

Bible Lessons



*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”
—Luke 4:18-19*

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Publishing Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.

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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THE 3rd QUARTER, 2025

Broken

Our vehicles and houses need repair from time to time. Tires go flat, transmissions slip, and engines need maintenance. Houses and other structures have roof leaks, plumbing problems, electrical issues, and paint can peel. We understand everything we use must be repaired from time to time—or thrown away.

Just as the temporal things in our lives need help, the human spirit is often in need of divine repair. Thankfully, God has a plan to heal the broken places in our lives! Just as it is important we recognize when our vehicle needs maintenance so we can make the decision to take it to a mechanic, we also must understand the brokenness in our lives before we can present our needs to the Great Physician. This understanding comes only by God’s enlightenment and our willingness to let Him enlighten us.

We have all seen brokenness in the temporal realm. The owners either did not have the resources to repair what they owned, or they no longer cared. The result was the same—dereliction.

Brokenness in my spirit can be neglected for several reasons: 1) I feel my brokenness is “normal,” therefore I have no need for healing; 2) I justify my brokenness because I blame someone else for my pain, therefore my brokenness must remain until the other person changes; 3) My brokenness gives me a warped sense of identity and power over others, and I do not want to get rid of it lest I lose that advantage; 4) I recognize my brokenness but feel God cannot or will not help me.

Praise God, there **IS** healing for **ALL** the ways our spirits can be broken and damaged! Many scriptures back this up. Countless lives have been transformed by the renewing God affords us. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).*

—Bro. Clifford Cole

JULY 6, 2025

ABRAHAM DENIES HIS WIFE

Genesis 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. (*Genesis 12:10-20*)

Genesis 20:1 And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.

4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? (*See also Genesis 20:5-8.*)

9 Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.

10 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?

11 And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

12 And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

13 And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. (*See also Genesis 20:14-15.*)

16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reprov'd.

17 So Abraham pray'd unto God: and God heal'd Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

MEMORY VERSE: The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. —**Proverbs 29:25**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abraham denied his wife twice, claiming the half-truth that she was his sister. He reasoned his wife was so beautiful that others would eliminate him and take his wife. Abraham was reprov'd both times by the men who believed his story. God twice protected Abraham, his wife, and the men who took steps to take Sarah as their wife. Abraham learned his lesson to trust God despite his worst human imaginations.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 12:10 **“Abram went down into Egypt”**: reliance on human thinking; dependance on human intervention in times of need (*F.B. Meyer*).

Genesis 20:16 **“Thy brother... is to thee a covering of the eyes”**: Abimelech reprov'd Sarah, reminding her that her brother was her husband—and the marriage covenant, unlike the relationship of siblings, tempers the actions and spirit, providing a measure of God-given protection from immorality (*Matthew Henry*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Genesis 12:1, God called Abram to leave his land of nativity for a place yet unknown. When Abram finally arrived in Canaan, God promised it would be his home for generations to come. When a grievous famine arose in Canaan, Abram decided, of his own accord, to go down to Egypt to escape the hardships of the famine. Lacking the confidence of being directed by God, Abram fell further into the trap of human reasoning by deciding to say his wife was his sister so he would not lose his life for her sake.

In Genesis 20, Abram again left the place God had placed him in

and journeyed south to Gerar. The Bible does not explain why Abraham left this time, but it could have been to escape the recent horrors of the previous chapter, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The news of Lot and his two daughters' behavior after they escaped into the mountains could also have given cause for Abraham to put some distance between them. Whatever his reasonings, they were not God-given, because he fell yet again into the cycle of human reasoning. He denied his wife the second time.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Who told Abram to escape the famine in Canaan by going down to Egypt?
2. Abram feared Pharaoh would kill him and take his wife. Why didn't Abram have this same fear when he entered Canaan, the land God told him would be his for generations to come?
3. How can being out of the center of God's will leave room for imaginations and fears?
4. Who is affected when we act according to our human wisdom?
5. As Abram predicted, Pharaoh sent for Sarai, his wife. How accurate was the rest of Abram's assessment of the situation?
6. How did Abram survive the Canaan famine after leaving Egypt?
7. Several years later, Abraham journeyed south to Gerar. He again claimed Sarah as his sister. How did this work out for him?
8. Who did God use to help Abraham overcome his fear of losing his life for the sake of his wife's beauty?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

A paradox we all face is that God-given blessings and strengths can also become stumbling blocks. The devil attempts to hijack these blessings in order to use them against us. In Abraham's case, the devil leveraged the great beauty of his wife to lead him to believe others would kill him to get his wife.

Rather than deliver Abraham from his fear before it happened, God allowed Abraham to fail to reinforce the reality of Abraham's human weakness. However, God loved Abraham too much to abandon him in his great need. Even when it looked hopeless, God intervened and delivered Sarah from both Pharaoh and Abimelech.

When Pharaoh asked why he had deceived him, Abraham was silent. When Abraham failed the second time several years later and Abimelech asked the same question, Abraham gave a full confession. Abraham now “owned” his weakness and stood fully accountable for his actions.

Abraham went back to his home in Canaan the second time a changed man. He now understood that it was better to trust God to sustain him where he was rather than seek for better prospects when difficulties arose.

By staying where God wanted him, rather than seeking human answers to his problems, Abraham had no fear of losing his life for the sake of his wife’s beauty. It was only when Abraham had moved outside of God’s plan that he felt it necessary to deny his wife.

“Dear Lord, help me to be content where you place me. Help me to acknowledge my weaknesses and failures so that you may grant me overcoming power over them. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

I’m looking at the definition of Reflection: why something took place, what the impact was, and whether it should happen again, as opposed to just remembering the incident. Reflecting on the account of Abraham being willing to stretch the truth and endanger his wife to save himself not once, but twice, brings sadness to me.

1. It happened to an otherwise devout man.
2. It displays the lack of value placed on women in the Old Testament.

This picture was replayed again in Genesis 26:7 with Abraham’s son, Isaac and Rebekah. Then again, in Genesis 19:1-8, Lot had just met two strangers and invited them to stay at his home that night. Before the story ends, Lot offers his two daughters for abuse so that he can protect the two strangers he has just met.

Reflecting: What went through the daughters’ minds as they saw the angry crowd outside and then heard Dad make that offer?

What went through Sarah’s mind when Abraham told her his reason for his deceit? “Sarah, I have to look out for myself first.”

The Bible includes both good and bad actions. I think of the verse in Romans 15:4: “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.”

My reflections bring me to the conclusions:

1. If “Me First” looks ugly in others, how does it look in me?
2. The good news of the gospel restores the value of women to the place God intended from the beginning. Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” Our wedding vows sometimes speak of “Nourishing and cherishing in good times and in bad times so long as we both shall live.”

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful. This part of Abraham’s life can only serve to teach us what not to do. Now our stories are being written. When my story is finished, will my wife and children’s testimony be, “Dad gave himself for us,” or “Dad had some good qualities but also some flaws that never got corrected. He looked out for Number 1 first?” Lord, help me.

—Bro. Dan Doolittle

JULY 13, 2025

JACOB

Genesis 25:28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of *his* venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he *was* faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage*; for I *am* faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised *his* birthright. (*Full story from birth, Genesis 25:23-34*)

Genesis 27:6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying,

7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death.

8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother *is* a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth man:

12 My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.

13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me *be* thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me *them*.

18 And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here *am* I; who *art* thou, my son?

19 And Jacob said unto his father, I *am* Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.

21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou *be* my very son Esau or not.

22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice *is* Jacob's voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau.

23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.

24 And he said, *Art* thou my very son Esau? And he said, I *am*.

30 And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

32 And Isaac his father said unto him, Who *art* thou? And he said, I *am* thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where *is* he that hath taken venison, and brought *it* me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, *and* he shall be blessed.

