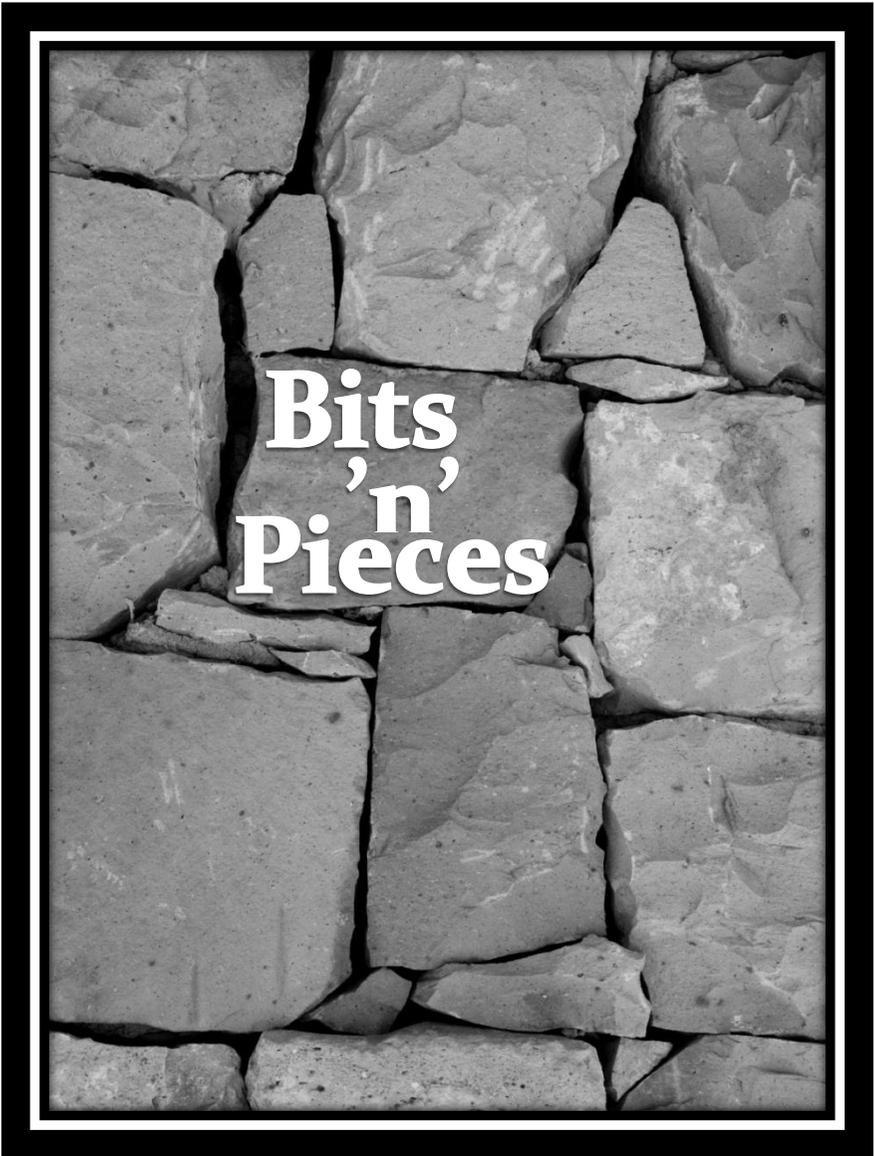


**Bits 'n' Pieces**  
**In the Old Testament**

**By Lyle Ratzlaff**

**2011**

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## Foreword

This project is not intended to be an exegetical thesis or theological treatise. It is my personal attempt to put in print observations that I have made during my own study of the Bible. The objective is to provide a limited commentary that is easy to read and understand, one that could be used for individual study or Bible lesson preparation. On the pages that follow are things that I found noteworthy and elected to mention. In the interest of keeping this project purposely concise, I have not incorporated every conceivable topic. Proof texts and many scripture references have not been included. They are in my notes, and I believe that my comments can be substantiated. I chose to leave them out for fear that readers might become bogged down in technicalities and turn away in boredom. This work is meant to be interesting, thought provoking, and an educational experience.

