



Corinth Missionary Baptist Church
"The City of Faith"
813 South Cherokee Road
Social Circle, Georgia 30025



Dr. Constance Davenport
Christian Education Director

WINTER -2022 / 2023

December 2022 – February 2023

Sis Tamara Franklin
Sunday School Superintendent

Sis. Ruth Parks
Asst. Sunday School Superintendent

Bishop William Davenport
Senior Pastor

Jesus Is All Ministries

Lesson summaries by:
Renee Little, Willie Ferrell, & Montario Fletcher
Free Access - Previous Lessons
<https://www.jesusisall.com/sunday-school.htm>

“Diligent study of these lessons will not only bless you spiritually, but also aid you in discovering God's plan for your own life.”

-John Alva Owston



CORINTH
MISSIONARY
BAPTIST
CHURCH
ADULT
SUNDAY SCHOOL
CLASS



ADULT

WINTER SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

TABLE OF CONTENT

Page	Lesson	Date	Title
6	1	Dec 4 th	A Life of Total Commitment (Part II)
10	2	Dec 11 th	"Elisabeth's Commitment"
14	3	Dec 18 th	"Elisabeth's Commitment" (continued)
18	4	Dec 25 th	The Shepherds' Commitment"
22	5	Jan 1 st	"The Shepherds' Commitment" (continued)
27	6	Jan 8 th	"Putting Commitment into Action"
31	7	Jan 15 th	"Putting Commitment into Action" (continued)
36	8	Jan 22 nd	"Commitment of the Midwives"
39	9	Jan 29 th	"Commitment of the Midwives" (continued)
43	10	Feb 5 th	"Rahab's Commitment"
47	11	Feb 12 th	"Rahab's Commitment" (continued)
51	12	Feb 19 th	"Commitment in Leadership"
56	13	Feb 26 th	"Commitment in Leadership" (continued)

You can also follow the lesson by joining live each Sunday morning via our website:

<https://www.thecityoffaith.org/sundayschool>



Sunday, December 4, 2022

Lesson 1 - "A Life of Total Commitment (Part II)

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:46—55

Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 2:1—10

Background Scripture: Luke 1:26—38, 46—55

Read: Luke 1:26—38, 46—55

Luke 1:46—55

*46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. 49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. 51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. 54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; 55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever*

In the eyes of God, a ruler must be just (2 Samuel 23:3) and must be a champion for the poor and needy (Psalm 72:4). The Lord's unwavering commitment to the weak and helpless is an expression of His faithfulness to men and women. In the final section of the Song of Praise, Mary worships God for His faithfulness.

6. How does Mary's song express the fact that God sometimes turns the values of the world upside down (vs. 51, 52)?

"Mary's song shows that what is seen is not all that it seems. God takes the world's values and expectations and turns them upside down. God himself would come to earth and face rejection by the proud, the powerful, and the rich. He would lift the lowly and fill the hungry. And God continues to do that today" (Osborn, gen. ed., Life Application Bible Commentary, Tyndale). Mary might have been very young, but she obviously had a great deal of wisdom and insight.

"In Mary's song, as in Hannah's song, these holy women were filled with wonder to see that 'the proud, the mighty, the rich' were not chosen to usher in the greatest events, but the lowly. They sang of this as no capricious movement, but as a great principle of God by which he delights to put down the mighty from their seats and to exalt them of low degree" (New Commentary on the Whole Bible, Tyndale).

Modern people enjoy tales of triumph by underdogs. Ancient people likely are no different. We may think of Esther, the clever and faithful Jewish girl who resisted the intrigues of the powerful Haman with the result that Haman was destroyed. Also compelling

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to analyze Mary's words and see that God chose her to bear His Son as a result of His grace.

Principle: to see how a faithful servant of God addresses Him.

Application: to develop a vocabulary that culminates in praising God.

MARY'S REFLECTION ON GOD'S

FAITHFULNESS—Luke 1:51—55

The way of the world is that the rich and powerful often take advantage of the poor. This oppression is decried by the Old Testament prophets, who teach that God is Lord of both rich and poor. "Hear this word, ye ... which crush the needy.... The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks" (see Amos 4:1, 2).

are the stories of Daniel and his companions, who resisted the decrees of the mighty kings of Babylon.

Equally loved are the stories of ancestors who rose from humble beginnings to positions of great power. Joseph went from being a slave in prison to being the master of Egypt. David left the solitary life of a shepherd to become a great king. The irony of Jesus' life is that in His greatness He becomes the servant of all (see Mark 9:35). Paul tells us that Jesus left His secure place in Heaven and humbled himself to become a man. God has now exalted Jesus above all others (Philippians 2:6–9).

7. How does God satisfy the hungry (v. 53)?

This role reversal of the rich and the poor is continued (compare 1 Samuel 2:5; Psalm 107:9). Later in Luke, Jesus teaches that the poor will be blessed and their hunger will be satisfied (Luke 6:20, 21). In contrast, Jesus says the rich will be turned away hungry (Luke 6:24, 25).

The coming of God's Messiah is to be a working out of His justice, bringing good news to the poor. When Jesus reads Scripture in the synagogue of His hometown Nazareth, He picks this passage: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

8. How has God helped the nation of Israel according to His mercy (v. 54)?

Holpen is an older English form meaning "helped." The coming of the promised Messiah is to be understood as an act of great mercy to the nation of Israel in accordance with God's promises; God will indeed "perform the mercy promised to our fathers" (Luke 1:72). Israel has learned the lesson that it cannot survive without God's mercy, as shown in His consistent aid for the nation.

A strong theme in the Old Testament is the necessity of "waiting" for the Lord to show His mercy to the people. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18; compare Luke 2:25).

Now this mercy has been shown in the womb of Mary. This part of the waiting is over!

9. How does Mary acknowledge God's trustworthiness (v. 55)?

Mary ends her Song of Praise by recalling the most basic and central of Israel's heritage of promises from God. This is the promise to Abraham that his descendants (his seed) are to become a great nation. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2; compare 17:7; 22:17). Mary recognizes that God keeps His promises. This is the essence of trustworthiness. For this poor, pregnant teenager of "low estate," the trustworthiness of the Lord is the lifeline she needs to sustain her.

CONCLUSION: MARY AS AN EXAMPLE FOR CHRISTIANS

Are you committed to too many things? Do you find yourself running between church, school, family, job, hobbies, sports, social events, band concerts, shopping, fitness clubs, and many other commitments? Has anyone ever told you that you must learn to say no when asked to do more things? If this describes you, you may have a problem with over-involvement, but this is not necessarily a commitment problem.

True commitment is not a scheduling problem. It is not measured by the level of one's busyness. Commitment, rather, is a deep matter of the heart. It involves both a selfless willingness to serve and a clear sense of priorities. Ironically, commitment to God does not always mean "Let's get busy right now." Commitment to the Lord starts with slowing down and carefully discerning His will and His work.

Think about that: commitment begins with slowing down! If we take the opposite path, the path of "diving right in," we run the risk of missing what God may be trying to tell us through the subtle clues that He likes to give. We may become more and more inefficient as we become more and more frantic in our busyness.

This quarter's lessons will teach us much about commitment. They will do so by examining the lives

of important Bible characters. Mary was one who slowed down and took time to praise God. She was faithful to Jesus throughout His life and did not abandon Him even at His execution. She is pictured after the resurrection as a person of deep faith and prayer (Acts 1:14). These are the reasons we still should call Mary “blessed.”

Luke 1:39—45. Read Luke 1:5—24, 39—45 in preparation for this lesson. Good studying!

Lesson Summarized by Kimbley Y. Baker-Richardson
Jesus Is All Ministries

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can never fully rejoice in God until we recognize our need for Him (Luke 1:46—47). God’s gracious gifts should make us humble, never boastful (vs. 48—49).
2. God’s mercy is unlimited; it extends to all who humble themselves before Him (v. 50).
3. God’s measureless power assures us that ultimately justice will be done (v. 51).
4. If we simply seek to humbly follow the Lord, He will exalt us in due time (vs. 52—53).
5. Christ’s birth demonstrated God’s faithfulness to all His promises (vs. 54—55).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Make Mary’s praise your own.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, when we see the praise that poured from Mary’s heart, we cannot help but be moved. This young woman loved You very dearly. May our hearts become like hers, full of joy in serving You. May we never lose the wonder of being allowed to serve You. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Your Messiah. Amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

The next lesson reverts back to what happened when Mary first arrived at Elisabeth’s house. We have an opportunity to study the words of praise offered by Elisabeth at what God was doing. December 11th’s lesson is titled, “Elisabeth’s Commitment.” The lesson text is



Sunday, December 11, 2022

Lesson 2 - "Elisabeth's Commitment"

Lesson Text: **Luke 1:39-45**

Background Scripture: **Luke 1:5-24; 39-45**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 7:10-14**

Luke 1:39-45

439 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; 40 And entered into the house of Zechariah, and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: 42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell the story of the meeting between Mary and Elisabeth.
2. Explain the role of faith in the life of one who is used by God in significant ways.
3. Express appreciation to one other person for how God is working in his or her life.

Introduction - Commitment

Many years ago, a college-aged war protester was photographed holding a sign that said, "Nothing is worth dying for." This picture was on the front page of many newspapers, and his claim generated lively discussion on campuses. It is one thing to protest a war; it is quite another thing to claim that nothing is

worthy of absolute allegiance. To die for something is the ultimate commitment. The question at the time was this: Was this sign an expression of a world whose only absolute commitment was to noncommitment?

This quarter's lessons seek to help us understand commitment from a biblical perspective. Commitment is difficult to define adequately and tricky to evaluate initially. Sometimes, we have no idea of the breadth or the depth of a commitment until it is put to the test, for in the end commitment must be demonstrated rather than simply verbalized. The groom who is truly committed to his bride will honor his vows of fidelity to her. The woman who is committed to her children will sacrifice her time, her comfort, and even her personal happiness to see them thrive. The believer committed to his church will give his time and money to it in significant ways.

Last week's lesson looked at the commitment of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This week, we consider another player in the drama surrounding Jesus' birth: Mary's relative Elisabeth. These two women have much to teach us about commitment, both to God and to each other.

Lesson Background

In the Jewish households of the ancient world, the birth of a baby was no less a special event than it is today. The "barren woman" of Old Testament times was a married woman who failed to have children. Her lack of children was a huge disappointment to her husband. Furthermore, it was the cause of pain in her own life; it was an unfilled void. Therefore, there was great joy when a woman who had been childless for many years was blessed with children (see Psalm 113:9). This barren-woman-become-mother was the

situation of Elisabeth in today's lesson. She understood her pregnancy in old age not as an inconvenience, but as a blessing (Luke 1:25).

Today's text takes this joyous commitment of two mothers to their unborn sons and factors in their deep commitment to God and His plan for the nation of Israel. The women experienced miraculous pregnancies—pregnancies that could be only God's work.

They were both affected by angelic visitations. They both had husbands who struggled to come to terms with these events. And in the end they both submitted fully to God's will and allowed their bodies to become vessels for the working out of His will.

The opening narrative of Luke tells the story of Zechariah and Elisabeth. They were a married couple who believed that parenthood had passed them by. They were described as being "well stricken in years" (Luke 1:7). It would be unusual in Elisabeth's day for a woman to experience a first pregnancy even in her late twenties or her thirties. Women married very young, and if there were no pregnancy within a year or two of the consummation of a marriage, the woman was considered to be barren, unable to have children.

Both Zechariah and Elisabeth were from Judaism's priestly tribe, the Levites (Luke 1:5). Zechariah was a member of the priestly course of Abijah, 1 of 24 such divisions. Members of each of these divisions served as temple workers for a week at a time in Jerusalem on a twice-yearly rotation. These priests lived elsewhere the rest of the year.

Elisabeth is described as being of "the daughters of Aaron," meaning the daughter of a priest. Zechariah was dutiful to serve at the Jerusalem temple when his division's time came up (Luke 1:8). We may surmise that since they had not been granted children, they had directed their devotion toward this type of service.