34 And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, *even* me also, O my father.

35 And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.

36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. (*Full story of Jacob deceiving his father, Genesis 27:1-46*)

Genesis 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27 And he said unto him, What *is* thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. (*Full account of Jacob's wrestling, Genesis 32:21-32*)

MEMORY VERSE: And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? —**Genesis 27:36**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jacob obtained both the birthright and the blessing through underhanded means. Fleeing the wrath of his brother, Jacob went to Haran to live with his Uncle Laban. After twenty-one years, Jacob felt it was finally time to return home and face his brother. Fearing the worst, he sent his family ahead to meet his brother while he stayed behind to pray. Jacob “wrestled with a man” through the night. At the breaking of dawn, God finally blessed him, changed his name, and enabled him to meet Esau.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 25:26 “**Jacob**”: supplanter; to overthrow a person by tripping up his heels (*Clarke*).

Genesis 32:28 “**Israel**”: a prince of God (*Barnes*). Although many commentators differ on the literal interpretation of the Hebrew word that stands for Israel, the text of the Book of Genesis etymologizes the name: El (abbreviation of God); Yisra-El (Israel) = To wrestle, contend, prevail with God. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_\(name\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_(name))

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jacob's brokenness did not start with his generation. His father and mother exhibited favoritism with he and his brother, Esau. Isaac was partial to Esau and Rebekah preferred Jacob. This favoritism laid the foundation for the chain of painful events that so greatly affected Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob: the inability to trust God to fulfill His promises, the layers of deceit, bitter disappointment, plans for revenge, fleeing home, and the dread of returning home.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What was the basis for favoritism in Isaac and Rebekah's home?
2. How did favoritism affect the family?
3. Rebekah came up with a plan to "help God keep His promise." How did that work out for her?
4. When God makes a promise, what is the best thing for us to do regarding its fulfillment?
5. How did Jacob obtain the blessing he needed to face his angry brother when he returned home?
6. What does Jacob's resolve to "hold on" until he got his blessing teach us?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Jacob outwitted his brother twice. When he fled to his Uncle Laban's home and subsequently fell in love with Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel, Jacob's father-in-law substituted Leah, Rachel's older sister, as his bride. Jacob worked an additional seven years for Rachel. In the years following we read in Genesis 31:41 that Laban changed Jacob's wages ten times.

Jacob, the deceiver, was not only tricked multiple times by his father-in-law, but was later deceived by his ten oldest sons when they brought back Joseph's coat of many colors—red with the blood of a kid goat. Naturally, Jacob assumed the worst and said in Genesis 37:33, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces."

God, in His sovereignty, does not let deceit slide forever. Even though it may appear the one getting the upper hand wins, God settles

the final score. In Jacob's case, this certainly held true. He was deceived many more times than he deceived others.

When Jacob finally decided to leave Laban, he did so in secret. As he neared the territory of his brother, he knew he would need far more than his wits to survive. He needed God. Desperate for divine help, Jacob started praying earnestly. While praying, he encountered "a man" in the darkness with whom he wrestled for several hours. Somehow, Jacob knew he needed to hold on for his blessing. Toward morning, "the man" touched Jacob's side and dislocated his hip. Wrestling with a hip out of joint is next to impossible, yet Jacob persevered and got the blessing he desired.

Our brokenness, whatever it is, eventually catches up with us, at which time we may feel our case is hopeless. Our spirit will feel "out of joint" as we wrestle with God. However, if we keep holding on, as Jacob did, God will give us a new name that signifies the blessing He gives us. Our old name of brokenness will be forgotten. Praise God!

"Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise to replace my brokenness with strength and power. Help me to hold on until the blessing comes. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

Many people excuse their brokenness with statements like, "My father was this way," or "My grandmother was like that; this just runs in our family," or "...but you don't know what I've experienced in life!" Jacob could have had those same excuses, and maybe even had them for a while! He could have tried to justify himself by thinking, "God, you made me this way! I've been a deceiver since I was in the womb! I had no control over that!" However, after reaping the rewards of his scheming, Jacob finally came face to face with his brokenness and determined, "I want to be whole!" In desperation he wrestled "a man"—whom many of the commentators are convinced was our Divine Redeemer in human form—until he was changed! I'm inspired to share here a few lines of a song titled "The Broken Vessel" by Andraé Crouch.

The Potter saw a vessel
That had been broken by the winds and rain,
And He sought with so much compassion

To make it over again;
And I, oh, I was that vessel
That no one thought was any good,
But I cried, "Lord, You're the Potter,
And I am the clay,
Make me over again today."

Then God picked up the pieces
Of my broken heart that day;
And He made me a new vessel,
And revived my soul again.

O weary soul, maybe you also feel that you are broken. Maybe your vessel looks okay on the outside, but deep inside there are cracks that belie your wholeness. If you want to be restored, there is One who can make you completely whole. Like Jacob, you can be healed of brokenness and have "power with God"!

—Bro. Fari Matthews

JULY 20, 2025

JOB AND JEREMIAH CURSE THE DAY THEY WERE BORN

Job 3:1 After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.

2 And Job spake, and said,

3 Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night *in which* it was said, There is a man child conceived.

4 Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it.

5 Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.

6 As *for* that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months.

13 For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest,

14 With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves;

15 Or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver:

16 Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants *which* never saw light.

Job 42:1 Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

2 I know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee.

3 Who *is* he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

6 Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes.

10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11 Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

12 So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

13 He had also seven sons and three daughters.

Jeremiah 20:7 O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.

8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

9 Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*.

14 Cursed *be* the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.

15 Cursed *be* the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.

16 And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide;

17 Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb *to be* always great *with me*.

18 Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame? (*Full passage, Jeremiah 20:7-18*)

MEMORY VERSE: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes. —**Job 42:5-6**

WORD DEFINITIONS

Job 3:8 “**Curse**”: execrate; to declare to be evil or detestable; denounce; to feel or express great loathing for (*Strong’s, Merriam-Webster, and Oxford dictionaries*).

Job 42:10 “**And the LORD turned the captivity of Job**”: “And the LORD turned Job to repentance” (*Clarke*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Job, a “perfect and upright” man, suffered the loss of his all his flocks, herds, and children. He lost the respect of his friends, and his wife’s support. In her great grief, Job’s wife told him, “Curse God and die.” Job refused to curse God, but he did curse the day he was born.

Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet,” had the unpleasant task of warning the people of Israel of their impending doom if they did not repent. He suffered greatly from the understanding God gave him and he also faced bitter opposition for proclaiming God’s pronouncement of punishment. Because of his inward pain, Jeremiah cursed the day he was born.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What is the devil’s plan for a person who loses all hope of their pain lessening?

2. What is God's plan for our suffering?
3. When Job finally understood how his own thoughts were so far below God's thinking, what was his reaction?
4. What would Job have missed if he had not allowed God to heal his broken spirit?
5. "The LORD turned the captivity of Job," after he did what?
6. Why does God bring about our deliverance according to His wisdom rather than ours?
7. How much did God trust Jeremiah to continue to do his will, even when doing so brought much pain to him?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

It is amazing what God will do for the broken-hearted when they forsake self-defense, admit God is righteous in all His ways, and pray for those who accuse them unjustly. Job did nothing to deserve the great difficulties that came his way, yet his three friends assumed he was guilty. When Job proclaimed his innocence, however, he found no relief from his pain. After a period of time, God helped Job see that being innocent of wrongdoing did not elevate him to righteousness. He saw his low estate compared to God and the healing process began. God brought him to a place where he could pray for others from a position of true humility.

Jeremiah, also known as "the weeping prophet," wisely committed his case to the LORD "that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart." He realized God allows suffering because God also allows free-will among mankind.

"Dear Lord, please help me to continually commit my way to your care. Help me remember you not only see all things, but you have all power in Heaven and earth to help every soul that puts their trust completely in you. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

We have no control over the timing of the enemy's attacks on our thoughts. We can decide whether we entertain those thoughts and how much time we devote to contemplating them. Both Job and Jeremiah found themselves in a similar predicament. Both brethren came close to a breaking point, questioning God and nearly charging

him foolishly. These accounts and many others in the Bible are recorded for our benefit. May God help us to learn from the experiences of others and apply them to our lives. Acknowledgment and understanding brought Job to a place of repentance, and God reversed his circumstances. Jeremiah and Job's recognition of God's sovereignty brought their focus back to His omniscient wisdom and understanding of His creation, both for themselves and others.