My beliefs and convictions are centered on the concept that the Bible is the written Word of God, complete and infallible in the original language and text. It does not just contain the words of God—it is the inspired Word of God. Having achieved a major life goal of going through the Bible, cover to cover, one hundred times, I see uniqueness in inspired scripture that I do not have words to define adequately. I have read other manuscripts that did not become part of the canon of scripture, and they are, in my opinion, different somehow. God says that His Word is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword. In contrast, an encyclopedia may be accurate and true, but its words can never be described in those terms. A confidence that God had His hand in the process of putting the Bible together those many years ago is paramount. I am content in that belief. My challenge to all is to read through the Bible. You will never regret devoting the necessary time to that endeavor. That accomplishment will change your life forever.



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# “First”

## Genesis 1:1

A casual reading of the Bible is an excellent endeavor. Expressions easily perceived on the surface are accurate and filled with significance. Additionally, the Word of God embraces incredible depth. On occasion, God has concealed profound thoughts and ideas in the context, the original language, or the ancient customs of the day. A scholarly study, performed appropriately, can be an exceptionally rewarding experience.

The very first word in the Bible reveals this concept well. Genesis 1:1 reads “In the beginning...” That introductory phrase is one word in the original Hebrew texts. Transliterated into our language as *Bereshiyth*, God is imparting a subtle hint in His opening statement, what (or more accurately, who) His Word is all about.

Hebrew is similar to many other languages in that words are often formed from root words. As in English, those root words are compounded by adding prefixes and suffixes to alter their meaning slightly. The root of *bereshiyth* is *rosh*. As additions are made to the root *rosh*, the translated meanings become: first, firstfruit, firstborn, high priest, highest, head, and beginning.

Jesus Christ is described in many places in the New Testament using the Greek terms for these words. Following is a small selection of passages.

First—Revelation 22:13

Firstfruit—I Corinthians 15:20

Firstborn—Colossians 1:18

High priest—Hebrews 2:17

Head—Colossians 1:18

Highest—Philippians 2:9

Beginning—Revelation 22:13

Colossians 1:15-18 affirms that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things. We will discover that He is the focus of the Bible from beginning to end. It is appropriate that descriptive references to Him would be located in the creation narrative, in the very first word of the Bible.

# “Huge”

## Genesis 1

How big is the God you worship? An honest answer will color and tint how you read and view the Bible. The pat Sunday School response is “Oh, He’s very big.” But are we convinced? At times, it can be advantageous to revisit a thought or concept in the spirit of genuine study. We can then walk away from the process, confident and reaffirmed in our beliefs. Or, if necessary, adjust to additional information, and rethink our convictions.

Genesis 1, the account of creation, is a central focal point that must be considered in any discussion of “How big is God?” We have already examined the first word in the Bible. The second is as fascinating. “In the beginning, God...” we read. Hebrew is not unique in structure. Several other languages have the distinction of containing nouns that can be *singular*, *dual*, and *plural*. English is generally limited to the singular and plural construct of nouns. An “s” added to the end of the word in English is, in most cases, sufficient to transform the noun into its plural configuration. The Hebrew word for God, *Elohim* in the original text, is in the plural (three or more) form. One of the greatest mysteries of the Bible—how can God be three distinct, unique, equal persons and yet considered One? Will that riddle ever be solved this side of the grave? It is sufficient that the Bible, God’s own Word, teaches it. Our feeble minds find the comprehension of the infinite impossible, at best.

God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit, were present at creation, each actively taking part. The vantage point of Colossians 1:16-17 gives the impression that Jesus Christ was “center stage”, as it were. (On a personal note, one could imagine that when the Bible says “And God said...” Jesus could well have been the One speaking the words out loud.) The account in Colossians goes on to say that not only did He speak the world into existence, He holds it together. If He were to let go or turn away for an instant, all would cease to exist! The question again, “How big is the God you worship?”

An infinite God is difficult to define, explain, or understand. He knew that, and ingeniously put together a Book containing everything that we need to know about Him. An infinite God, displaying Himself in a finite number of pages means one thing. Every word on those pages is important. Very important. And yet how many have not availed themselves of the opportunity to read every one of those words?