Hasty Visit (Luke 1:39, 40)

Most people have had to make a "quick trip" at some point in their lives, a hasty excursion that didn't allow for much advanced planning. Such trips are occasioned by unforeseen emergencies or special

opportunities. Today's text begins with such a journey.

Excited Meeting (Luke 1:39-41)

1. What did Mary do right after being told of her pregnancy and that of her relative Elisabeth? (Luke 1:39-41)

Previously, Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel. Mary learned during that visitation that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. The angel also told Mary that her relative Elisabeth was experiencing God's grace in a miraculous pregnancy of her own (Luke 1:36). Almost immediately after receiving Gabriel's message, Mary prepared to visit Elisabeth some sixty or more miles south of Nazareth in Judean territory. She remained there about three months (v. 56).

2. What might have been some reasons why Mary wanted to see Elisabeth?

Perhaps Mary felt that no one is going to understand her situation in her hometown, and she needed to find someone who could understand her. We must keep in mind that Mary is engaged, but not yet married to Joseph (Matt. 1:18).

Perhaps Mary wanted to share the good news to Elisabeth in person. After all, Mary was going to carry the Savior of the world in her womb, which is a miracle of God. Mary knew that Elisabeth was expecting a miraculous birth as well; Elisabeth was barren, but she was told that she will birth John the Baptist.

As believers, we need to share some of the things that God has done, or is doing for us with each other. Sometimes, there is nothing like listening to another believer's story to keep our faith strong. When God does great things in our lives, we must be willing to tell others about it.

3. Why can we say that these women viewed life from God's perspective instead of a human one?

As they were discussing their pregnancies with each other, they realized that God was the one that was making the pregnancies happen. They were both

godly women; thus, they were able to see things from God's perspective.

It is not always easy to see life from God's perspective. Since we are in a physical world and we live in physical bodies, our natural propensity is to think naturally. Times do come when events are obviously beyond what is natural, and then we realize that God is at work. In our day-to-day living, however, we tend to forget about God's control over every event. As we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God and how He works, we gradually begin to view all of life's situations as being under His guiding control. This is called sovereignty.

As believers come to a deeper understanding of how involved God is in our lives, our joy grows. Things we face are not accidental or lucky. Rather, they come about because of the gracious guiding hand of God. As we increasingly understand this, we become better able to handle those times in life that prove to be hard trials. We are also able to more fully enjoy the good things that God sends our way. This is what Elisabeth and Mary were experiencing. The joy they expressed to each other in their meeting was tremendous.

To be continued...

Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, December 18, 2022

Lesson 3 - "Elisabeth's Commitment"

Lesson Text: **Luke 1:39-45**

Background Scripture: **Luke 1:5-24; 39-45**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 7:10-14**

Luke 1:39-45

439 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; 40 And entered into the house of Zechariah, and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: 42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Lesson Text: **Luke 1:39-45**

Background Scripture: **Luke 1:5-24; 39-45**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 7:10-14**

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell the story of the meeting between Mary and Elisabeth.
2. Explain the role of faith in the life of one who is used by God in significant ways.
3. Express appreciation to one other person for how God is working in his or her life.

Supernatural Signs (v. 41)

God's involvement does not stop with the two miraculous pregnancies. The special presence of God enlivens the reunion of Elisabeth and Mary.

4. At what moment was Elisabeth filled with the Holy Spirit, and what things happened just then? (v. 41)

Upon entering "the house of Zechariah" (v. 40), Mary finds the goal of her journey: "Elisabeth." It was when Elisabeth heard the greeting from Mary that the baby in her womb leaped and she was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 41).

We should not overlook this significant moving of the Holy Spirit. "He is styled The Spirit because He is a spirit; He is styled Holy because He is holy to the measure of infinity; He is identified as The Spirit of God because He belongs to the Godhead; He is called The Spirit of Christ because He is by Christ sent into the world" (Chafer, Systematic Theology, Zondervan). This Person suddenly filled Elisabeth and enabled her to express truth she was previously unaware of.

We must remember that during Old Testament days, the Holy Spirit came upon people to accomplish some particular goal and then removed Himself when that goal was achieved. It is only since the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost that He remains permanently in a person who has been born again (John 14:16-IS). Elisabeth lived in the days prior to the Spirit's permanent dwelling in believers; so on this occasion she experienced something she had probably never experienced before.

5. What spiritual benefits have you received from a relationship with an older relative?

Probably all of us have a favorite older relative. We have been blessed by his or her wisdom and guidance. We have learned valuable lessons that will not soon be forgotten.

This fact should cause us to aspire to be a blessing to all relatives, but especially to younger ones. Those of us who are aunts, uncles, and grandparents have opportunities to make a significant impact on nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Often they will listen to us when they will not heed their own parents.

The Spirit Stirs Rejoicing (v. 42)

The Gospel of Luke reveals a great interest in the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:16; 4:1; 11:13; 12:12). Elsewhere as here, Luke presents a person as being filled with the Holy Ghost in order to utter a prophecy (see Luke 1:67; compare 2:25, 26). Therefore, Elisabeth's words that follow constitute a divinely inspired word from God. She is acting in a prophetic manner on this occasion.

7. Why did Elisabeth refer to Mary's baby as "my Lord" (v. 43)?

Elisabeth's reference to Mary's baby as "my Lord" (v. 43), would serve to reaffirm what Gabriel had said earlier to Mary (c.f. vs. 26-38). Elisabeth clearly understands the root cause of blessing in this situation. Mary, her young relative, has been chosen to be the mother of the Lord!

The New Testament speaks often of God's divine plan of providing for human redemption by sending His Son (see John 3:16, 17; Galatians 4:4). Yet we can think of many other ways in which the Son of God could have come into the world. He could have appeared as a full-grown man, ready to begin His work on day one. He could have been born into one of the wealthy households of Jerusalem, where He would have had easy access to the venues of power and influence. He could have come to earth on a cloud of glory, giving instant credibility to His mission by the nature of His appearance.

But God chooses none of these avenues for the advent of the Lord Jesus. The Messiah begins His human existence in the womb of a peasant girl from an insignificant village of poor reputation (John 1:46). From Mary and Elisabeth we learn that no person who is willing to serve God should underestimate his or her value. God does not look upon our outward appearance or circumstances. The Lord looks instead at our hearts (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

8. What was it Mary did that pleased God? (v. 45)

Mary has the one requirement that pleases God, and uses it to make His plan work: faith. She is blessed because she believes. Her submission to God's will leads to the fulfillment of the angel's fabulous predictions for her son. Her boy will grow to be the true heir of David's throne, to preside over an eternal kingdom, and to be understood as the Son of God himself (see Luke 1:33-35).

It is difficult for us to appreciate fully how key Mary's role is in all of this. At this stage, the creator of the universe entrusts His plan to save sinful humankind to a teenaged girl of simple yet powerful faith. We marvel at this plan, even twenty centuries later.

Conclusion

An elderly friend of mine once confided to me that his early goal in life had been to become a fighter pilot in the Air Force. As a young boy he had done all he could to prepare himself. He had read voraciously and knew extensive details about every plane in active service. He had worked to keep himself fit so he would be able to pass a physical.

Eventually, he applied and was accepted into a pilot training program. In the end, though, he washed out because his eyesight was slightly below the necessary standard. He went on to have a productive career in another field and to raise a family of wonderful children, but the desire of his heart was denied because he did not meet the standards of qualification.

What sorts of qualifications do we need to enlist in the service of the Lord? Today's lesson is about two key players in the divine drama of human salvation, and we can learn much by examining their lives. We don't know about their eyesight, but we do know that both lived in tiny villages and probably had minimal educations.

Neither Elisabeth nor Mary could bring great influence or wealth to the task of ministry, but both possessed loving, submissive hearts. They were women of faith, and they were committed to each other. They did not permit rivalry to enter their

relationship. Because of these and other factors, God trusted them to be the mothers of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ.

The basic qualifications for God's service are commitment to the Lord and commitment to His people. Such commitment finds its source in faith. But this is not "blind faith" as the world might think of when it hears the word faith. This is faith based on evidence. Both Elisabeth and Mary had evidence from Israel's history. They also had the evidence of their miraculous pregnancies.

God can always use one who has submitted to His authority and strives to do His will. As another marvelous woman of faith, Christina Rossetti (1830–1894), wrote, "What can I give him, poor as I am? ... [I] give my heart."

Prayer

Everlasting Father, may we find encouragement in the examples of two of Your great servants, Mary and Elisabeth. Their circumstances were humble, yet their hearts were rich. As Mary was pronounced blessed for her faith, may we continue to receive Your bounteous blessings as we too walk in faith. And should You need us for a task, may we be found worthy. We pray these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Practical Points

1. No matter what our circumstances, God provides people who will understand and encourage us (Luke 1 :39-40).
2. Fellowship with other believers will confirm and strengthen our faith (v.41).
3. We should not hesitate to acknowledge God's blessing on others (v. 42).
4. Those who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit will not value themselves too highly (vs. 43-44).
5. It is by believing God and His promises that we experience true blessing in our lives (v. 45).

Thought to Remember

God still blesses faithful, committed people.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

They were simple shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem and keeping watch over the sheep when a glorious band of angels announced the birth of Christ. Absorbing this wonderful sound and sight, they sought out the child and are remembered every Christmas. Study Luke 2:8-20 "The Shepherd's Commitment" in preparation for this lesson.

Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher
Jesus Is All Ministries



CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR

Sunday, December 25, 2022

Lesson 4 - "The Shepherds' Commitment"

Devotional Reading; **Psalm 107:1–15**

Background Scripture: **Luke 2:1–20**

Scripture Lesson: **Luke 2:8–20**

Luke 2:8-20

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to examine the interchange between the humble shepherds of Bethlehem and the heavenly angels who appeared and the action this caused the shepherds to take.

Principle: to be aware that God used ordinary people to receive His announcements and act on them.

Application: to encourage common people to hear divine news and respond positively to it.

INTRODUCTION

A new baby is born! How do you let people know of this joyous event? There are many different ways, both old and new. Years ago, it was traditional for men to hand out cigars to let their friends know there was a new child in the household. (For non-smokers this might be a bubble gum or candy cigar, in either blue or pink.) Within a few days, the record of the birth would be published in the town newspaper, efficiently informing those who kept track of such things.

When mother and baby were home from the hospital, she might hand-address birth announcements and mail them to all the appropriate friends and relatives. It was not uncommon for a business owner to post a message on the reader board, letting all those who drove past know "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" Informally, the community grapevine could quickly convey the news: "Did you hear that Linda and Ryan just had another boy?" A tradition in many churches was to have a rose in a vase on the pulpit, accompanied by an announcement from the preacher and a note in the bulletin.

Times have changed, but the desire to let people know about a birth has not. Now the news of a birth may be instantly communicated to grandparents via cell phone cameras. Digital pictures of the newborn may be e-mailed on the day of the birth. Details may be posted on a family web site within hours. Birth

announcements may be done through some type of e-card system that is paperless, cheap, and quick.

None of that existed in the first century AD. But we may safely assume that all of the normal channels of communication of the ancient world were working to announce the birth of Mary's son. Grandparents in Nazareth would have learned, although it would have taken several days for the news to travel there.

In addition, God chose two extraordinary methods to announce the birth of Jesus. First, He revealed a new star, which was noticed by ancient stargazers. This figures into the story of the wise men and is told in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Second, God sent angels to give the news to some local shepherds that very night. This is the story that is told in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and that is the focus of today's lesson.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Understanding today's lesson hinges on appreciating the role of shepherds in the ancient world. In this period, flocks of sheep or goats were common sights throughout Palestine. Much of the land was unsuitable for cultivation because of rocky conditions or the steepness of the slopes. As a result, many families, even those who lived in the cities and villages, owned flocks. The animals were both a source of income and a tangible asset of wealth.