When we find ourselves in situations where the evil one attacks our thoughts, we must cry out to God rather than consider those thoughts. In times of adversity and suffering, achieving this is often more challenging than it appears. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19). In our own strength it is not possible to withstand these assaults; we have to rely on God and stand on the many precious promises given to us in the word of God. "Neither give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). If we give Satan an inch, he will take a mile. God can enable us not to relinquish any ground.

—Bro. Tavis Browne

JULY 27, 2025

MOSES' RELUCTANCE TO LEAD THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Exodus 3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.

6 Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his

face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

7 And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8 And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11 And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them?

14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (*God and Moses' conversation, Exodus 3:1-18.*)

Exodus 4:1 And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.

10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach

thee what thou shalt say.

13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand *of him whom* thou wilt send.

14 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, *Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.*

15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.

16 And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

17 And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs. (*God and Moses' conversation continued, Exodus 4:1-17.*)

MEMORY VERSE: And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? —**Exodus 3:11**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, but Moses drew back three times: he said he was not important enough to do the job, the people would not believe he was sent from God, and he was not eloquent enough. Moses finally asked God to send someone else, arousing God's wrath.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Exodus 3:1 "**The mountain of God... Horeb**": also known as Mount Sinai, סיני, from סנה, a bush, because it was in a bush or bramble, in a flame of fire, that God appeared to Moses (*Adam Clarke*).

Exodus 3:14 "**I AM THAT I AM**": The Vulgate translation is, "I am who am"; the Septuagint, "I am he who exists"; the Arabic, "The Eternal, who passes not away"; the Jerusalem Targum, "He who spake, and the world was; who spake, and all things existed" (*Clarke*).

Exodus 3:13 "**Send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send**": from the Hebrew, "Send a person more fit for the work than I am" (*Clarke*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Exodus 2:11-15, Moses felt drawn to help the people of his nativity. His human efforts failed miserably, forcing him to flee for his life. Moses, once the crown prince of the most powerful nation on earth, became a shepherd in exile for the next forty years. He was eighty years old when God visited him in the burning bush in the backside of the desert.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why didn't God bless Moses' human efforts to help the Israelites, as described in Exodus 2:11-15?
2. How did this failure appear to affect Moses' thinking about God ever using him in the future to help His people?
3. When the proper time came for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, would anything less than a "burning bush" visit from God have been enough to convince Moses?
4. How well did God understand Moses' feelings of inadequacy?
5. If God knew why Moses felt the way he did, why did He finally become angry with Moses?
6. How does God view our excuses if we keep using them to hinder His calling on our life?
7. In Moses' hesitation, what did he focus on? What *should* he have focused on?
8. If we are tempted to feel "worthless," how will it help to remember how God sees us?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God has a job for everyone; these jobs are specifically tailored for us, for our time, and for our circumstances. The preparation for what God has in mind for us, however, involves difficulty and testing. In our humanity, we may not understand how God uses painful events to mold and perfect us for the work He has in mind, especially if we feel our pain is the result of our own mistakes or even the result of the mistakes/sins of others.

The devil will try to use our shortcomings and hurts to hinder us from doing God's will. God uses the same to teach us humility and

faith. The choice is ours. Do we let life happenings, including our mistakes, destroy us? Or do we allow God to use them to perfect us?

“Dear God in Heaven, thank you for viewing my humanity through your mercy and love. Heal the broken places in my heart and mind that I might do your work. In Jesus’ name, Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

Not smart enough, not quick enough, not good enough, not patient enough, not kind enough. Not enough... Inadequate. What do the voices in your head say? If you push against them, putting yourself out there, they insist your effort wasn't enough. If you give in to them, you perpetuate a cycle of withdrawal.

Moses wasn't a young person when he was dealing with this sense of inadequacy. Our shortcomings follow us through life; they are not unique to the young. The secret is to push through the feelings. It doesn't mean the sense of inadequacy goes away; it simply allows the Lord to use you despite them.

I like writing; however, the few times I'd submitted testimonies, I felt foolish afterward. It didn't take long for the sense of shame to overcome any desire to contribute. Sis. Angela reached out and invited me to participate when she was doing the Bible Lessons, but by the time I said, “Yes,” someone else had stepped up. I wasn't upset; I thought I'd dodged 'the bullet.'

It was a surprise to me when, a few years, later Sis. Vonda reached out asking me to pray about helping. I nervously said, “Yes.” Once again, the sense of inadequacy hit hard. Will I be able to fulfill the commitment? It's mostly ministers who are participating, what am I doing among this number? Do the words I share even connect with the reader? I became a little haphazard in signing up for subjects. Words of encouragement gave me the boost I needed to step up again. Every quarter it's the same, feeling inadequate; but, it's a way to serve the Lord—it's a way to give. So, I sign up with a clenched stomach and anxiety, trying to leave the results with the Lord.

When you feel inadequate, push! Push through the doubts and leave the results to God. At the end of the day, it's done for Him, and if it's not a blessing to a single person, it's an act of service for the Lord, an expression of love to Him.

—Sis. Diane Doolittle

AUGUST 3, 2025

AARON AND MIRIAM BECOME JEALOUS OF MOSES

Numbers 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard *it*.

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

4 And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

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

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

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.

10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam *became* leprous, *white* as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, *she was* leprous.

11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

12 Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

13 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

14 And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out

from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in *again*.

15 And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in *again*.

MEMORY VERSE: Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. —**Song of Solomon 8:6**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Miriam and Aaron grew jealous of Moses' calling. Their criticism of Moses was at first expressed through disdain of his wife, but their main complaint soon became apparent. They claimed God did not speak to Moses only, but to them also. Miriam was held in high regard as a prophetess, and Aaron was a mouthpiece for Moses, but they both felt they should have had positions equal to Moses. God punished Miriam and Aaron for their pride by striking Miriam with leprosy.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Numbers 12:1 "**Ethiopian woman**": It is unclear if Zipporah, an Arabian from Midian, is referred to here, or if Zipporah had died and Moses married again (*Barnes, Clarke, and Meyer*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Most Bible scholars believe Miriam was seven years older than Moses and four years older than Aaron. As a young girl, she watched over Moses from a distance when he was laid in the basket to float among the reeds. It was Miriam who suggested to Pharaoh's daughter that a certain Hebrew woman, her mother, take care of baby Moses when she decided to adopt him. Eighty years later, after God delivered Israel with their passage through the Red Sea, Miriam led the people in a song of praise, as written in Exodus 15:20-21.

As mentioned in the previous lesson, in Exodus 4:13-16, when Moses felt unable to lead Israel out of Egypt, God became angry with him and sent his brother Aaron to be his spokesman.

Unfortunately, this mouthpiece, Aaron, later collaborated with the people to sin by making a golden calf for them to worship when they grew impatient with Moses while he was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What seemed to be the root of Miriam and Aaron's jealousy?
2. Based on who got leprosy, who most likely was the instigator in the complaint against Moses?
3. How does spiritual pride and jealousy start?
4. What does God think of it?
5. How contagious is it?
6. What most likely would have happened if God had not corrected Miriam and Aaron?
7. Miriam and Aaron lived another thirty-seven years after their great transgression. How thoroughly did God help them overcome spiritual pride and jealousy?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As our memory verse points out, "jealousy is cruel as the grave." If allowed to run its course, the end of jealousy is never good, especially if it is spiritual jealousy. King David faced intense jealousy, Solomon dealt with it, and Jesus was crucified because of it.

How did jealousy develop among the three siblings, who were all past eighty years old, were spiritual leaders of God's chosen people, and had been given much spiritual responsibility? Proverbs 13:10 tells us, "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised *is* wisdom." Pride is at the root of all jealousy, even spiritual jealousy. Simply put, spiritual jealousy cannot grow without spiritual pride. Spiritual pride, however, can easily lead to spiritual jealousy.

How can a spiritual person be tempted with spiritual pride? Several years ago, my wife and I landscaped our front yard. We cut down several trees, hauled in loads of good topsoil, and put down sod. For the first year we had a beautiful weed-free lawn. The second year, however, we noticed a few weeds began to sprout. Other grasses began to invade our lawn as well. Only through rigorous effort could these weeds and invasive grasses have been controlled. Sad to say,

other matters took too much of my attention, and I simply cut the weeds and undesirable grasses down every time I mowed the lawn. It was too easy to allow the “undesirable” to gain a foothold in our once beautiful lawn rather than attack it with the necessary effort to keep it the way it was when freshly sodded.