A most interesting portrayal is found in Isaiah 59:17! Few are familiar with this verse, yet it describes the essence and character of God more succinctly than any other passage in the Bible. We find there four character traits that picture Him to us in an extraordinary way. An infinite God defined by four words.

*He put on righteousness as a breastplate.* Righteousness. God is absolutely, totally and completely perfect in every way. End of discussion. He cannot abide with sin. He loathes it. He will not allow anything less than His standard to prevail. Everything God does is righteous and good. Everything.

*And the helmet of salvation on His head.* Salvation. From before the creation of the world, God knew we would have a problem with sin. So He made plans for the redemption of man, salvation. It is the central theme of the Bible from beginning to end. Christ is the sacrifice, the Son of God. And if the references to the breastplate and helmet sound familiar, it is worthy of note that Paul, in writing to the Ephesian church, wasn't the first to use an analogy of armor. A careful study of Isaiah 59 will reveal all the other items Paul mentioned as well.

*He put on garments of vengeance.* Vengeance. God is a vengeful God. He is Judge, Jury, and Executioner. That description is discomfiting to us. And yet, through the pages of the Bible we see over and over again God judging sin—harshly. It may even frighten us a bit. That is not all bad—*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

The fourth character trait may surprise most. Few think of God in this light, which is truly unfortunate.

*And wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak.* Zeal. The “forgotten” character trait of God, zeal, is defined as “intense enthusiasm, to be deeply passionate about.” Everything God does,

He accomplishes with eagerness and excitement. He is sincerely fervent about all He has ever done. That is an amazing idea. Just think what that can mean. Not only was He intensely passionate and enthusiastic about the big moments, like creation. But He is also as ardently interested when dealing with individual people on a day to day, moment by moment basis.

The zeal of God is awesome to behold. An example is found in Job 38:7. God was talking to Job, upbraiding him for his behavior, and reminding him about creation. He concluded with the phrase *while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy*. The picture that comes to mind is of overwhelming scope. Imagine the entire population of Heaven gathered together. Billions and billions of the heavenly host are looking on. Jesus Himself steps out into the nothingness. With the enthusiastic and passionate zeal of God Almighty, He declares "Let there be light." As He speaks the words, light comes into being, (and probably all the laws of physics and time as well). In His zeal, He acknowledges the awesome, perfect, amazing thing He has done and says "It is good!" All of heaven recognizes it too, and a deafening cheer goes up to God for the wonderful things He has done in that moment. The universe that we live in is not merely an average creation prepared by a mediocre God. It is an absolutely astonishing creation completed by an enthusiastic, passionate God intent on doing His very best, if that is even appropriate to say.

The account of creation, as written in Genesis, emphasizes many times over the timing of the events. A total of six twenty-four hour days, when everything was created, followed by one day of rest. Day four is of special note. On that day, the sun and moon were created. Immediately following, in our English Bible, are five little words that should stop us in our tracks. *He made the stars also*. The substance of that statement is staggering. Almost as an afterthought (or in parenthesis), God states that He made the entire universe. Billions of galaxies each filled with billions of stars, with planets probably circling many of them, and moons and asteroids, and comets, and things we haven't even discovered yet! Again the question arises, "How big is your God?"

The significance of today's interest in how things came into existence is found in II Peter 3:3-5. Peter, through the Holy Spirit, reminds us that in the last days questions will arise in the world

concerning creation. There will be a deliberate refusal to believe in the Biblical account of creation. If Genesis is correct, a “huge” God exists and is actively interested in mankind. Many will not want to admit that, because, that God, is indeed worthy of worship.

One phrase in the passage in II Peter 3, as of this writing, has not been fully explained scientifically. *They deliberately forget that long ago, by Gods word, the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.* Couple that with Genesis' mention of *the deep*, and questions arise. Clearly, God has the ability to create an earth with the appearance of age. (Do we doubt that Adam was created with the developmental form of a mature man?) There is no solid explanation for the water, but one interesting observation.