The flocks were tended by shepherds, who came to the task from several different sources. Some shepherds of the time were simply the children of the owner, doing menial work for the greater benefit of the family. Others could be relatives in need of employment. In these cases, there was a strong family motivation to guard and care for the flock.

Shepherd duty was generally unpleasant. Hours were long. There was little protection from the rain, sun, and cold. The meals were sparse. Daily routine could include leading the flock for several miles to be watered and to find adequate forage. The opportunity for social niceties such as meeting with friends was rare. Small flocks were tended by a single shepherd, who may have had only a dog for companionship.

If appropriate family resources were inadequate for shepherd duty, the owner could be forced to hire men

for the task. This was considered to be one of the lowest levels of employment possible. The men who took such jobs were seen as untrustworthy (see John 10:12, 13). We do not know if the shepherds of today's lesson were from the category of young family members or from the loathed journeyman shepherd class.

Bethlehem had a reputation for shepherds and flocks that extended back to the time of David (1 Samuel 16:11). During the time of Jesus, the flocks of Bethlehem were a main source for lambs that were sold to Passover pilgrims in nearby Jerusalem. A Jewish historian of this period by the name of Josephus estimated that 100,000 lambs were sacrificed in Jerusalem on Passover (compare 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chronicles 35:7). This made sheep a big business! Therefore, we may assume that such large flocks were tended by a mix of family children and hirelings.

A most unexpected thing happened to the shepherds of today's story: they were visited by an angel! While we sometimes think that the Bible is full of angels, such visitations are relatively rare. Luke has a special interest in this area. He records three angelic appearances during the events leading up to the birth of Jesus (to Zechariah, to Mary, and to the shepherds). An angel ministered to Jesus in the garden (Luke 22:43). Angels witnessed to the women at the empty tomb (Luke 24:23). Likewise, in Acts (Luke's second book) angels were encountered as a means of direction and protection for the people of the first-century church (examples: Acts 5:19; 8:26).

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT (Luke 2:8-14)

1. How did people in that day generally feel about shepherds, and why might this group have been watching sheep near Bethlehem (Luke 2:8)?

It was not easy being a shepherd. We know David was the son of a shepherd and was called in from being with the sheep when Samuel was looking for God's choice of a king. He was part of a family business. By New Testament days, the occupation of shepherd was not so well accepted. Shepherds were often viewed as dirty and smelly thieves and were not welcomed as respected members of society. The

group of shepherds here was probably no more highly thought of than any other group.

Bethlehem was just a few miles from Jerusalem, where Jewish men were required to assemble three times a year for sacrifices. The Mosaic Law allowed those who lived great distances away to purchase their sacrifices in Jerusalem rather than bring them from home. This flock of sheep being watched near Bethlehem might have been raised for such purchases.

2. What happened to change the darkness and quiet of the night for the shepherds (v. 9)?

We can imagine the peace and quiet on the country hillsides surrounding Bethlehem. Common night sounds frequently interrupted the quiet, but that was expected and normal. At least some of the shepherds would have been awake to make sure the sheep slept peacefully and were safe from predators.

Others probably dozed lightly, always on the verge of waking up if needed. Luke 2:8 is a beautiful portrait of tranquility, but that gives way in verse 9 to a portrait of sudden, unexpected activity that caused great fear.

The sudden appearance of an angel standing near them shattered the peace and quiet of the night and understandably caused the great fear that overcame them. While we usually assume that the angel simply “appears out of nothing,” the language came upon them implies that the angel walks up to the shepherds. At the proper instant, though, the angel is revealed to them with supernatural glory. This includes bright light, for Luke says the glory of the Lord shines.

Both the quiet and the dark were instantly gone. The shepherds are described as terribly afraid. These men who braved wild animals in order to protect the flocks found themselves terrified.

3. What did the angel say first, and what message followed (v. 10)?

The angel first told the shepherds not to be afraid – “Fear not.” This echoed Gabriel’s words to both Zacharias and Mary when he suddenly appeared to them (1:13, 30). Was this angel also Gabriel? We are not told, but whether it was or not, the same message would be necessary upon his appearance because of our natural propensity to become afraid at unexpected events. The reason they did not need to be afraid was that he had come with good news for them.

What the angel says next is difficult to render into English. We should note that in the original text the phrase bring you good tidings is a verb and great joy is the object of that verb. The idea is something like this: “I have a good announcement for you: a great joy for all the people has come.” It was at this moment that the official birth announcement of the Messiah was given.

4. What is encouraging about the fact that Jesus’ birth was first announced to humble shepherds?

To hear that the announcement of Jesus’ birth was given first to lowly shepherds is a reassurance to us that Jesus is for everyone and not just the privileged few. Status in life, amount of money possessed, position attained, and worldwide fame have nothing to do with the reason Jesus came. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), and that includes everyone, regardless of status in life. No one should ever feel too small or too insignificant to win the attention of Christ.

Fortune and fame were not what Jesus’ coming was all about, nor should they be the driving goal of believers. Everything related to Jesus’ coming was humble and simple, including the selection of the shepherds to receive the first announcement.
To be continued...



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Sunday, January 1, 2023

Lesson 5 - "The Shepherd's Commitment" (Continued)

Devotional Reading; Psalm 107:1–15

Background Scripture: Luke 2:1–20

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:8–20

Luke 2:8-20

8 *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to examine the interchange between the humble shepherds of Bethlehem and the heavenly angels who appeared and the action this caused the shepherds to take.

Principle: to be aware that God used ordinary people to receive His announcements and act on them.

Application: to encourage common people to hear divine news and respond positively to it.

5. Why was the message of Jesus' birth one of "great joy" (v. 11)?

The angel's message was the kind of news that would bring joy to people everywhere. What is this "great joy"? It is the announcement of a birth. The angel includes four reasons why this birth is joyous.

First, it has taken place in David's city, Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:4–13). The shepherds understand this as a fulfillment of the many promises to King David regarding an eternal throne (example: Psalm 89:3, 4). Thus, this is the announcement of a royal birth. Second, this baby is to be a Saviour, one to deliver oppressed Israel. That day a Deliverer (the meaning of "Saviour") had been born. This may lead the shepherds to think the baby will be a warrior-king, not realizing that the Savior's mission is spiritual rather than political (compare Matthew 1:21). Third, the baby is the Christ, the Messiah. These two words, one Greek and one Hebrew, both mean "the anointed one." This signifies that He is chosen and sent by God with special authority and empowerment.

Finally, the baby is the Lord. This is surely puzzling to the shepherds, for this is a title the Jews reserve for God himself. How can a baby in Bethlehem be God? Such is the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, the foundational Christian belief that Jesus is both fully human and fully God. As an author, Luke does not lead his readers to this conclusion after many chapters, but states the divinity of Jesus with Him yet a tiny baby. Just to be sure the shepherds could find the baby, the angel gave them a special sign they should look for (Luke 8:12). The unusual detail for

the shepherds is that a manger, an animal feed trough, has been appropriated for the baby to sleep in. There is no wooden cradle or even a large basket. This fact directs the shepherds to search for the new king in places where livestock feed. Lofty things had just been said about Him, but they would find Him in extremely lowly conditions. Such would never be the case except under God's direction. It was a more-than adequate sign.

6. What is the meaning of "heavenly host" (vs. 13)?

Just as suddenly as the one angel had appeared, now a multitude appeared. No specific number is given, but we know from other places in Scripture that the angels are innumerable. They could have filled the entire sky. It was a good thing the shepherds had already been told they did not need to fear, because this scene certainly would arouse strong emotions. Since they now knew the reason for this appearance, they were no doubt filled with joy and awe instead of fear.

This especially would have been their response when they heard the praise this multitude of angels (called a "heavenly host," or "heavenly army") proclaimed. Also, the very appearance of so many angels indicated an unprecedented event.

7. Describe the praise of the heavenly host (v. 14).

The first phrase uttered by the angels was "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14). The coming of Jesus, of course, is one of the necessary events making salvation possible for us. It was God who devised the plan that allows us who are separated from Him because of sin to be reconciled with Him. There should be a constant flow of praise from our hearts to Him for what He has done to save us. Without this provision, our eternal destiny would be separation from Him.

This army of angels does not talk of war, but of peace. They refer to peace on earth and goodwill to people. This should not be viewed as an announcement of the end of war between nations (for we still see that today), nor was it a universal declaration of peace to every person. Mankind is not by nature at peace with God. We are separated from God by sin. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being

justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The idea in the angels' praise is that peace can be a reality to those who are the objects of God's goodwill. They are the ones who receive Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour from sin. In this all glory goes to God, for this is a work solely of Him. It is an act of pure grace.

AN UNPARALLELED PRIVILEGE (Luke 2:15-20)

8. What was the shepherds' response to the angelic message (v. 15)?

"How would shepherds respond —these tough men whose theological education came from the heavens and meadows rather than the synagogue and its rabbis? No quibbling or quarreling! Rather, they made an immediate decision—to go to Bethlehem to see what God had reported to them. They wanted to be part of the work God was doing. . . . What audacity that God would use society's lowest occupations... to begin His awesome work of salvation" (Anders, ed., Holman New Testament Commentary, Broadman and Holman).

Just as suddenly as they had appeared, the angels were gone and the darkness and silence returned. Nothing, however, would ever be the same for this group of men. They had seen something never seen before on earth and something that would never be seen again. They were a privileged group allowed to hear the angelic announcement of the Messiah's birth. Can you imagine how they stood and gazed at each other silently before someone spoke up with a suggestion about what they should do? A revelation like this required a response.

They knew without doubt that what they had just witnessed was a message from the Lord. These were apparently God-fearing, believing men who received the revelation. There was no hesitation on their part to head for Bethlehem immediately to see with their own eyes what they had been told. In fact, the text says that they went in great haste. Can you see them rushing as fast as they could in their shepherd's robes, each one urging the others to step up the pace a bit?

All at once, there they were: the father (as it would have seemed to the shepherds), the mother, and the

baby lying exactly where the angels had said, in a manger where the animals normally ate (v. 16). The rushed sense of eager discovery disappeared and was replaced with a quiet sense of awe and reverence. That baby, who looked just like any other one, was the long-awaited Messiah! And they were the first humans to see Him!

9. What happened after the shepherds left the manger, and what kind of response did they receive from other people (vs. 17, 18)? What do you do when you hear such exciting good news that you cannot keep it to yourself?

Obviously, you tell everybody you see. Since we are told the shepherds specifically told everybody "the saying which was told them concerning this child," we assume they explained the appearance of the angels and the exact message they had communicated to them. That was certainly information nobody had ever been told before. What would people think of such an unusual report?

Luke 2:18 tells us that everybody "wondered" at what the shepherds were saying. "To wonder" means to not understand fully and yet to marvel. For the author Luke, this is a reaction from those who witness the miraculous (see Luke 8:25; Acts 2:7). It is difficult for some of us who have heard this account all our lives to capture in our minds the amazement and wonder that spread as the shepherds told their news. It is good for us to try to imagine it, however, because what we are reading was the most significant event that has ever occurred in history. The growing excitement would have come from the fact that it was now being reported that the Messiah whom Israel had waited hundreds of years for had actually arrived! Such news thrilled the hearts of those who understood.

10. How was Mary's action at this time different from that of others, and why do you suppose this was so (v. 19)?

We cannot help wondering what was going on in Mary's mind through all this. There is no indication that she was exhibiting the excitement being felt by the people. After all, she had been in a state of amazement for the past nine months! During that time she had adjusted to the reality of what was

taking place. There is also reason to believe that in spite of her youth, she was a godly woman who was well acquainted with the Scriptures.