When we get saved, God replaces our spiritually “stony heart” with a soft and pliable heart. The devil does not leave us alone just because we gave our life to God, however. He plants seeds of pride, selfishness, and every other thing he can think of in hopes these seeds will sprout and begin to grow unchallenged. A saved person will notice these changes and face a choice. The spiritual analogy is, “Do I completely kill these weeds? Or do I simply cut them down every week when I mow the lawn and hope they will not grow too much?” It is so easy to cut their tops off weekly, just like I did with our once beautiful lawn. Cutting the top off a weed does not kill it, unfortunately. It pops back up and grows some more. Undesirable plants, such as Star-of-Bethlehem, spread their reach under the soil by means of underground bulbs that never die off but spread yearly. One Star-of-Bethlehem bulb produces seven new bulbs yearly. This invasive species will take over wherever it is not completely dug up and eradicated.

Jesus taught so much about spiritual pride and jealousy. Paul, James, and Peter also had a lot to say about it. They understood pride will take over anywhere it is not continually and completely eradicated daily, like the literal example of the Star of Bethlehem bulb.

“Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for warning us that spiritual pride and jealousy is a real and present danger. Thank you for giving grace to root it out. Please help me dig it up as soon as you bring it to my attention. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

Miriam had been greatly used of the Lord, but why didn’t she confront her self-exalting spirit before it blossomed into contention and attacked the primary servant leader whom God had demonstrated to be His chosen leader? By this time, Moses had been the hand by which God had given great miracles. He had been in the very presence of God on Mount Sinai multiple times, and by the direct mouth of God had instituted His law. Moses had followed through with his commission from the Lord to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and

through the Red Sea where they had witnessed God's jealous, protecting hands kill all the Egyptian army that pursued after them. Miriam, the prophetess, acted upon God's inspiration to join Moses' song of deliverance by leading the women to answer the men's verses. These praises were sung because God had used MOSES to bring their deliverance by having them "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord," and to stretch his hand over the sea both to open it for Israel and to close it upon the Egyptians.

Inspired by the Spirit of God to instruct the women, Miriam probably shared some leadership with Moses and Aaron that seemed now to be threatened by Moses' Ethiopian wife.

If it is God, and not we, who gives the giftings and positions of responsibility to His body, why should we allow jealousy to fester inside us? Since it is the Holy Spirit that orders the gifts to edify and build up God's church, why should we feel entitled to a gifting or fear that our standing will be diminished by another's gifting? Choosing to humbly and gratefully rejoice in what God is orchestrating through us and through others is how we combat the poison of jealousy.

—Bro. Jeremy Booher

AUGUST 10, 2025

SAMSON

Judges 16:4 And it came to pass afterward, that he [*Samson*] loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

5 And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength *lieth*, and by what *means* we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred *pieces* of silver.

6 And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength *lieth*, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart *is* not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength *lieth*.

16 And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her

words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

17 That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.

18 And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

19 And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

20 And she said, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

22 Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

23 Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.

24 And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.

25 And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

26 And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

27 Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines *were* there; and *there were* upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.

28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD,

remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life.

31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought *him* up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years. (*See complete passage, Judges 16:4-31.*)

MEMORY VERSE: But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites. — **I Kings 11:1**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Samson, a Nazarite, was judge of Israel for twenty years. The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life threatened the great strength God had blessed him with when the Spirit of the LORD would come upon him. The third Philistine woman Samson was attracted to, Delilah, proved to be his undoing when she pressed him to the point of divulging why the Spirit of the LORD blessed him with such strength.

Samson lost his strength when he lost his hair, but God had mercy on him when his hair grew back. Samson also had a change of heart, as evidenced by the fact that he was willing to die with the three thousand Philistines in the temple of Dagon.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Judges 16:4 “**Delilah**”: *dālal*, meaning languishing; to *slacken* or *be feeble*; figuratively to *be oppressed*: bring low, dry up, be emptied, be not equal, fail, be impoverished, be made thin (*Strong’s*).

Judges 16:25 “**That he may make us sport**”: possibly an exhibition of his prodigious strength, brought about by the restoration of his hair (*Clarke*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Judges 13 tells of an angel appearing unto a certain woman of the tribe of Dan. The angel told the woman that her son would be a Nazarite drinking no strong drink, abstaining from all unclean meat, and was to never cut his hair.

In Judges 14, Samson “saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines” and wanted her for his wife. His father and mother said, “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.”

Samson’s marriage to the woman in Timnath ended on the seventh and final day of the wedding feast when his wife, with many tears, finally persuaded him to tell her the riddle he had put before the young men at the feast. When the young men answered correctly, he grew angry and slew thirty men of Ashkelon and gave their garments to the young men, fulfilling his agreement to give thirty changes of raiment to them if they guessed the riddle.

More drama followed in Judges 15 when three thousand men of Judah came to him and asked if they could bind him and deliver him to the Philistines. After making them promise they would not attack him, he submitted to being bound and delivered to the Philistines. When they approached the camp of the Philistines, “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.”

In Judges 16:1-3, Samson saw a harlot in Gaza that attracted his attention. “*And it was told* the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed *him* in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that *is* before Hebron.”

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What motivated Samson to allow Delilah to continually ask him the source of his great strength?
2. How was Delilah able to finally wear Samson down to the point he “told her all his heart”?
3. How much did Delilah really care for Samson?
4. What is the spiritual analogy of Samson losing his eyesight?
5. How did God show mercy to Samson after he was made a prisoner?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Many people have had dangerous pets that ultimately injured, maimed, or killed them. For example, a seemingly harmless baby snake can eventually grow up into a mature snake strong enough to kill their owner. The snake can turn on their master in an instant, often catching them at a vulnerable time.

The traps the devil sets for us can take on the appearance of “Delilah”—beautiful and persuasive, yet demanding a certain allegiance from us. The trap is designed to destroy our lives in the present and ultimately our souls in the end.

The jaws of the trap may move slowly at first and escape our attention. It took twenty years for Samson to finally succumb to the wiles of the third Philistine woman, Delilah. When Samson fell, though, it was too late for him to retract any of his prior decisions and actions.

God, in His great love and mercy, had plans beyond Samson’s failure. He gave Samson an opportunity for redemption. When Samson prayed, God restored his former strength, delivering him from captivity. His life ended, but it ended in victory. Praise God!

“Dear Lord, thank you for your plans for me. Thank you for your desire to deliver me from every trap the devil plans for my destruction. Help me to accept your plan of redemption. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

When we read about the life of Samson, we recognize some brokenness in his life. Although God in His mercy gave him another

chance, and the end of his life ended in victory over the Philistines, there are questions about his life's story that we may think about and lessons we may learn.

In the Bible, we read about the lives of many people, and we can get many spiritual lessons from them. In Samson's life, we see a man by whom God had chosen to execute His judgement upon the Philistines; but he was given certain restrictions on his life that he was to maintain. He was not faithful to these commands, and there were serious consequences. He lost his great strength and his eyesight, and he became a slave to the people he was to conquer. He also died with them.

Even though God had mercy and gave Samson his strength again and allowed him to be victorious in his death by destroying more than in his life, we have questions in our minds. One question we may ask is, "How could the story of Samson's life have been different?" Another question is, "What could have made a difference in his life's story?" Also, "What lessons can we learn from his life's story?"

No doubt, if Samson had been willing to take the advice of his parents and had chosen a woman of his own people, instead of from the enemy, he could have lived and died with dignity and respect. He could have maintained his eyesight and freedom. The people that he died with were gathered there to make fun of him.

We can learn of the importance of following wise counsel and of obedience to God. The Bible tells us of the blessings that we will receive in our lives when we obey God's commands. It is full of examples of the effects of obedience and disobedience to God on the lives of people.

—Sis. Doris Clay

AUGUST 17, 2025

DAVID'S FLIGHT TO GATH

1 Samuel 27:1 And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: *there is* nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

2 And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maoch, king of Gath.

3 And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife.

4 And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him.

5 And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?

6 Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day.