During the early 1960's and until the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a tremendous rivalry between the two world super powers. The US and the USSR were both intent on showing the rest of the world that their system of life was superior. Most are familiar with the race for the conquest of space. Few are aware of another contest that was ensuing. Both nations proceeded with the task of attempting to drill deep into the earth's core. The United States conceded early, but Russia continued from 1965 until officially discontinuing drilling in 1994. Known commonly as the Kola Superdeep Borehole, the result was a nine inch diameter hole bored 7.5 miles deep. Drilling in the tremendous pressures and heat (356<sup>0</sup>F), are beyond the solutions of current technology. Two discoveries made at that facility are worthy of mention here. First, fossils were found at a depth of four miles. Secondly, and to the point of our subject, it was found that the granite at those extreme depths is super-saturated with water. There is currently no scientific explanation for this. In fact, it goes against all known models and theories.

Personally, I have observed numerous so called scientific facts come and go in my lifetime. The one thing that has not altered is the Word of God, our Bible. A choice to believe the Bible unquestionably may not be the socially accepted model, but it has triumphed over all challengers so far, and will continue to do so.

And the question is asked one more time, “How big is your God?”

# “Tempting”

## Genesis 3

A few foundational basics must be positioned prior to any discussion of the events of Genesis 3. *First*, God created man perfect, sinless, and immortal, but conditionally so. The innocence of man allowed him to partake of the tree of life and live endlessly in unspoiled harmony with God. However, if that purity was compromised in any way, man would not be permitted to live forever apart from God. It was actually an act of grace when God subtracted man from the garden. It paved the way for possible restoration and redemption. *Secondly*, God created man with a free will. Man has the freedom to make choices, and rejoice in, or dread, the consequences. *Thirdly*, God created man with boundaries. He was given rules to follow. Fences do not just enclose and limit. Fences also distance and constrain the influence of undesirable things. And *fourthly*, God created man with an adversary, Satan. The New Testament portrays that relationship as a spiritual battle, ongoing and very real.

Adam and Eve were given one “Thou shalt not.” They were not permitted to eat from one tree in the garden. Along came Satan with the big lie that he still uses today--“You will be like God.” Eastern religions are replete with this concept. Adam and Eve both fell prey to the enticement, both were at fault. And no longer innocent, they secreted themselves in shame.

After sin was committed, their lives changed. Their relationship with God was dismantled. Instead of a pleasant walk with God in the cool of the day, they hid, and God came to where they were. Ultimately, the Bible teaches that left to himself, sinful man will not search for God. God always makes the initial move toward us. We then notice that God supplied skins for clothing. This act infers that an animal had to die to furnish that hide. It implies the shedding of blood. God has always had an imperative; atonement for sin requires that blood be spilled. At this point, God cursed man (as well as all of creation—see Romans 8:22). God had also told Adam that on the day he sinned, he *will surely die*. Adam

lived to a seasoned age of 930 years. He did not die physically that day, but he did die spiritually. From that moment, he was in need of a Savior and salvation in the same manner as anyone alive today. The Bible teaches that the sin introduced by Adam, created a sin nature that has been passed down through every generation since.

Cast out of the Garden of Eden, their lives became subject to hard work, pain, and suffering. The account says that Cherubim and a sword blocked the gate to the Garden. Why? The tree of life was there. Man was forbidden to eat of it anymore. One might wonder if the Cherubim and sword were visible until the days of the great flood of Noah's day, 1656 years later, as a testimony to the story that Adam undoubtedly passed on to those that came after him. Remember, he lived for many years after being eliminated from the Garden of Eden.

## “Neighborly”

### Luke 10:25-37

Our Lord, as He walked this earth and taught us about God, utilized parables frequently. The people who heard Him firsthand were in awe of His message. They were impressed by the confidence demonstrated as He imparted an astonishing comprehension of Scripture—He knew His subject well. Few methods of communication are as effective at conveying and explaining complex thoughts and issues as is the parable. Jesus used them regularly in His public discourses. We will take an in-depth look at arguably the most recognizable of all of Jesus’ parables. “The Parable of the Good Samaritan”, as it is commonly entitled, is a unique story with significance and background in the third chapter of Genesis.