Her attitude was based on her understanding of what God was accomplishing through this birth. Luke 2:19 simply says Mary "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." The word "kept" indicates that she was storing up memories of everything that was happening so that she could reflect further upon them in the future. The word "pondered" indicates that as each event unfolded, she added it to what she had already observed and combined these individual events into the big picture. Little by little, Mary was growing in her realization of how significant the events of her life were becoming. Salvation was being offered to the world through her son, God's Son.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The birth of Jesus assures us that there is hope for all the people of the earth (Luke 2:8- 11).
2. Jesus' lowly birth reminds us that His work was not for just a privileged few (v. 12).
3. We believers have as much to praise God for as the angels did (vss. 13-14).
4. It is not enough to know God's promises. We must also act on them and proclaim them (vs. 15-17).
5. God's works should not just cause wonder. The works of God should also make us consider who He is (vs. 18-19).
6. Though people may reject our testimony, God always accepts our praise (v. 20).

CONCLUSION: This is the last lesson before Christmas, and it continues our look at aspects of the birth of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Luke is a master at narrative characterization. That is, Luke writes in such a way that the readers get to know the people of his story and gain insights into these characters very quickly. This lesson focuses on some unnamed men and boys who would have seemed unusual candidates for attention in the ancient world: field shepherds. For a brief moment, Luke brings us into their world to witness a marvelous work of God.

God's plan for human salvation required that His divine Son become a human being. Without being

human, Jesus would not have been able to die for the sins of the world. God decided that this necessitated Jesus' birth by a woman, and His years as a baby, toddler, and child. Jesus was not to be like the mythical Greek gods, who emerged fully-grown from the sea or a cave.

While we bow the knee to the newborn king at Christmastime, we recall that we are worshipping God among humankind. He is the Word become flesh (John 1:14). "Oh come, let us adore Him!"

PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, things haven't changed that much since Jesus was born. We, like the shepherds, are awed by the magnitude of Your gift. We ponder and try to understand the depth of Your love, but it is beyond our ability to comprehend. So, we continue to offer You our praise and give You all the glory. May You always reign over us. We pray these words through the name of Your Son, Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

The good news of Jesus' birth is still precisely that!

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week's lesson is "Putting Commitment into Action." We will concentrate on the beginning ministry of John the Baptist, the herald of Christ. Study Luke 3:1-20.

Have a blessed New Year! From all of us, at Jesus Is All Ministries!



Sunday, January 8, 2023

Lesson 6 – “Putting Commitment into Action”

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 51:10–19**

Background Scripture: **Luke 3:1–20**

Lesson Text: **Luke 3:7–18**

Luke 3:7–18

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. 15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people..

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to study John's basic message, the reactions of various people to it, and John's description of the coming Messiah.

Principle: to be aware that God positioned His messengers to prepare them for His Son's arrival.

Application: to help believers accept and promote their roles as messengers of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

There are many things to appreciate about Luke's careful account of Jesus' life and ministry (in the book of Luke) and of the beginning of the church (in the book of Acts). His attention to detail is impressive and does much to validate the Word of God due to the fact that what he said can be verified from secular history. Such careful recording probably stems from the fact that he was a physician (Col. 4:14). That profession has always required articulate diagnosis and treatment, and missing details can be disastrous.

Luke 3 begins with a list of significant political and religious leaders who were in office during the days of John the Baptist. An examination of the ones mentioned reveals that the world was not a friendly place for one who came to preach righteousness and clean living. If we were to take the time to look at the history of each of these leaders, we would discover much scheming, intrigue, backstabbing, and other corruption. John would have no easy task. Sadly, the problems were daunting.

CHALLENGING THE MASSES—Luke 3:7-14

1. How did John view the hypocritical ones in the crowd (Luke 3:7)?

As the official forerunner of the Messiah, as foretold to Zacharias (Luke 1:17), he had a special message

for Israel. He pre-pared the way for the appearance of Jesus by calling upon the people to get right with God. The multitudes who came to John in the wilderness included many hypocritical people. Some came out of curiosity. Some wanted to add another work to their religiosity. John knew of their deceptions, for it was clear that the way they were living did not match what they were saying. They claimed to know the God of Israel, but there was no attempt on their part to live according to what He had told Moses. John had no time for such duplicity. So, he spoke his message clearly and boldly.

John did not see these hypocritical people as saints but as snakes: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). Vipers are poisonous snakes such as adders or pit vipers. John implied that not only were these pretenders hurting themselves but they were also affecting others with their poisonous beliefs. It would have been bad enough that they were on the road leading to the wrath of God, but to take others along with them deserved severe condemnation. He was not afraid to denounce them.

2. What is "the wrath to come?"

The wrath of God is not a popular or comfortable topic today. We want to focus on a loving God, not an angry God. Yet the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is loaded with references to the wrath of God (examples: Jeremiah 10:10; Romans 1:18). Two connections are often present in such texts.

First, the wrath of God is connected with God's righteous judgment (Romans 2:5). God's anger is His response to evil and sin (see Romans 13:4). Second, the wrath of God is often associated with the wilderness experience of the nation of Israel. Because of disobedience and lack of faith, the wrath of God came upon Israel, and they wandered in the wilderness 40 years before entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 9:7)

3. What did John say was the evidence of a genuinely righteous relationship with God (vs. 8,9)?

The real evidence of a right relationship with God would come from fruit in keeping with repentance.

That is, if they were truly repentant of their sins, their lives would show it in righteous living. There were many, however, who lived in whatever ways they wanted without concern about righteousness and relied on the fact that since they were descendants of Abraham, everything was fine between them and God. John reminded them that God did not need them. He could raise up children out of stones and do fine without them.

We can imagine John illustrating this by lifting a smooth stone from the Jordan River and reminding the audience that God can take rocks and make them into people for His glory. God formed Adam from dirt (Genesis 2:7) and showed Ezekiel that He could form people from dry, old bones (Ezekiel 37). Fruits worthy of repentance are more important than biological descent.

John then went one step further in his message by telling them that instead of being fine with God, they were already under His judgment. Since they were not bringing forth fruits evidencing repentance, they were like unproductive trees about to be chopped down. An ax was ready to chop any who did not bear good fruit. The message is the same for us today. Calling oneself a Christian means nothing to God if it is not accompanied by godly living. If salvation is not real, the end result will be a fiery finish.

4. What question did the people pose to John, and what does that reveal about their response to him and his message (vs. 10,11)?

The multitudes of people no doubt included both those who were sincerely interested in John's message and those who were there only to criticize. Nevertheless, many are convinced that he is telling the truth. They want to know more. Luke presents three groups who question John further, each asking What shall we do?

For Luke, the people are one specific group of these three. These are common folk, the peasant population. They have taken John's message to heart and desire further, specific instructions. From among these common people came a sincere question relative to what John was saying. If they were to bring forth fruits that evidenced repentance, what should they be doing?

John's response consisted of two examples of things they could do if they truly believed in God. Their belief would cause them to be concerned about other people who might be suffering. People who are right with God have a compassionate spirit willing to reach out to help others. Being generous with the necessities of life is evidence of the lack of self-centeredness that keeps one from being concerned about others. John mentioned clothing and food.

Do you know of someone in your church who is driving a car with bald tires and cannot afford new ones? Take him to the shop, and pay for some tires. Do you know a student without tuition money who is unable to return to school next semester?

When a person is endeavoring to live by the principles of God's Word, many opportunities for sharing will come. God knows that He can trust His children to be available to help one another. Perhaps we should also consider that doing this is a source of genuine joy. It feels good to reach out and help others.

5. What did John tell the publicans they needed to do to be right (vs. 12,13)?

The second of John's three groups are publicans (tax collectors). Tax collectors are described by John MacArthur as "disloyal Israelites hired by the Romans to tax other Jews for personal profit" (The MacArthur Study Bible, Word). They were a hated class because of this disloyalty and were sometimes viewed as symbols of the worst kind of people. Yet even these national traitors could repent. There were some of them in the crowd listening to John who apparently came under conviction and wondered what to do.

It was common for tax collectors (publicans) to overcharge people. The Roman government told the tax collectors what it wanted to receive from the populace in their vicinity. They were free, however, to charge more than the government asked for—as much more as they wanted—and keep the difference as personal profit. So, tax collectors were doubly hated because not only were they traitors to their own

people, but they were cheats and thieves on top of that. The greatest barrier breaker- Jesus, was once criticized for eating with them (Matt. 9:10-11)!

They were told by John that evidence of repentance could be seen in honest dealings with the people. "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:13). The people had no recourse but to pay whatever the tax collectors demanded. They did not dare risk the wrath of the Roman Empire, for then they would become objects of retaliation. Dishonest and greedy tax collectors could get away with requiring any payment they chose. It was clearly a form of betrayal, but their greed often overcame any sense of right and wrong.

It is easy to make an application for ourselves from this example. The business dealings of any believer should always be fair and honest. Proverbs 11:1 says, "A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight."

To be continued...



Sunday, January 15, 2023

Lesson 7 – "Putting Commitment into Action" (*Continued*)

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 51:10–19**

Background Scripture: **Luke 3:1–20**

Lesson Text: **Luke 3:7–18**

Luke 3:7–18

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. 15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people..

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to study John's basic message, the reactions of various people to it, and John's description of the coming Messiah.

Principle: to be aware that God positioned His messengers to prepare them for His Son's arrival.

Application: to help believers accept and promote their roles as messengers of Christ.

6. What do we know about how the soldiers often acted, and what did John tell them to change (v. 14)?

The third group that comes to John is made up of soldiers, professional military men. John's instruction to the soldiers is that they not use extortion to increase their income. They were in positions of authority and could use their power for either good or bad.

John mentioned three areas of being a soldier that they should watch over carefully. They should not use intimidation against people. They should not falsely accuse people of things they had not done. Both of these actions were evidently used in extortion, forcing people to give them money to keep from being further pursued and mistreated. The third thing John said was that they should be content with their wages. John challenged them to be content with their pay instead of using extortion to pad their bank accounts.

Money often becomes a motivation for unethical and dishonest dealings with others. Paul wrote to Timothy and warned that "the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). Even believers can be led astray if their focus moves away

from wholly pleasing God to getting more money. We must fully surrender our finances to God and absolutely refuse to consider being anything less than totally honest.

There is a difference between claiming to follow Christ and actually living the principles of God's Word. It ought to be the goal of every believer to learn and then completely obey the principles for living found in the Bible. Let us determine that we will be people of honesty and integrity.

CLEARING UP CONFUSION - Luke 3:15-18

7. What expectation did the people have about John (v. 15)? Who was this John anyway?

Many in the crowd could not decide. There was a sense of expectation in the air during those days. Some unusual things seemed to be happening, and people were evidently wondering what they meant. John was an unusual man with an unusual ministry, living and ministering in an unusual place. There had been rumors of an unusual birth followed by the unusual witness of a group of shepherds. Something was in the air, causing people to anticipate something else.

Could it be that this John was the long-awaited Messiah? He certainly was not the normal head of a home working hard at an occupation. Is this what the Messiah was to be like? After all, John spent his time preaching and baptizing and seemed to be a messenger from God. Luke wrote that everyone in the crowds busily speculated whether John might be the Christ. There must have been a lot of whispering and conjecture going on as people tried to decide what John was doing and whether certain major changes were about to take place.

One thing we can observe is that John had sparked the attention of the people and had awakened their sense of expectation that the Messiah either was here or would be soon. We can also note that John himself was apparently highly regarded among those who were not his critics. If they were thinking he could possibly be the Messiah, they obviously did not doubt his character or the high standards he imposed on himself.

8. How did he explain what he was doing compared to what the Messiah would do in His coming (vs. 16, 17)?

Once John knew the people were asking these questions about him, he quickly dispelled their thoughts that he was the Messiah. "Although John was the first genuine prophet in four hundred years, Jesus the Messiah would be infinitely greater than he.

John's job is to baptize. This certainly means the physical act of baptism, but that act must be seen as part of the broader issue of repentance. His task is to get the people to recognize their sin problem. John also explains how insignificant he was compared to the one more powerful who was coming (v. 16b). In most households, a lowly slave would untie the sandals of guests and then wash their feet. "John saw himself as even lower than that slave in comparison to the coming Messiah. John was not even worthy of doing the most menial tasks for him, like untying his sandals" (Osborne, gen. ed., Life Application Bible Commentary, Tyndale).