7 And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months.

1 Samuel 29:1 Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which *is* in Jezreel.

2 And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish.

3 Then said the princes of the Philistines, What *do* these Hebrews *here*? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, *Is* not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell *unto me* unto this day?

4 And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? *should it not be* with the heads of these men?

5 *Is* not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

6 Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, *as* the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host *is* good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favour thee not.

7 Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines.

1 Samuel 30:1 And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire;

2 And had taken the women captives, that *were* therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried *them* away, and went on their way.

3 So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, *it was* burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives.

4 Then David and the people that *were* with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

8 And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake *them*, and without fail recover *all*.

18 And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives.

19 And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any *thing* that they had taken to them: David recovered all. (*For complete passage, see I Samuel 30:1-19.*)

MEMORY VERSE: And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. —**Joel 2:25**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: David grew weary of running from King Saul and decided to seek asylum with the king of Gath, not once but twice. After a year and four months had passed of the second stint, David and his men were miraculously spared from joining in the battle against Israel. Returning to Ziklag, they discovered it had been burned and their families taken captive. David's men were overcome with grief and spoke of stoning him. David "encouraged himself in the

LORD his God,” and received the assurance that all their wives and children would be recovered if they pursued after them.

WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Samuel 27:1 **“Said in his heart”**: said to his heart (*Matthew Henry*). David argued with himself and convinced himself through his human wisdom.

1 Samuel 27:1 **“I shall”**: Our words, even when spoken only in our heart, have much power to influence our actions for good or for evil. Our words help set the tone for us to overcome or be overcome. Proverbs 23:7a tells us, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

David spent five long years running for his life before deciding to flee to Gath the second time. His father-in-law, King Saul, was determined to eliminate him, knowing God had anointed David to be king in his stead. King Saul threw a javelin at David at close range on two occasions. He spoke to his son Jonathan and to all his servants that they should kill David. He tried to have David killed by the hand of the Philistines by bribing him with marriage to his daughter, Michal. Saul also pursued David on numerous occasions, hunting him like a criminal.

David went to Achish, king of Gath, the first time when he began running for his life. The servants of king Achish recognized David, however, and said, “*Is not* this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?” David overheard their murmurings and pretended to be a mad man and “scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.” Achish then had David driven from him (I Samuel 21:10-15).

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What are some of the motivating factors the devil can tempt us with to take our own counsel?
2. How well did David’s plan seem to work for the first year and four months in Ziklag?

3. As David and his men marched with king Achish toward the battle against Israel, what conflict of interest did David have to contend with?
4. What could David's six hundred men have been thinking as they marched toward the battle?
5. How did God miraculously intervene so David and his men did not arrive at the battle front?
6. What caused David's men to blame David for their loss to the extent they spoke of stoning him?
7. What was David's only hope of escaping with his life and of regaining all their families?
8. How does encouraging ourselves in the LORD our God help us in our "impossible difficulties"?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

During the time David lived in Gath, he pretended to be an ally, living in duplicity. When David made raids on the Geshurites, Gezrites, and Amalekites, he claimed the raids were against southern Judah and the southern parts of the Jerahmeelites and Kenites. Bible scholars do not believe David wrote any Psalms during this time; living by his own wisdom hindered divine inspiration. By comparison, David wrote Psalms 34 after he attempted to flee to Gath the first time but was driven away after he feigned madness. This beautiful Psalm speaks of the benefits of trusting God when all seems hopeless. David regained this trust when he turned to God with his whole heart and "encouraged himself in the LORD his God."

"Dear God, thank you for your willingness and power to help me in my time of need. Help me to always choose your grace and wisdom first rather than turning to you as my last resort. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

We all need direction from God. We seek God daily for direction to go and to come. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6). God has given us senses: we see, we feel, we hear, and we smell. All these are God-given; not to hinder us but to work in conjunction with the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in all truth. The Bible teaches us to watch and pray.

I don't expect God to tell me when to brush my teeth, when to start my truck, or when to wash my face, but as I go through life, if there is anything that is not in accordance with the Holy Spirit, I expect a check from God and I must adhere to it.

Whether David received a check from God before he moved, I do not know. We do know that David, in a great time of need, called on God. God is better than a GPS, and God began to direct him, without scolding, to show him the way out. How blessed it is, in a time of crises, that God yet offers direction, help, and healing.

—Bro. E.E. Gracey

AUGUST 24, 2025

ELIJAH RUNS FROM JEZEBEL

1 Kings 19:1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

3 And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers.

5 And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat.

6 And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

7 And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee.

8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

10 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:

12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

14 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

15 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria:

16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room.

17 And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

18 Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

MEMORY VERSE: But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. —**Psalm 73:2**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jezebel sent word to Elijah that she intended to kill him within twenty-four hours, because he had killed the prophets of Baal. Hearing this, Elijah fled for his life to the wilderness. After a forty-day journey to Horeb, the mount of God, the LORD asked him what he was doing there. Elijah replied he was the only one left who served God, and that his life was as good as over.

WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Kings 19:8 “**Horeb the mount of God**”: also known as Sinai, where Moses saw the burning bush and later received the Ten Commandments.

1 Kings 19:18 “**Seven thousand**”: Seven is regarded as a perfect number (*Clarke*). God knows the names of all who worship Him, especially when they are oppressed for their faith.

LESSON BACKGROUND

For three years, God withheld rain from the land of Israel. In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah told Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” During the third year, the LORD told Elijah to inform Ahab of the coming rain. On his way, Elijah saw Obadiah, the governor of Ahab’s house. Elijah told Obadiah to tell Ahab, “Behold, Elijah is here.” Obadiah feared for his life, thinking Elijah would disappear again, but Elijah assured him Ahab would see his face that day.

In 1 Kings 18, we understand Obadiah hid one hundred of the LORD’s prophets in a cave and fed them with bread and water. Evidently, the LORD had not revealed this to Elijah, based on his later complaint to the LORD, “I only am left, and they seek my life to take it!”

When Ahab finally saw Elijah, Elijah told him to gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, along with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of the groves. At the gathering, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to see if the God of Heaven or Baal would bring down fire to consume the sacrifices they had prepared.

After the fire from Heaven had consumed Elijah’s sacrifice, along with the stones, the water in the trench, and the dust around the

sacrifice, Elijah killed the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Later that day, as the rain started coming, Elijah “girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why did God not reveal to Elijah that Obadiah had hidden one hundred of the LORD’s prophets in a cave?
2. Even after all the ways God used Elijah the day fire came down from Heaven to consume the sacrifice, why did Elijah still feel like he was the only one left that feared God?
3. Jezebel held Elijah personally responsible for the loss of her prophets. How does the devil try to use the same trick on us sometimes?
4. In what ways did God show mercy to Elijah during the time of his utter despair?
5. How does God show mercy to us when we feel like “all is lost”?
6. In what ways does God remind us we are NOT “the only one left that fears God”?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Everyone feels utterly alone at times, perhaps even “forgotten” by God. Jesus suffered immense emotional turmoil when He felt all alone on the cross, to the extent that while hanging on the Cross of Calvary, He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mathew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). Is it any wonder that Elijah also felt alone while fleeing Jezebel’s wrath?

One of the reasons God allows us to occasionally feel all alone in our troubles, and at times even forsaken by God, is to help us not be lifted in pride. Immediately before Elijah ran from Jezebel, he saw fire fall from Heaven to consume the sacrifice as he prayed, he killed the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, he witnessed the people of Israel acknowledge the LORD was the only true God, he prayed for rain—and it rained—and he outran Ahab’s frightened horses back to Jezreel. Elijah never fled for his life quite like he did from Jezebel on this occasion, but neither was Elijah used of God as much as he was that fateful day. God is a jealous God, as Isaiah 42:8b explains, “...my glory will I not give to another.”

God also allows us to feel forsaken by Him to help us remember we can do nothing without Him. We are utterly dependent on Him. We cannot draw one breath without His mercy. We cannot think one coherent thought without Him granting us that ability, and we can certainly do nothing worth anything at all without His blessing. Paul told the Corinthian church, in 1 Corinthians 15:10a, “But by the grace of God I am what I am...”

Finally, if we never felt forsaken by God, even when living to the best of our understanding, we would never be able to empathize with those who feel hopeless. Empathy is a powerful way of relating to and helping those in need. Jesus understands perfectly how we suffer in our extreme situations because He “was in all points tempted like as we are...” (Hebrews 4:15b).

“Dear Lord, thank you for understanding my limitations, especially during the times I feel like no one understands. Thank you for not forsaking me, even when I feel like that is the case. Help me to remain faithful, knowing you will see me through with victory. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

Several years ago, during a very difficult season of our life, my husband and I were both struggling with circumstances we had no control over. Typically, when one of us was weak, the other one was strong and able to provide the needed support and comfort. This time wasn't that way. We were both needing help at the same time and unable to give it to the other. I felt so discouraged, not just because of the adverse circumstances we were both struggling with, but also because I was weak at a time that my husband needed me to be strong for him. I was crying out to The Lord to help me to be strong, but I didn't know how He was going to help me.

During this period, it was necessary for me to make a trip for a funeral with another individual, leaving my husband behind as he had other duties pressing. On the drive I had plenty of time to think, and my mind was going in circles, seeing no way to rise above the dark clouds of discouragement and into the light of hope again. We arrived a little early for the funeral, so we went into a nearby restaurant to fill the time. While we were there, I met a couple that loved The Lord, and we had a lengthy and in-depth conversation. I

left that restaurant so encouraged and amazed at how The Lord orchestrated that meeting to meet my need. I went home, able to face the same challenges, but with renewed hope and strength.

—Sis. Sarah L. Herron

AUGUST 31, 2025

JONAH

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.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that

the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. *(See complete passage, Jonah 2:1-10)*

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.

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. *(See complete passage, Jonah 3:1-10)*

Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? *(See complete passage, Jonah 4:1-11.)*

MEMORY VERSE: When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. —**Jonah 2:7**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jonah, an “unwilling servant,” fled from the presence of the LORD to escape the duty he deemed loathsome—preaching to the city of Ninevah. By example of his own disobedience, he taught the fear of the LORD to the men on the ship he boarded. After being delivered from the great fish and then preaching to the people of Ninevah, Jonah witnessed a great revival. The king of Ninevah proclaimed a fast of food and water for all Ninevah. God had respect to Ninevah’s repentance and spared them, but Jonah was not happy about it.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Jonah 4:11 **“Six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand”**: The one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants of Ninevah had long ago forgotten about God and were ignorant of His ways. They could not discern between good and evil. Some Bible scholars believe the population of Ninevah grew close to three hundred thousand during Sennacherib’s reign (704-861 B.C.) several years later.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Assyrian soldiers, some of whom came from the capital city of Ninevah, were considered some of the most brutal and feared soldiers of the time. They disfigured their captives, marking them for the rest of their lives—*if* they spared their lives. Child sacrifice, abortion, and temple prostitution was common in Ninevah.

When God told Jonah to go to Ninevah to preach, Jonah needed to travel northeast about 550 miles to get there. Instead, he hired a ship that intended to sail west 2,500 miles to Joppa, a port city on the southern tip of modern-day France.

God used Assyria to bring the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity about forty years after Jonah preached in Ninevah. It is interesting that Jonah’s mother is believed to be from the tribe of Asher and his father of the tribe of Zebulun, both northern tribes in Israel.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Why did Jonah not want to preach to Ninevah?
2. How well did Jonah's plans play out when he attempted to flee from the presence of the LORD?
3. Why and how do people attempt to "hide from God" today?
4. How did Jonah's efforts to flee from God affect other people?
5. It is common to think "my decisions affect only me." How accurate is this belief?
6. God did not share Jonah's opinion of Ninevah. Why?
7. Why did God so miraculously spare Jonah's life?
8. How was God finally able to help Jonah see Ninevah as He saw it?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Jonah had reasons in his mind for avoiding the job God gave him to do. The Assyrian's cruelty was no secret. Jonah had probably heard many stories of the atrocities the Assyrian army committed and may have even seen some of the victim's disfigured faces. While Jonah might have had some concern for his own safety, we do not read anything about it. Jonah's main complaint with God's plan to warn Ninevah of their impending doom was God's mercy—mercy directed toward those whom Jonah felt were unworthy because of their sins. Yet, God understood the Ninevites were incapable of any other behavior. He explained to Jonah there "were more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand."

One of the most important things to remember when observing behavior we consider unacceptable is that the person we believe to be in the wrong may not fully understand everything as we do. God wants to give them understanding, and He may use unorthodox means to bring that understanding. Jonah's deliverance from the whale is certainly an example of an unorthodox means to the extreme.

The other thing to remember is God loves everyone and is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34b). Because God is incapable of favoritism, He does things that contradicts biased human thinking.

"Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving everyone. Help me to work with you, rather than against you, in your quest to see all come to repentance. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

In accordance with the quarterly theme of brokenness, Jonah showed a sense of it by not wanting to deliver God's message to the Assyrian people. It seems he would have rather seen judgment against the Assyrians instead of mercy. This nation was an enemy of Israel; they were a cruel group of people, and treated their captives inhumanely. Yet, God saw fit to entreat them with a warning.

The attitude of the Jews was biased against anyone who was not a Jew. Why would Jonah want to help his enemies in any way? Why travel such a distance to give a dire warning to your enemy? Why put your own life at stake for such a heathen, ruthless, people? So, Jonah arose, not to obey, but to disobey God.

God could have sent someone besides Jonah after he fled to Tarshish, but Jonah needed to be broken in another fashion, and he needed to learn of God just as the Ninevites did. Whether Pharisee or publican, saved or unsaved, minister or laity, brokenness in God's hand is necessary for us to portray the example God desires to see displayed. By Jonah's example we cannot assume that we are "so right" in our dealings with others, without truly listening to God for His desired message to be imparted. We know that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The ways of God called for Ananias to go pray for Saul (Acts 9:10-17). The brokenness of Ananias caused him to obey God and go to entreat Brother Saul. How different is the expression of brokenness by Ananias and its effects when compared to the brokenness of Jonah who felt he did well to be angry, Jonah 4:9?

—Bro. Paul Phillips

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

JAMES AND JOHN—FIRE FROM HEAVEN

Luke 9:51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.

53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though

he would go to Jerusalem.

54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

MEMORY VERSE: Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:19-21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans who did not welcome Jesus. Jesus told them they were unaware the spirit they displayed contradicted the gospel He brought to the lost and dying world.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 9:54 **“Fire... from heaven”**: lighting sent as a punishment.

Luke 9:55 **“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of”**: you are unaware your spirit is in opposition to my spirit and mission.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus and His disciples were on their way back to Jerusalem. Their path brought them through one of the villages of Samaria. It is possible that James and John were the disciples Jesus sent ahead to secure lodging for the night and food for their refreshment. Upon being refused, they took personal offense and sought revenge that equaled their feelings of rejection. They did not know Jesus would soon suffer a sham of a trial and death on a cross.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Jesus was rejected repeatedly before dying on the cross. Why was rejection necessary for Jesus to fulfill His ministry?

2. Why is rejection sometimes necessary for us to today when doing God's will?
3. Why does rejection hurt so much?
4. James and John took Jesus' rejection by the Samaritans personally. Why?
5. Jesus never retaliated when rejected. What did He do instead?
6. How easy is it to seek revenge when suffering for righteousness' sake, as described in 1 Peter 3:8-14?
7. What wisdom "descends from above"? What wisdom originates from our human emotions and thinking?
8. When were the disciples finally able to see the value and power in letting God avenge them and the gospel of Christ? (See Acts 2)

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Philip, the evangelist in Acts 8:5-8, preached the gospel of Christ in Samaria. They received the gospel gladly, "and there was great joy in that city." It is hard to imagine that this was the same city that turned Jesus away a short time earlier. How easy it is to judge a situation as "hopeless" before the time! If James and John had been able to call fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans when they were so offended, there would not have been a revival when Philip came later.

If Jesus had allowed the rejection He felt to cloud His mission, His human feelings would have been too overwhelming for Him to die on the cross of Calvary.