All John did was baptize with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This prediction of John, which is found as well in the other Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:33), is repeated by Christ in Acts 1:5 just before His ascension into heaven. Later this baptism in (or with) the Holy Spirit occurred on the Day of Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in the bodies of the believing disciples. The baptism with fire seems to refer to a future judgment as explained in verse 17, perhaps that which purifies believers, or ultimately. Judges those who refuse to believe.

Here the picture of a threshing floor and the separation of grain kernels from chaff is quite descriptive. The winnowing fan was used to blow chaff away, letting the grain fall back on the floor. The grain was then placed in storage bins, while the chaff was swept up and burned. Christ will separate believers from unbelievers, and the latter will be sent to a place of unquenchable fire (c.f. Psalm 1). The people needed to prepare for something far more important than John's baptism.

9. What do John's words say to us (v. 18)?

Luke ends this section by reminding us that his presentation of John is brief and selective. There are many other things said by this powerful preacher to the crowds who come to hear him. Luke indicates that these are exhortations, meaning moral encouragements to the people to give up their many sinful ways and work out their repentance.

We wish we had more of the preaching of this mighty man of God. It is easy to accept Jesus' evaluation of John as "much more than a prophet" (Luke 7:26). He is a unique person in God's divine plan of salvation.

10. How can John the Baptist's directions to his original audience help someone today to reach the point of repentance?

Repentance is closely connected with the confessing of sin—after all, sin is what we repent of. Before someone will confess sin, he or she must acknowledge that sin exists. John pointed out both sinful and godly behavior. Placing the two alongside one another allows the hearer to realize the stark contrast between them.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

1. Knowing that God's wrath awaits sinners should motivate us to spread the gospel (Luke 3:7).
2. God is not impressed by our ancestry; He looks at the heart of each individual (vs. 8-9).
3. A repentant heart will be seen in the way we treat others (vs. 10-14).
4. The clear gospel message backed up by a godly life will have a tremendous impact (v. 15).
5. We must never claim for ourselves the honors that are due Christ alone (v. 16).
6. If people are to grasp eternal life, they must hear about eternal judgment (vs. 17-18).

CONCLUSION - Actions That Count

"I promise! I'll never drink again!" These might be the words of a destructive alcoholic attempting to negotiate his way through yet another crisis caused by his drinking. The problem is that for many families this has a hollow ring, for they have heard it before. They might love the alcohol addict dearly, but his poor choices affect others too. They want more than words, no matter how sincere. They want

change. They want the person who promises to quit drinking ... to quit drinking!

Repentance is a nonexistent topic in some churches. Part of this stems from a reaction to the preaching of the past, which was often overly moralistic. Preachers of a previous generation were expected to condemn everything from card playing to mixed swimming. However well-intentioned this might have been, the emphasis was upon behavior rather than repentance. Social pressure was applied to church members that required strict standards of do's and don'ts—and woe to the errant sinner who violated this code!

This system is based on fear, and fear is not a good motivator for the long term. Eventually we become numb to threats, and they lose their effectiveness. Behavioral change that is long lasting must come from a different source. True godly living comes from the heart. I do the right thing because I want to do the right thing, not because I am afraid of the consequences of violation.

John the Baptist understood this very well. He was called to prepare Israel for God's Messiah. He did not see this as getting them to clean up their lives for the sake of appearances. He saw this as effecting a change in heart. When he called Israel to repentance, he wasn't just saying, "Cut down on sinning." He demanded "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8), the outward signs of a positive inward change.

Today, the Messiah still comes into the hearts of men and women. Jesus understands us in our weaknesses. His heart is broken by our self-destructive sinning. But he wants much more than "less sin." He wants a changed heart, a repentant heart. He desires more than a person saying, "I won't sin anymore." He wants the heart that repents and affirms, "I don't want to sin anymore." Until we get to that point, we have not fully repented, for repentance involves the whole person, not just specific behaviors.

PRAYER

God of all creation, judge of the living and the dead, we do not fear judgment because we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. May we never take our salvation for granted by disregarding how You expect us to live. Instead, may Your Holy Spirit

continue to mold and shape us toward being ones who bear much fruit that is pleasing and acceptable to You. We pray this in the name of the One whom John the Baptist pointed to, Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

John's challenge to repent endures.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In the next lesson we move to the Old Testament to study people of commitment. Shiphrah and Puah were Israelite midwives who defied Egyptian masters by allowing boys to live despite murderous instructions. Study Exodus 1:8-21 "Commitment of the Midwives."

Lesson Summarized By Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, January 23, 2023

Lesson 8 – Commitment of the Midwives”

Devotional Reading: **Proverbs 16:1—7**

Background Scripture: **Exodus 1:8—21**

Lesson Text: **Exodus 1:8—21**

Place: Egypt Time: 1525 B.C.

HOW TO SAY IT

HYKOS	Hik-sos
PITHOM	Py-thum
PUAH	Peu-uh
RAAMSES	Ray-am-seez
SEMITIC	Suh-mih-tik
SHIPHRAH	Shif-ruh

Exodus 1:8—21

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

13 And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor. 15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to explain how Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites began, male children were threatened with murder, and midwives defied the royal edict.

Principle: to realize that courage can triumph over adversity.

to encourage believers to infuse their courage with abiding faith in God and take action that follows His will.

LESSON BACKGROUND

An underlying theme of the book of Exodus is that God keeps the promises that He had made to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the book of Genesis. One such promise or prophecy by God was that the descendants of Abraham (or Abram) would endure some 400 years of servitude in a foreign land, where they would suffer oppression (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6).

The final chapters of the book of Genesis depict the migration of the family of Jacob from Canaan to Egypt. The date of 1876 BC is often given as the time for this migration that would turn into a stay of 430 years (Exodus 12:40, 41). The Scripture for this lesson tells why the treatment of Jacob’s descendants changed from appreciation to persecution during the stay, and it reveals the means by which servitude and oppression became reality.

QUESTIONS KING AND HIS FEAR —Exodus 1:8—14

1. What significant truth do we learn about the new king in Egypt (Exodus 1:8)?

The new king ascended Egypt's throne, and we are told he did not know Joseph. There has been much study and discussion as to the identity of this king. Many believe it was Ahmose I, who was the founder of the eighteenth dynasty. Joseph arrived in Egypt long before the reigns of the Hyksos rulers, who were usurpers from Asia during the fifteenth through seventeenth dynasties. Things would have been much different now, and Joseph was no longer an important figure.

“The new king did not remember Joseph—his privileged position in the older pharaoh's administration, his administrative skill that saved the Egyptians from starvation, and his enrichment of the pharaoh's treasury. This new pharaoh probably did not reign immediately after the death of the pharaoh of Joseph's day” (Radmacher, gen. ed., *The Nelson Study Bible*, Nelson). It is a sad commentary that Joseph was so completely forgotten, but is that not the way it often is with the passing of generations?

2. What did the pharaoh do when he saw the Hebrews were growing in number at an alarming rate (vs. 9,10)?

Pharaoh decided the situation called for shrewd dealings with the Israelites. He determined to do whatever would keep them from multiplying so rapidly and hold them in subservient positions that would keep them from organizing, he would feel much safer. He needed to take action that would allay his fears about this growing people. The pharaoh decided to resort to forced labor. “There were levels of slavery in Egypt. Some slaves worked long hours in mud pits while others were skilled carpenters, jewelers, and craftsmen. Regardless of their skill or level, all slaves were watched closely by ruthless slave masters, supervisors whose assignment was to keep the slaves working as fast as possible. They were specialists at making a slave's life miserable” (Osborne, gen. ed., *Life Application Bible Notes*, Tyndale).

This new king also feared the Hebrews because of their superior numbers and potential military strength. He saw that they continued to grow numerically and had the potential to turn against the Egyptians in battle. This could lead to their departure from Egypt. These situations would be disastrous. If they helped Egypt's enemies in war, Egypt might lose. If they left the land, Egypt's cheap labor would be gone.

3. How did the increased pressure of slavery affect the Hebrews (vs. 11,12)?

Charles R. Erdman described the Hebrews' situation this way: “They were compelled to labor, not only in cultivating the fields, but in digging canals, building dikes, and constructing store cities and arsenals. During interminable hours, under the scorching sun, their bare bodies bleeding from the cruel lash, they were made ‘to serve with rigour,’ and their lives were ‘bitter with hard bondage’” (*The Book of Exodus*, Baker). The taskmasters were heads of labor gangs, indicating severe situations for laborers.

Perhaps the most important fact in this passage is the continued multiplication of the Israelites. No matter how hard the Egyptians tried to stifle them, God blessed them by increasing their numbers. The harder the Egyptians were on them, the more the Israelites increased, and their continued growth caused increased fear on the part of the Egyptians. The word translated “grieved” in Exodus 1:12 means “to be anxious” and indicates a growing dread of these prolific people.

4. Why did the Egyptians' attempt to suppress the children of Israel fail (vs. 13,14)?

“The Egyptians' attempt to suppress the propagation of the Hebrews (1:11-14) failed because it is simply not possible for human beings to ultimately thwart the will of God” (*New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Tyndale). The Egyptians did not realize this, of course, and doubled their efforts to suppress the Israelites. The Hebrew word for “rigour” is *perek*, which means “to break apart,” or “fracture.” The word points to great severity of servitude. The Egyptians were cruel.

The Israelites' bondage was said to include hard labor making bricks and mortar, as well as working long hours in the fields. This would include all types of construction work, along with farm work. The construction work included making the bricks for the actual building projects. The farm work entailed hard labor throughout the heat of the day, probably from sunrise to sunset. Ancient drawings have been uncovered by archaeologists showing the taskmasters standing over the workers with whips in hand.

To be continued...



Sunday, January 29, 2023

Lesson 9 – “Commitment of the Midwives” (Continued)

Devotional Reading: **Proverbs 16:1—7**

Background Scripture: **Exodus 1:8—21**

Lesson Text: **Exodus 1:8—21**

Place: **Egypt** Time: **1525 B.C.**

HOW TO SAY IT

HYKOS	Hik-sos
PITHOM	Py-thum
PUAH	Peu-uh
RAAMSES	Ray-am-seez
SEMITIC	Suh-mih-tik
SHIPHRAH	Shif-ruh

Exodus 1:8—21

8 Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. 13 And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor. 15 And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to explain how Egyptian enslavement of the Israelites began, male children were threatened with murder, and midwives defied the royal edict.

Principle: to realize that courage can triumph over adversity.

Application: to encourage believers to infuse their courage with abiding faith in God and take action that follows His will.

MIDWIVES AND THEIR FEAR —Exodus 1:15—21

5. What drastic measure did the pharaoh take when he saw that forced labor was not working (vs. 15,16)?

Yet another stage of oppression is announced by the king of Egypt. Two Hebrew midwives are named as the ones who are to be the instruments of the next step that is intended to suppress further growth among the Israelites. Their names are Semitic, and this suggests that they also are Israelites (although the language allows the phrase Hebrew midwives to mean “midwives over the Hebrews”).

We should not conclude that these were the only Hebrew midwives, because the population was by then very large. Perhaps these were the chief

midwives responsible for other midwives who served under them.

Shiphrah and Puah—the two midwives—were given the following command by Pharaoh: “When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live” (Exodus 1:16).

The king’s request is not quite what we call “partial-birth abortion,” although there are similarities. The pharaoh is asking the women to use their resources to kill male infants. The reason is obvious: males can become part of a fighting force against the Egyptians.

6. *What was a time when you were asked to do what was wrong in order to meet the desires of someone in authority? How did you respond?*

Romans 13 tells us that we are to obey those in authority. However, Peter and John refused to obey an authoritative command to speak no more in the name of Jesus. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20).