The Apostle Paul was rejected in Corinth after spending over three years there. Apollos came later and was accepted, but Paul refused to be offended in being rejected and Apollos accepted. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 that some of the congregation contended for him, others for Apollos, and others for Cephas (Peter), but they were all for the same gospel of Christ, and Christ was not divided. Later, in Philippians 1:12-19, Paul wrote "some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of goodwill. He remained thankful, however, that "whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

"Dear Lord, help me to not take offense personally, especially offenses I suffer for the sake of your gospel. Help me to let you take care of them, lest I hinder your work. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

God is not willing that any should perish. Sometimes we become so focused on our lives, our efforts, and our desire to follow God and uphold His law that we lose sight of the true purpose in why His Son came to earth. We become emotionally attached to our Savior, but not necessarily in the right way. We begin to personalize the attacks on Christ, begin to add our thoughts and feelings into the situation, eventually even reacting more so because we are personally offended on Christ's behalf.

We forget the instructions to turn the other cheek. To bless those that curse us. To love our enemies and to do good to those that hate us. To pray for those that persecute us.

The Philippian jailer and his whole family were brought to God by men that stayed true to God's purpose and desire. Paul and Silas prayed and sang at midnight, then prevented the jailer from taking his own life when the earthquake hit. Not one call for retribution or revenge.

After Jesus had instructed us how to treat our enemies, He explained the reason for doing so: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (*Matthew 5:45-48*).

May we learn to love with the perfect love of the Father, who was willing to send his own Son down to die and suffer for us, that we should be able to truly live and be adopted sons and daughters.

—Bro. Eric Doolittle

SEPTEMBER 14, 2025

PETER DISSEMBLED WITH THE JUDAIZERS

Acts 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. *(See Acts 10:1-33 for complete passage of Peter's vision and accompaniment with Cornelius to Caesarea.)*

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Galatians 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch

that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

(See Acts 15:15-18 for complete passage of James' final conclusion.)

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

MEMORY VERSE: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. —**Galatians 3:28**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Peter was shown in the vision in Acts 10 that he was to consider no one “unclean” or unfit for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Later, while visiting the Antioch congregation, Peter ate with the believers there, but some of the Judaizers from Jerusalem that came later influenced Peter to dissemble, which in turn caused Barnabas to withdraw also.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Galatians 2:13 “**Dissemble**”: deceit; hypocrisy (*Strong’s*); the acting of a stage player (*Thayer*).

Galatians 2:13 “**Also carried away with**”: to take off together; to passively yield (*Strong’s*); to yield or submit one’s self to lowly things; not to evade their power (*Thayer*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Peter’s experience in Acts 10 convinced him it was wrong to exclude Gentile believers from the right hand of fellowship in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bible scholars believe it was approximately seven years later that Peter, while visiting Antioch, fell to peer pressure to no longer eat with the Gentile believers. Roughly three years after the incident at Antioch, the meeting at Jerusalem resulted in the decrees recorded in Acts 15.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. In Acts 10:6, to what extent was God depending on Peter to do His bidding?
2. How much of the vision did Peter understand when it first came to him?
3. Why was it difficult for Peter to resolve the conflicts in his mind regarding the vision?
4. After the Lord spoke to Peter as he was meditating on the vision, how did Peter then understand the vision?
5. When Peter traveled to Antioch seven years later, what caused him to not eat with the Gentile brethren, thus going back on what the Lord had taught him earlier?
6. Who can be affected by peer pressure in a negative way?
7. Why did Paul deal with Peter's dissimulation publicly?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Our personal views regarding certain subjects are deeply rooted in our inner being—and not easily changed to another viewpoint. Some of the subject matters to be considered go back for many generations. The “normal” status for the subject matters in question are a way of life and are rarely questioned. A few examples could include the following: Children in Switzerland become adept at snow skiing; young girls in certain parts of Africa learn to balance large water vessels and other heavy loads on their heads; children growing up in Utqigvik, Alaska, formerly known as Barrow, Alaska, think that mid 40's Fahrenheit in the summer is “warm.”

During their four hundred years of bondage in Egypt, the Israelites remained an “exclusive” community due to their circumstances. After their deliverance from Egypt, God gave the explicit commandment in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 to not marry among the nations they were to conquer and eliminate. 1 Kings 11:1-8 tells of King Solomon marrying hundreds of foreign wives in direct violation of God's commandment, and of the damage it did to himself and to the kingdom.

God gave distinct dietary commandments to His people after their deliverance from Egypt. These guidelines were intended for their physical well-being and as a constant reminder to not engage in

the eating habits of idol worshipers.

By the time of the New Testament, Jewish leaders had added many traditions, among them the practice of not eating with other nationalities. Peter knew nothing different than these traditions, even though Jesus had taught by example and by His rebuke of the Jewish religious leaders that these customs were added by men and not necessarily ordained by God.

When Peter was given the vision of the unclean animals let down by the sheet from the heavens, it puzzled him at first. God then spoke to him plainly what it really meant, and he willingly cooperated with God in preaching the gospel to Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, and those gathered with him. Seven years later, when Peter failed to stand by the understanding God had given him, God had mercy on him through the admonishment of Paul. Three years later, during the council at Jerusalem, Peter stood up and addressed the issue of the long-held Jewish traditions that were now a stumbling block. The result of the council at Jerusalem was the letter to the Gentile believers that brought great comfort and balance to the church.

“Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your divine wisdom, love and patience. Help me to understand your divine balance in all areas, even in those areas of which I have deeply engrained opinions. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

It is in our human nature to see things from our own perspective, influenced possibly by our family, our past, or our desires. It can cause us to have a skewed perspective or even be blind to the needs or desires of others. The Lord wants His body to be in unity and work together for the good of all. This requires us to think of others and not contend for our own way. Sometimes it requires The Lord to chasten us, which is not a pleasant experience, but the result can be beautiful and beneficial.

Have you ever thought you were on the right side of an issue only to find that you were decidedly wrong? I have and the way The Lord worked with me is something I have never forgotten. It was both a painful and beneficial experience.

One Sunday a vote was taken on an issue and everyone was for it except for me. I had presented my reasons, but it had made no

difference in the outcome. I went home, hurt that no one had seen that I was in the “right.” I was still hurt the next Sunday, but The Lord was waiting for me with a very clear message on “Presumption.” It wasn’t pleasant to see myself and the error of my thinking. Afterwards though, I was able to release my hurt feelings to The Lord, He healed them, and the fellowship both with My Lord and congregation was not broken. Praise The Lord!

—Sis. Sarah Herron

SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

SAUL OF TARSUS

Acts 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 But he [*Stephen*], being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and

putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

1 Timothy 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

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

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

Philippians 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

MEMORY VERSE: For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. —**1 Corinthians 15:9**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Apostle Paul was not always a “vessel unto honor.” Before his Damascus-road experience, he persecuted the church with unrivaled zeal.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 8:1 “**Consenting**”: to think well of in common; assent to; allow; be pleased with; have pleasure.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul, known as Saul in his youth, was born in Tarsus, located in south-central, present-day Turkey, near the Mediterranean Sea. At an early age, Saul showed promise in studying the scriptures. According to Acts 22:3, he was brought up in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God...” Gamaliel was one of the most prominent and influential Pharisees of the time. It was a great

honor to study with him. Saul's early life was greatly influenced by Gamaliel and the teachings of the Pharisees.

Paul never met Jesus in the flesh, based on 1 Corinthians 15:8, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." When Saul/Paul did "meet Jesus" on the Damascus road, it completely reversed all of his former biases and thinking.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When Stephen knelt and prayed his last words, "Lay not this sin to their charge," how did this at first appear to "encourage" Saul in his zeal to persecute the church?
2. At the height of Saul's career as "chief persecutor" of the church, he met Jesus on the way to Damascus by means of a bright light from Heaven. Why did God wait until then to bring Saul to a decision point?
3. Jesus asked Saul a question as he fell to the earth in the bright light. How did this question change Saul's opinion of Jesus and His church?
4. If Saul had responded to the bright light by hardening his heart further, how would that have impacted his future?
5. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:13 that he persecuted the church ignorantly. Why does God have great mercy on ignorance?
6. What did Paul give up, and what did he gain?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Saul of Tarsus was taught from childhood the doctrine of the Pharisee sect. By the time he reached young manhood, he was fully persuaded he "knew the truth."