Together, these two passages tell us that our obligation to obey earthly authority ceases when that authority commands something contrary to God’s will. When Peter and John responded as they did, God provided His blessing and the church continued to grow. When we are asked to violate the will of God for the will of people, we must respond not in arrogance or vindictiveness, but rather in simple statements declaring our allegiance to the Word of God.

7. *Whom did the midwives fear, and how was that fear different (v. 17)?*

The first thing we are told about these midwives after they received their instructions is that they feared God. As a result, they could not do what the pharaoh commanded of them, for it would violate what they knew to be God’s ways. Their commitment was to life, not death. It had to have been their faith in God that enabled them to defy Pharaoh’s command. The text specifically says that they saved the male

children alive just as they did the females. In their actions they were putting their trust in God for their lives.

8. *What parallel does the example of the Hebrew midwives have for us today?*

It is said that we live in a culture where human life is not regarded as highly as it was by the two midwives. The problem with abortion in our world has escalated to shameful proportions. We must remember that it is God who gives life, and only God should take life. Abortion is as much murder as what Pharaoh was advocating for the Hebrew children. We should never be guilty of having taken life in this way. For any who might have, it is important to confess it to God and receive His forgiveness.

9. *What did the pharaoh ask the women when he heard of their actions (vs. 18,19)?*

When Pharaoh heard what the midwives were doing, he called them in and asked them pointedly why they were saving the baby boys alive (v. 18). It was clear that they had purposely disobeyed him, and surely his fear of the continued growth of the Hebrews drove him to follow up on the matter.

So “the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them” (v. 19). It is possible that childbirth may be less difficult for women who endure rigorous lives. If this is the case, then the midwives state the truth. Another possibility is that the women speak only part of the truth in that the midwives have determined to be very slow about responding when making their house calls. Under this possibility, the Hebrews are fully aware of the reason for the delay, and it is agreed that each baby will be born and breathing before a midwife arrives.

10. *Why did God bless them in spite of their apparent lie (vs. 20, 21)?*

The question often arises as to whether the midwives lied and why God could bless them if they did. Charles Ryrie had some thoughts on this and explained it this way: “This may be a true statement; but even if it was a lie, the midwives are not

commended for lying, but for refusing to kill. The pharaoh had resorted to male infanticide. Perhaps the midwives were deliberately slow in arriving to help the mothers” (The Ryrie Study Bible, Moody).

The oppression of the people, however, does not end (see the last verse of the chapter and the account of Moses’ birth in Exodus 2). But the efforts to practice population control at this time are futile. The midwives eventually are blessed with their own children—that’s the implication of he made them houses. We may say that “they lived happily ever after.” Times often will be difficult for the Israelites as the years pass, but for now they have examples of faith and faithfulness of two midwives who fear God and are blessed for their decision.

CONCLUSION - CONSEQUENCES

The midwives’ response to the king’s question has more than one possible interpretation as noted. But the bottom line is that their fear of the Lord was greater than their fear of the consequences that the king of Egypt could administer.

The results could have been disastrous. We recall that God does not always choose to provide physical protection and blessing for those who take a stand for Him; the martyrdoms of the prophets and the apostles speak to this fact clearly. We thus should not come away from this lesson believing that taking a stand for God will result in an easier or safer earthly life. But God did choose to bless the two midwives who feared Him.

In the final analysis, to hear the words “Well done” is the desired eternal consequence for those who serve Him, no matter the earthly consequence (Matthew 25:21,23).

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Those who seek worldly power often see believers as a threat to them (Exodus 1:8-10).
2. Persecution is sometimes a means God uses to bring about growth (vs. 11,12).
3. Neither spiritual heritage nor commitment assures us of an easy life (vs. 13,14).
4. We are to be good citizens, but God’s word always takes precedence over man’s (vs. 15-17).
5. Those who obey God must be prepared to account for their actions (vs. 18,19).
6. Actions motivated by proper fear of God will be rewarded by God (vs. 20,21).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Pleasing God is the most important thing.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for this study that has prompted a greater commitment to make godly decisions. We all go through crises in life, and these often offer us choices. The important thing is that we bring glory to You when a crisis comes. This will require courage, but with the power of Your Spirit, we shall prevail. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Israelite spies sent in to Canaan were sheltered by Rahab the harlot in Jericho and aided in escaping. When the walls later came tumbling down, she and her family were saved. She was the mother of Boaz—husband of Ruth, and great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:18—22; Matt. 1:5). The next lesson is titled, “Rahab’s Commitment.” The printed lesson is Joshua 2:1—4, 8—14; 6:22—23, 25. Study Joshua 2:1—24; 6:22—25 in preparation for this lesson. Good studying!

Lesson Summarized by Kimbley Y. Baker-Richardson
Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, February 5, 2023

Lesson 10 - "Rahab's Commitment"

Lesson Text: **Joshua 2:1–4, 8–14; 6:22–25**

Background Scripture: **Joshua 2; 6:22–25**

Devotional Reading: **Hebrews 11:23–31**

Joshua 2:1–4, 8–14

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into a harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither tonight of the children of Israel to search out the country. 3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. 4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: . . . 8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; 9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. 12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: 13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. 14 And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

Joshua 6:22–25

22 But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. 23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. 24 And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

TODAY'S AIM

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. State the factors that caused fear for the Canaanites, but faith for Rahab.
2. Give a modern example of someone who has the godly courage of Rahab.
3. Describe how he or she will adopt Rahab's courage in one area of life.

Introduction

One of the favorite activities of many college students is touring with a musical group. The logistics for such tours are much tougher than the inexperienced onlooker could possibly imagine. There are not only concerts to prepare for but also numerous plans for everyone together.

Such events pale to almost nothing, however, in comparison to the movement of over two million

people from one land to another. We cannot imagine the logistics involved in Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan. Nevertheless, in the case of a touring music group or of a relocating nation, the key to success is the commitment of the individual members of the group. Last week we noted the dedicated commitment to God of two midwives. This week another woman is the focus of our attention.

Lesson Background

The book of Joshua begins with the Israelite nation encamped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. That city was the first military objective in Canaan. It had been at least 120 years since the Egyptians began the oppression of Israel, as described in the previous lesson. During that time Moses had been born, and he had fled Egypt at the age of 40 (Acts 7:23–29). At the age of 80 (Exodus 3:10; 7:7), Moses was called by God to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses died at the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7), while the Israelites were camped in Moab (Numbers 21:20).

The stay in the plains of Moab lasted quite some time. During that interval the king of Moab sent for Balaam to come and curse Israel. It was at least a 400-mile trip one way to secure Balaam, and he did not come until the second appeal. These two trips thus required that the king's representatives travel no less than 1,600 miles (Numbers 22).

Israel also fought extensive campaigns against two major groups who lived on the eastern side of the Jordan (Numbers 21:21–35). These were against Sihon and the Amorites (the nearest group to the north and east; Deuteronomy 2:24–37) and against Og, the king of Bashan, an area east of Galilee. The latter conflict involved capturing 60 cities (Deuteronomy 3:4), and such campaigns take time.

A military census was taken at the end of the wilderness wanderings, with the total number of men available being 601,730 (Numbers 26:51). It seems to have been a custom to keep a large part of the army on the home front, so a much smaller number was available for the conquests in the Transjordan area (that is, the area to the east of the Jordan River). Then came time to cross that river into the promised land (Joshua 3, 4).

Concealing the Spies (Joshua 2:1-4)

First a bit of reconnaissance is needed. The verses selected for this lesson yield a thrilling account of spying, intrigue, treason, courage, and hope. They primarily involve Rahab (a prostitute in Jericho), two unnamed spies, and Joshua.

1. Why did Joshua send two men to Jericho to spy? (Joshua 2:1)

The word Shittim represents a place in the plains of Moab. Joshua sent two men to look over the land to determine what he needed to do in order to capture the land. Joshua knew that God promised the new land to the Israelites. Joshua didn't send the spies out of unbelief. Rather, Joshua knew that he would have to do his part in capturing the land promised by the Lord.

We should note that Joshua sent the men in secret. In other words, Joshua didn't allow the other Israelites to know that he sent spies into the land. Memories of being one of the 12 spies about 39 years prior must be on Joshua's mind (Numbers 13:8, 16). Joshua remembered that when Moses sent spies into the promised land, ten of the twelve spies caused the nation to lose faith in the Lord over getting the land. Joshua wanted to ensure that in case the men had doubts about capturing the land, that it wouldn't spread to Israel and cause the nation to go back into the wilderness for another 40 years.

2. Why was Rahab's house a good place for the spies to stop?

The spies viewed Rahab's house as a place where they could "get lost." Rahab's house provided an opportunity for the spies to have shelter and some freedom. People go in and out of a harlot's house, and they would fit in with the normal traffic of her house. (Schaeffer, Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History, Crossway)

It is interesting that God uses many people who are often scorned or are weak spiritually to accomplish His ends. The list of such people includes Matthew (a tax collector), Gideon (a fearful person), Moses (a murderer and a refugee in a foreign land for 40 years), Jacob (a deceiver), and Jonah (a reluctant

prophet). The spies entered the house thinking no one would notice them. They would be wrong as word spread to the king of Jericho about their presence.

3. In what ways have you seen God use those considered “unworthy” to accomplish His purposes?

When we make a statement of the unworthiness of someone to be used by God, we are in fact sitting as a judge of God. Instead, we should give praise to God for the fact that He chooses to use any of us! The fact that He sent Jesus to die for us means that we all fall into the category of being unworthy.

God frequently uses those who appear to be unworthy by the standards of this world. First Corinthians 1:27–29 reminds us that God can use those who seem foolish, weak, base, and despised to demonstrate His wisdom, strength, and majesty. God accomplishes His will by using even those who reject Him; pharaoh is a prime example (Exodus 9:12). We want to make sure we don’t fall into this category.

4. How did the King of Jericho respond when he heard that men from Israel had come? (vs. 2, 3)

Upon receiving word of the spies’ presence in Jericho, he immediately sent word to Rahab to turn the men over to him. He explained that the spies were spying the land, and their presence was a threat to national security. The king was thinking that Rahab would obey him out of her patriotic duty to her country.

5. What was Rahab’s response to the king? (v. 4)

It is likely that Rahab and the two men are aware of the danger of the situation. Thus, the precaution of hiding may already be accomplished. The hiding place is on the roof, under stalks of flax that are there to dry (Joshua 2:6, not in today’s text).

Rahab chose to disobey the king. She responded by saying that the spies left her house and she didn’t know where they went. Rehab’s actions reveal that she had some understanding of the God of Israel. Though she had this understanding, she was not a part of the Israelite faith. We can then say that she wasn’t aware of God’s law. That does not mean that Rahab’s lie was justified, but God can use a person’s sin to bring about his purpose (cf. Rom. 8:28). That doesn’t mean that God caused or even condoned Rahab’s lie, but God can turn the results of sin into His favor. We must also remember that God also forgives the sins of believers through the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, and by Christ’s blood in the New Testament.

When Rahab was accepted into the nation of Israel, she would then learn about the law, and would have to change her ways, especially since she would be part of the lineage of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5-6)

To be continued...



Sunday, February 12, 2023

Lesson 11 - "Rahab's Commitment" (Continued)

Lesson Text: **Joshua 2:1–4, 8–14; 6:22–25**

Background Scripture: **Joshua 2; 6:22–25**

Devotional Reading: **Hebrews 11:23–31**

Joshua 2:1–4, 8–14

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into a harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither tonight of the children of Israel to search out the country. 3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. 4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: . . . 8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; 9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. 12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: 13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. 14 And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

Joshua 6:22–25

22 But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. 23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. 24 And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

TODAY'S AIM

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. State the factors that caused fear for the Canaanites, but faith for Rahab.
2. Give a modern example of someone who has the godly courage of Rahab.
3. Describe how he or she will adopt Rahab's courage in one area of life.