One peculiar trait of our humanity is a stubborn resistance to anything that challenges what we hold to be true. For example, if someone tried to tell me that one of my favorite foods did not taste good, I would laugh and not be moved at all from my opinion. More than likely, the mention of my favorite food would only make me want more of it as soon as possible. The best way to change my opinion on food is to introduce me to something that proves to be far superior to what I am used to. This happened to me years ago when a young lady, who would later become my wife, introduced me

to a different way of eating a common food item. At first, my reaction was a strong aversion—almost of disgust. When I finally agreed to try it, my shock at how good it tasted surprised me. It is one of my favorite foods to this day, when eaten the way she demonstrated.

Saul's increased motivation to eradicate belief in Jesus Christ was spurred on by the unsettling realization his efforts were ineffective. The reason Saul was unsuccessful in convincing believers to recant was they had experienced true salvation, which made their former religious experience unsatisfactory. When Saul "met Jesus" on the road to Damascus, he was forced to reconsider his former belief system. No human could force him to entertain any other belief, but God had the understanding and power to bring it about.

From Saul/Paul's time to the present, countless people have experienced a true heart conversion from their former belief to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christianity is spreading the fastest in areas where it is most persecuted. This spread seems paradoxical, but God knows the language of every heart and is eager to speak to each one, just as He did Saul. All who will listen will hear His sweet voice and respond. Psalms 34:8a says, "O taste and see that the LORD is good..."

"Dear Lord, thank you for dealing with my heart. After experiencing your love and forgiveness, I understand your full plan of salvation is far above anything else I could experience. Amen!"

REFLECTIONS

I've always thought that of all the sins people can commit, Saul's was a "big" one—against God's own people. It was a great betrayal to the saints and to his own God (that Saul "thought" he was worshipping and obeying). Because of that, I've always figured that Saul had a tough struggle forgiving himself—even though God forgave him. Once he realized his great sin, he may have felt so broken and "unfixable" that he despaired of hope.

But at his conversion, Saul was not dealing with ordinary people and their way of thinking. He was dealing with Jesus—our loving and merciful Savior. His thoughts and ways are SO much higher than ours. He sees not what we are, but what we can become—through Him.

Jesus now had what He was looking for—a “chosen” and ready vessel that He could really use. Saul’s great sins were forgiven and forgotten. It didn’t matter how bad they had been—they were now covered by Christ’s blood.

Somehow Saul must have realized this great truth when Jesus spoke to him. He took heart, and it made him determined to now follow Christ relentlessly—despite the great suffering that he would endure himself by doing so.

Concerning all the persecution and damage that Saul (now Paul) had previously done and that he couldn’t fix himself, he did the right thing—he left it with God to take care of. He didn’t let himself become paralyzed and useless because of his shame. He properly rolled that heavy burden of his past onto our strong Burden-Bearer, and he left it there.

Yes, the saints suffered under the great persecution that Saul inflicted on them, but God gave special grace to His people during that time. The end result was that the Gospel was spread widely—a good thing!

Your big mess that you can’t fix? God is the Master at making wrongs right. When we truly surrender our broken situation to Him, He alone can do the impossible and bring “good” out of “bad.” That is His “specialty,” and He delights in doing it. Whether big or small, give Him a chance with your broken situation too! (Romans 8:28.)

—Bro. Ron Cole

SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

JOHN MARK

Acts 12:12 And when he [*Peter*] had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

14 And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

Acts 12:21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking

some to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus [also known as John Mark], sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

2 Timothy 4:9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:

10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Philemon 1:23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

24 Marcus [also known as John Mark], Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.

MEMORY VERSE: Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure. —I Timothy 5:22

CENTRAL THOUGHT: John Mark was perhaps a teenager during the time of Jesus' ministry. When John Mark accompanied his Uncle Barnabas and the Apostle Paul on their first missionary trip he was probably elated at first. Difficulties arose, however, that discouraged him. We don't know why he left the first missionary trip, but it was not under the best of circumstances. Paul was unwilling to take him along on the second trip.

The scripture is silent on John Mark's reaction at being refused for the second trip. No doubt he was disappointed, but he determined to not become completely discouraged. Later, when he had proved faithful for a period of time, Paul requested his presence, saying, "He is profitable to me for the ministry."

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 13:5 "**They had also John to their minister**": John Mark was an assistant to Saul (Paul) and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (*Barnes and Clarke*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Tradition states Jesus and His disciples had their Last Supper in the upper room of Elijah and Mary Mark, John Mark's parents. It is possible John Mark was nearby during the meal, possibly even overhearing some of their conversation.

In Mark 14:51-52, a "certain young man," whom many scholars believe was John Mark, followed Jesus and His disciples into the garden.

Mary, John Mark's mother, and sister of Barnabas, hosted the prayer meeting for Peter when he was held in prison and miraculously delivered by the angel of the Lord.

John Mark authored the gospel of Mark, the first gospel to be written, approximately thirty-five years after Jesus' resurrection. Historians believe Peter helped provide much of the information recorded in the book of Mark. It appears the gospel of Mark had a Roman audience in mind, based on its emphasis of Jesus' identity and miracles.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. John Mark ministered to the personal needs of Barnabas and Saul [Paul] on their first missionary journey. What difficulties might he have encountered that prompted him to leave the work?
2. When Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking John Mark with them on their second trip, what would John Mark have been tempted to think and feel when he found out about the disagreement?
3. Paul spoke of John Mark in Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon in a positive light. What attitude would John Mark have displayed for Paul to speak highly of him after refusing to take him on the second missionary trip?
4. Paul requested John Mark to join him as a helper in the ministry approximately 12 to 14 years after refusing to take him on the second missionary trip. How does this illustrate the process of maturing spiritually, and forgiveness through the grace of God?
5. If John Mark had refused to be reconciled with Paul regarding the second missionary journey, how likely would the gospel of Mark have been written?
6. How important is it for us to allow the difficulties we encounter along our Christian walk to mature us spiritually rather than harden us?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

History teaches us many significant events were not accomplished in the first attempt. Often, the individual promoting the idea or attempting the task suffered repeated failure and often faced ridicule and rejection.

“Colonel” Harland Sanders sold his first franchise for his fried chicken recipe in 1952 at the age of 65 to a restaurant in Salt Lake City, Utah. It took him eleven years and 1009 rejections to finally succeed. There are now over 5,200 KFC restaurants in the United States and over 15,000 worldwide. What would have happened if Colonel Sanders had given up on or before his 1009th rejection?

Abraham Lincoln failed many times in business ventures as a young man and was turned down for public office on eight different occasions. He ultimately became president at the age of 52. The years

of hardship, failure, and rejection leading up to this were “preparation years.”

Sir Winston Churchill suffered waves of unpopularity throughout his political career. He predicted the onset of WWII, but was met with scorn, even by Arthur Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister leading up to WWII. Churchill finally became Prime Minister in 1940, but only after WWII started.

Colonel Sanders, Abraham Lincoln, and Winston Churchill all faced repeated failures and rejection before the success we recognize them for today. They never gave up, even when it seemed futile to keep trying.

Rejection is one of the hardest things to bear. It can create deep emotional and spiritual wounds, even to the point of paralyzing us from moving forward in life. God, however, has a work for each one of us, despite our failures and feelings of rejection.

“Dear Heavenly Father, help me find my acceptance in you, and not in the whims of popular opinion. Help me to be faithful to the task you have for me. Amen!”

REFLECTIONS

There was a time in my life when I believed the Lord gave me a message for the prison yard. I had not preached yet. I remember going out there by myself, and I just couldn’t bring myself to do it. I felt the weight of failing the Lord. It wasn’t long after that the Lord gave me an opportunity to give the same message in the chapel, and I was able to give the message. I had the weight of failure, but also the opportunity for redemption.

There is a tendency sometimes to gloss over the failure, but I believe it is important that we feel the failure. Paul’s part of identifying the wrong was important. There is also the tendency to overemphasize the failure and not allow oneself to have redemption. Barnabas gave Mark the opportunity for redemption.

God never wants us to stay in our failures. He instead wants us to recognize them and move on to redemption. God doesn’t throw away the broken pieces, He, instead, mends them and makes them useful again.

—Bro. Marvin Moles

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