A Heartfelt Concern (Joshua 2:8-14)

6. What things did Rahab and others know about the Israelites, and what did this cause in Jericho? (vs. 8-11)

Rahab had significant knowledge of God since she expressed that He was giving the Israelites the land. She used the personal name of God, "Yahweh" (translated "Lord") in her statement. This is the

personal name of the one true God. She spoke as if His plan was an accomplished feat. This reveals the strength of her faith in her early understanding of God.

Rahab also said that the people of Jericho feared the Israelites greatly and that this fear was widespread over the whole land. Moses had foretold this fear at the Red Sea: “Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased” (Exod. 15:15-16).

Rahab used the word “terror” in describing how the people were feeling about the presence of Israel because terror had fallen upon them, the people were fainthearted; that is, they had lost their courage and were timidly watching and waiting to see what was going to happen next.

7. What special request did Rahab ask of the spies, and upon what she did base her request? (vs. 12,13)

Knowing that the Lord was going to conquer her land, she took action to try and take care of her family. She asks the spies to spare her and her family due to her kind actions towards them. Rahab expected the spies to feel sympathy towards her since she saved their lives by hiding them from the king. She asked for an oath based on her kindness to these men.

The Hebrew word translated “kindness” in verse 12 is *hesed* and is often translated “lovingkindness.” “Among people, *hesed* describes a bond of loyalty such as is established between relatives, friends, or allies. An act of *hesed* is carried out by free choice in harmony with the relationship (Richards, Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, Zondervan). This word also expresses the unflinching love of God.

8. What is the difference between the ways Christianity and the world view the value of keeping one’s word? How do we resist the world’s viewpoint?

Most people like to consider themselves to be truthful and honest. Yet many will succumb to the postmodern viewpoint that it’s important to keep one’s word only as long as it “works.” Yet our word is at the core of our being. Our faithfulness to our word is the basis of our integrity and reputation. Breaking promises, forsaking marriage vows, and using bankruptcy to get out of debt all are forms of failing to keep our word. To be a person of one’s word demands that he or she first take time to consider all promises, vows, or contracts being entered into. Commit yourself only to those things you are fully persuaded are right and that you can honor.

9. Upon what oath did the spies assure Rahab of being spared? (v. 14)

The spies swore their lives that they would remember Rahab and spare her. If they failed to save her, then they would forfeit their lives. However, Rahab was required to keep the mission secret. Rahab was putting herself in immediate danger; if the king found out she was helping the spies, he would have had her put to death. Who knows what kind of torture the king would have had for Rahab for her treason.

Rahab knew that God had the power to deliver nations unto the Israelites. She also knew that God had the power to save her and her loved ones. We cannot fail to marvel at the level of faith she exhibited with a limited knowledge of God, especially when we compare how puny is the faith of many of God’s children today who have known Him and His Word for many years.

A Promise Kept (Joshua 6:22-25)

10. What was the outcome for Rahab when Jericho was defeated? (vs. 22 - 25)

Chapters 3 – 6 describe the miraculous deliverance of Jericho into the Israelite’s hand. After receiving unusual instructions from the Lord (Josh. 6:1-5), he commanded the people to do just as he had been told. After marching around the city repeatedly and finally sounding when told to do so, the people witnessed the amazing fall of Jericho’s wall (v. 20). This enabled them to enter the city and completely destroy everyone in it (v. 21).

Joshua and the Israelites were faithful to the covenant promise given to Rahab. This happened before the city was looted and burned. Everything that was ordered to be destroyed, was, including all people other than Rahab's family. Everything that was not destroyed was put into the Lord's treasury (see Joshua 6:17-19).

11. How can our faith be effective for saving our own families?

We first have to make a distinction between physical and spiritual "saving." Rahab's act of faith led to the sparing of the physical lives of her family, but did it lead them to accept the God of Israel and thus save them spiritually as well? We don't know for sure, but the right actions of one can have a powerful influence on others.

This is especially so in regard to salvation and Christian living. Remember: God has no grandchildren. Each person must individually make a personal decision for Christ. Yet by example a Christian may influence a family member who is lost to come to Christ. Prayer is a powerful tool in this regard. Also see 1 Corinthians 7:14.

Conclusion

Hebrews 11:30,31 states that "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." In all human generations, whether before or after Calvary, *faith* in God has been the deciding factor in salvation.

Practical Points

1. We never know in whom God might be working to produce faith (Joshua 2:1).
2. Those who recognize God's work will recognize and honor God's servants (vs. 2-4).

3. God often confirms His word to us through other people (2:8-11; cf. 1:3).
4. Faith entails a willingness to abandon previous loyalties and join God's people (2:12-14).
5. We cannot expect God's blessing if we do not keep our commitments to others (6:22-23).
6. Those who serve God's people are serving God, and they will be amply rewarded (v. 25).

Prayer

Almighty God, thank You for the examples of men and women who were prompted by their faith in the choices they made. Give us wisdom today to choose what is pleasing to You and in accord with Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thought to Remember

Our words acquit or condemn us.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

It has been mentioned that this was a time for miracles for Israel. Crossing the Jordan River on dry land was one of them. Everything centered on the ark of the covenant that accompanied God's people. Those carrying it stood still in water, and God stopped the river's flow. Joshua replaced Moses, and the delayed occupation of Canaan began. Study Joshua 3:1-13 "Commitment in Leadership" in anticipation of next week's lesson.

Lesson Summarized by Montario Fletcher

Jesus Is All Ministries



Sunday, February 19, 2023

Lesson 12 - "Commitment in Leadership"

Lesson Text: **Joshua 3:1-13**

Background Scripture: **Joshua 3**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 142**

Joshua 3:1-13

1 And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. 2 And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; 3 And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. 4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore. 5 And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you. 6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. 7 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8 And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 9 And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. 10 And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. 12 Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to see what God did for the Israelites when they obeyed His commands through Joshua and were able to cross into Canaan.

Principle: to be aware that God is with His people in the difficult times of life.

Application: to urge believers to listen to God when they are faced with life's problems and seek to do His will.

INTRODUCTION

He had been one of those outstanding elders in a local church. He was a businessman, but his real interest in life was God's Word. He loved nothing more than to talk about the Bible at length with preachers and Bible college professors whom he met. With his concordance he had done word studies and researched many topics.

Now, however, he was concerned. His health was declining, and within a short period of time others would have to take his leadership role in the church. He may not have been the chairman, but for years he had been the leader whose wisdom was sought in every situation.

His concerns were expressed in an article that he wrote, "Passing the Mantle." Its title comes from the occasion when Elijah was taken to Heaven in a whirlwind and dropped his mantle (or cloak) to Elisha, who was going to succeed him as the leader of the prophets (2 Kings 2:11-13).

Leadership transitions have two dimensions: the concerns of the one who has been the leader and the concerns of the successor. The former leader may wonder if the successor will bring to ruin what years of work have accomplished; in some cases, the one receiving the mantle of leadership does little more

than bask in the benefits that are available. The forward momentum slows, and over a period of time there is a reversal of the positive motion that had been in effect. The one giving up leadership also may wonder if the one who follows will do so well that many will question why the previous leader was not able to accomplish as much.

The successor also confronts certain issues. “Can I do as well? Will I fail?” are questions of self-doubt. The new leader may want to change the image or methodology of the organization while wondering how the changes will be received. Some people cannot handle change; others delight in it.

This lesson presents the first leadership challenge that Joshua faced after he succeeded Moses. Moses had been the father of the nation, and he had accomplished much in the 40 years that he was the leader. At times the Israelites rebelled against God and Moses, but Moses always met the challenges.

Would Joshua himself be equal to the obstacles that the nation was to face in Canaan? Assurances had been given (see Joshua 1), but was Joshua up to the job?

LESSON BACKGROUND

The background for this lesson is essentially the same as in the previous lesson about Rahab. Featured here will be a review of references to Joshua during the previous part of his life—the 40 years in the wilderness that were years of preparation for his task as Moses’ successor.

The first mention of Joshua occurs just after the initial time that Moses struck a rock for water to flow from that rock (Exodus 17). The Amalekites, a wandering desert group descended from Esau, immediately attacked, perhaps desiring possession of the new water supply. Moses selected Joshua to organize an army out of the inexperienced Israelites to confront the enemy.

Moses needed someone like Joshua, so the next reference to him is as Moses’ “minister” or valet (Exodus 24:13). At that time Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the two tablets with the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20) and the Law in oral form. Joshua was permitted to go beyond the point

where Moses instructed the elders to wait for “us” until they returned (Exodus 24:14).

Young Joshua is also mentioned as remaining in what Moses called “the Tabernacle of the congregation,” perhaps to care for it as a part of his ministry to Moses (Exodus 33:7–11). In Numbers 13 and 14, Joshua was one of the 12 spies who entered Canaan from the south. That 40-day period turned into 40 years when the Israelites developed the “grasshopper complex” (Numbers 13:33). As the people heard the negative reports of 10 spies, they sided with the majority.

Only Joshua and Caleb of the twelve had the faith needed to forge ahead into Canaan, and they encouraged the people to do so. The people attempted to stone the two “good” spies, but God prevented it (14:10). The penalty was not only forty years in the wilderness (14:34), but God decreed that 603,548 out of the 603,550 men of war (Numbers 1:45–46) would die in the wilderness during the time remaining (see Deuteronomy 2:14). This averaged more than forty funerals per day, each a reminder of the rebellion against God.

Joshua was designated by the Lord to be Moses’ successor. Joshua was “a man in whom is the spirit” (Numbers 27:18), and he was commissioned, or ordained by Eleazar (the son of Aaron who became the high priest after Aaron died; 27:19–23). Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had also “laid his hands upon him” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

In one of Moses’ last addresses to the nation, he commended Joshua to the people. He also challenged Joshua to be strong and courageous (Deuteronomy 31:7). At that time the Lord himself commissioned Joshua with the same admonition (31:14, 23) and did so again in Joshua 1:7. Joshua was God-chosen to lead the people across the Jordan, into the Promised Land.

JOSHUA LEADING AND PREPARING THE PEOPLE (Joshua 3:1-6)

The events of the first two chapters of the book of Joshua lead up to the dramatic event about to take place. The people assure Joshua that they will follow him as they had followed Moses. Joshua reminds the

two and one-half eastern tribes of their commitment to help in the conquest on the western side of the Jordan River (Joshua 1:10-15). The incident of the spies and Rahab (last week's lesson) provides the important information that the inhabitants of the land are fearful. All is in readiness.

1. What is the setting as Joshua prepares to lead Israel into the Promised Land? (Joshua 3:1)

The Israelite encampment covered many square miles east of the Jordan. They had been camped at Shittim while Joshua awaited the report of the spies he had sent ahead into the city of Jericho. The spies' report had been favorable: "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Josh. 2:24). Joshua knew they should not wait any longer, so the next morning he gave the order for the Israelites to move up to the bank of the Jordan River. There they set up camp once again and waited for three days.

The Jordan River was in flood stage at the end of the rainy season and because of the melting snow on the mountains to the far north (Joshua 3:15; 4:18). It is clear that the people must cross this obstacle to enter Canaan. We can surmise that some of the older people who had been teenagers when the Red Sea was crossed 40 years before wonder if God will now repeat that miraculous experience.

2. What preparation and instructions were given for crossing Jordan? What evidences do we see that the crossing was more than a military or physical journey? (vs. 2-4)

We are not told how this period of time was used, but we are told that after the three-day wait, Joshua sent his officers through the camp with orders. No doubt there were many necessary preparations, because it was not just the military men preparing to cross the Jordan but their wives and children as well. The move up to the bank of the river would have signaled the beginning of the next phase, and everyone would have begun their preparations automatically. Imagine the excitement as they realized what was coming next!

The officers instructed the people to begin walking toward the river when they saw the Ark of the Covenant being carried by the priests. At this time the Ark of the Covenant replaced the cloud or pillar of fire as the focal point of leading for the people. Just as the cloud and pillar of fire had once represented God's presence, so now did the Ark of the Covenant. "The presence of the ark indicates that the crossing of the Jordan was much more than a military maneuver: It was a religious procession" (Gaebelein, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). It was not just Israel going into Canaan; it was God claiming His land.

The ark was going to be carried by Levites who were priests (Numbers 1:47-54). As soon as the people saw the priests begin to walk with the ark, they were to begin moving toward the river. The excitement and suspense must have been at an all-time high.

A distance of two thousand cubits, or three thousand feet, was to be maintained between the ark and the people. This is well over half a mile. It is not clear whether this means they were to stay that far behind it in order for everyone to see clearly where they were going or whether it means this distance was to be maintained both behind and beside it. Since the text says the purpose of this distance was for them to know where to go, it seems probable that this is a reference to following no closer than the designated distance.

This journey was one that none of the people except the two spies had ever taken before. They needed clear guidance from the Lord, just as we do when He leads us into new ventures of life.

3. What are some times in your life when you've seen God move but you've failed to follow? Why do we fail to act when we should? How do you overcome this problem?

Not a day goes by that God does not put into our lives opportunities to follow His lead. We often ask for God to lead, then fail to follow. Sometimes God's leading is to put us in a position to share our faith with a friend or coworker. But because of fear of saying the wrong thing or just feeling the time is not right, we fail to act.

We may see a neighbor working on a project around the house and sense a compulsion to offer assistance. This compulsion could be God giving us an opportunity to share His love by serving. Instead, we rationalize that we would be intruding, and thus we fail to respond. Our desire to spend what we earn on ourselves keeps us from following the leading of God to help a needy person or a Christian ministry that is having financial difficulties. Any corrective action begins with repentance.

4. What special preparation (sanctifying process) did Joshua call for? (vs. 5-6)

Further evidence that this was more than a military or physical activity can be seen in the instruction for people to sanctify themselves. Everything about this event centered on the God of Israel, who was making their entrance into Canaan possible. Since God is holy, since He was the ultimate leader of this advance, and since they were following the visible symbol of His presence, the people needed to be holy also. This was not a secular event; it was a sacred movement into the Promised Land.

Joshua called on the Israelites to sanctify themselves because God was about to perform miraculous things for them. Sanctification basically means to set

oneself apart for righteousness and from sin (consecration). Israel saw it as a purification from both inner sin and outer defilement. Therefore, sanctifying themselves involved both external and internal preparation.

External preparation was commanded for Israel at Mount Sinai when God told Moses He was going to appear before them on the mountain (Exod. 19:10-15). It involved washing their clothes (and probably themselves) and abstaining from sexual activity with their spouses. These were symbolic ceremonial purification rites, probably also employed at this time, that emphasized their appearance before a holy God. Crossing the Jordan was in the direct presence of that God.

The sanctifying process occurred that day, and the next morning Joshua told the priests to take up the ark and begin to cross the river. The miracle was about to begin, and they were the ones to reveal to the people that it was happening. The priests responded immediately. Anticipation must have been high; God was obviously at work among them, and they were about to go through something that had happened only one time before, at the Red Sea.

To be continued...



Sunday, February 26, 2023

Lesson 13 - "Commitment in Leadership" (Continued)

Lesson Text: **Joshua 3:1-13**

Background Scripture: **Joshua 3**

Devotional Reading: **Psalm 142**

Joshua 3:1–13

1 And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. 2 And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; 3 And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. 4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore. 5 And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you. 6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. 7 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8 And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 9 And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. 10 And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. 12 Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon a heap.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to see what God did for the Israelites when they obeyed His commands through Joshua and were able to cross into Canaan.

Principle: to be aware that God is with His people in the difficult times of life.

Application: to urge believers to listen to God when they are faced with life's problems and seek to do His will.

PEOPLE FOLLOWING (Joshua 3:7-13)

5. What promise did God give Joshua regarding the day of crossing the Jordan? (v. 7)

The Lord gave Joshua a wonderful promise that day: He would magnify him in the sight of all Israel. The people would be assured that Joshua was the right leader, and that the Lord was with him as He had been with Moses. He would be exalted in the eyes of the people in the same way Moses had been exalted. Respect for Joshua had already been established, but after this event it would increase significantly. For it to be comparable to that afforded Moses was great indeed. "This was, of course, a continuity with what they had experienced when they came out of Egypt. . . Now they were going to see a sign which paralleled the parting of the Red Sea. Though God gave the same sign as He had with Moses in order to establish Joshua's authority with the people, there was obviously something much more important at work than either Moses or Joshua. There is a continuity of the power of the Lord" (Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, Crossway). God stated that the

people would recognize that His presence was with Joshua just as it had been with Moses throughout his lifetime. Joshua 4:14 confirms that the people responded as God intended.

6. What additional instruction did God give for the priests carrying the ark? (vs. 8,9)

One more detail was now added to Joshua's instructions for those carrying the ark. They were to walk toward the Jordan River and then stand still in the river. Joshua 3:15-16 relates that the priests actually had to step into the water before it began to dry up. Each step was literally one of faith, for God did not perform the miracle until the soles of their feet rested in the water of the river. Then "the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan" (v. 17).

Keep in mind that the river was at flood stage and reason would have said that it was dangerous to enter the water. The priests stepping into the water had to be an act of faith. Unlike with the Red Sea, the waters were not parted in advance of the priests entering the water. It was only after they stepped into it in faith that the waters began to dry up.

7. What are some areas in which you (or your church) need to get your feet wet? What's holding you back?

Getting one's feet wet is another way of expressing a need to step out of a comfort zone. Churches and Christians are often fearful of taking steps of faith. We see much fear and faithlessness on the part of the Israelites during the exodus, and human nature hasn't changed.

Reaching out to new people, our very mission as a church, often goes lacking. Fear of

bringing "those people" into our fellowship inhibits our stepping out. Ministering to Christians who are hurting and caught up in a web of sin can be uncomfortable and time-consuming. But such acts of mercy are necessary if we are to be the people God wants us to be.

8. What is significant about Joshua calling God "the living God" (v. 10)?

Joshua referred to God as "the living God" who was among them. One of the purposes of the passage through the Jordan was for the Israelites to be convinced that the living God was with them. The powerful nations they would face all worshiped false gods; so they did not need to fear them. Not only was their God living, but He was also the sovereign God who ruled the entire world.

9. What specific challenges faced Israel after they entered the Promised Land?

While the prospect of finally entering the land God had promised them was exciting, the people knew that ahead of them lay great challenges. Seven powerful nations were already living in Canaan: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Joshua sensed that it was time for a word of encouragement. So, he called them together by saying, "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God." Here was another reminder that God, not Joshua, was leading them.

God was about to reveal to them once again that He was present with them. He would do this by driving those nations out before them as they advanced into the land. In Exodus 23:20-33, we read details that God gave Moses of how He was going to accomplish this. An angel would go before them to prepare the way and help them. Their responsibility was to not bow down to the

gods of any of the nations they were replacing. They were to completely destroy them instead, overthrowing and breaking down all their altars.

10. What was the key to their success as they faced the enemies in Canaan? (v. 11)

As they stayed true to God, He would use divine means to drive out those powerful nations (Exodus 23:28-30). He would cause the people to become fearful and confused and make them run from them. He would send hornets to be such a severe problem that they would leave to get away from them. He would do all this gradually so that the land would not become desolate or overrun by wild animals. Little by little He was going to give them the land. All of it would be theirs, but they were to keep from sinning against Him or serving the false gods of Canaan.

Joshua declared that this was how they would know that the living God was among them. "Verse 11 is the most important part of Joshua's speech. The sign that would confirm the people's faith was that the Ark of the Covenant would go ahead of them. It would not just go up to the Jordan but would enter it, as if the river were not even there and there were no rushing current to carry everything away" (Goslinga, Bible Student's Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Zondervan). Joshua deliberately referred to God as "the Lord of all the earth" to remind people that He was in control.

11. Why is the choosing of twelve men mentioned here? (v. 12)

Israel was told to appoint one man from each of the twelve tribes for an unnamed task. The choosing of twelve men anticipates what took place in the next chapter of Joshua. Joshua 4:2-8 explains their special duties in the

placement of twelve stones as a memorial. Each tribe was represented, reminding the people that God was with and among all of them.

There were two stone memorials for this event. Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan where the priests stood with the Ark of the Covenant (Joshua 4:9). The men selected from each of the twelve tribes of Israel chose the stones to build the memorial at the next campsite, which was named Gilgal (Joshua 4:20). These would serve as everlasting memorials to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan.

12. What did Joshua say God would do in helping them cross the Jordan? (v. 13)

In verse 13, Joshua explained to the people, for the first time, exactly how they were going to get across the Jordan River. He told them that as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the "Lord of all the earth" would "rest in the waters of Jordan." God himself, as symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, would "rest" in the waters. The waters flowing down from the north would stop flowing and stand up like a heap at a distance of about twenty miles (v. 16).

This would be different from the parting of the Red Sea, where water heaped up on two sides (Exodus 14:21-22). Water in the Jordan kept flowing toward the Dead Sea – only the waters flowing southward stopped and formed a great heap. We are reminded that "with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

We cannot help admiring Joshua's commitment to leadership. Good leaders must be visionary and willing to take risks. It helped much that Joshua had been Moses' assistant, for he learned a great deal about trusting God there. It becomes another

matter, however, when the mantle of responsibility actually becomes one's own. Joshua's faith in God enabled him to lead effectively.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We are always safest when following the Lord, even when the way is difficult (Joshua 3:1- 3).
2. Spiritual battles require spiritual preparation (v. 4).
3. Commitment to the Lord enables us to see His hand at work in all situations (v. 5).
4. We are not to seek honor in the Lord's service; He will honor us in due time (vs. 6-8).
5. God is Lord of all the earth; thus, no earthly power can thwart His will (vs. 9-12).
6. We should view obstacles as opportunities for our faith to grow (v. 13).

CONCLUSION

When invading a country, one would expect that the military would lead the charge with the best weapons, and best prepared soldiers leading the way. One might also expect the leader to make sure all the tools of war were ready for such an adventure.

But Joshua, Israel's leader, understood where his power and ability came from. His focus was on being prepared spiritually, knowing that it was God, not their army, who would give them victory.

Joshua knew God was with him, and he had seen God work mighty miracles. God had made a commitment to Joshua. Joshua believed the promise and acted on it as he began his leadership role. He may not have known how God would do things or how God would provide, but the knowledge that God would provide gave him all the confidence he needed.

Ancient Jews did not choose Moses, Joshua, etc., by democratic process. Those men could

choose subordinates (example: Exodus 18:24-26), but God is the one who chose the main leaders. Today, God has allowed nations and churches the privilege of choosing their own leaders.

Secular books and lectures by motivational speakers often develop the theme of how to be a good leader. But some of the finest thoughts on the qualities and qualifications of being a leader are found in the New Testament. One important passage is Acts 6:3 where the requirement is for men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." We do well to follow this same example when wisely choosing our leaders.

Two other important passages, almost parallel to each other, are 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Listed are attributes that overseers (elders or bishops) in the church should have prior to being given the challenging task of being responsible to give an account for those in their care (see Hebrews 13:17).

Whether it is at the national level or within the church or concerning any group having designated leaders, the admonition is still true: choose your leaders wisely. Another admonition is that leaders should ensure that they are worthy of being followed. Joshua did!

PRAYER

God, above everything else today, I desire to acknowledge Your leadership and to have the spirit of worship or submission in every part of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Honor your leaders.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON: Our next lesson is taken from the book of Judges. In "Preparing for

Commitment,” the angel announced the birth of Samson to Manoah and his wife. As an adult, God used Samson to deliver Israel, and his amazing strength was involved. Study Judges 13:1-25.

Lesson Summarized by Renee Little



Jesus Is All Ministries
Lesson summaries by:
Montario Fletcher
Deloris H. Washington
Willie Ferrell
Renee Little
Montario Fletcher

Free Access - Previous Lessons

<https://www.jesusisall.com/sunday-school.htm>