Ordinarily, most will immediately think of the query posed by a man and recorded in Luke 10. He had asked Jesus a simple, but thoughtful question. Who is my neighbor? Familiarity with the story recorded there renders a memory of three people who came across a gentleman who was in dire need of assistance. Only one genuinely cared and came to his aid, and thus the answer to his curiosity became obvious. The Samaritan was the true neighbor. Countless sermons have been preached and lessons taught with this story and text as their foundation. There is, however, a commonly overlooked aspect to the entire episode recorded in Luke. It is worthwhile to expend reasonable effort to explore the most important truth to be discovered in the parable itself.

We will turn the clock back approximately two minutes in the narrative, and look a bit more at the context in which Jesus is speaking. Verse twenty-five discloses the man’s initial contact with Jesus. We learn that he actually proffered two questions, the second of which was the one concerning relationships with neighbors. His initial inquiry was of far greater significance. “Teacher,” he asked, “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” What an excellent example of the most important question anyone can

ask! In our vernacular of today, the request might be worded slightly differently. How do I get to go to Heaven? What must I do to be saved? How do I become a Christian? All of our present day evangelistic efforts focus upon bringing an individual to the point in their life where they ask those questions. They can then address the recognized need for God in one's life. Not only has this man asked the most crucial question of his lifetime, he has posed it to God Almighty, the Author of Life, the Savior of the world!

A prudent student would agree that the answer to that question, given by Jesus, the Son of God, would be worthy of note. As Christ did on some other occasions, He requested of this man to recount his understanding of the Law. His response was correct as he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Jesus commended him for his proper comprehension of the Scripture, but the man immediately challenged Jesus with the second question regarding the definition of a neighbor. And the parable was shared with the crowd. But what became of the initial question?

I have participated in classes on evangelism, and never have I heard the answer taught that Jesus accepted from this man. The passage the man quoted says that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart and our soul and our strength and our mind, and our neighbor as our self. Jesus replied that was good enough. Where is the idea of a spiritual rebirth, or our sinful nature, or an understanding that God has offered a free gift and all we must do is accept and believe? It is indeed unfortunate that the second question distracted Jesus from the complete answer, as I would have liked to hear it—or was He genuinely sidetracked? Luke records for us an example of the genius of Jesus, The Great Teacher. The most incredible instructor and educator the world has ever known answered **both** questions with one story! A careful study is in order now, beginning in verse thirty.

*A certain man:* Our relationship with God is based upon ourselves and Him—no one else.

*Went down from Jerusalem to Jericho:* Physically, the trip from Jerusalem to Jericho is a downhill trek. From mountain city to valley city is a drop in elevation of nearly two thousand feet. Jerusalem is where the temple was located, where God had stated

that His presence would be seen. Jericho was a cursed city, a city of sin that Israel had destroyed many years earlier. The spiritual picture positions man travelling away from God toward sin, and it is a descent downward, a steep decline.

*And fell among thieves:* Satan, the ever present enemy of man, is described on several occasions in the Bible as a thief and a robber who has come to steal, kill, and destroy. Our memory of what happened in the Garden of Eden confirms that concept.

*Which stripped him of his raiment:* Recall that the first reaction of Adam and Eve was an attempt to procure for themselves clothing to cover their nakedness.

*And left him half dead:* A very interesting choice of words. Physically, it is impossible to be half dead—one is either dead or alive, not half one way or the other. When seen from a spiritual perspective though, it is entirely possible and accurate. Before Adam sinned, God had warned him that on the day he disobeyed, he would *surely die*. But the Bible says that Adam died at the old age of 930 years. Did God lie? Absolutely not, for though Adam did not die physically, he did die spiritually that day, and subsequently, everyone since has been born spiritually dead, in need of a Savior. In fact, he was personally in need of a Savior as well. He was left half dead, with no method of remedying his situation without help.

*A certain priest:* The most religious person in Israel journeyed by and refused to help. We will, likewise, not solve our circumstance with the church or other pious activity. They have no impact upon our dead spiritual condition. Religion cannot and will not save us.

*A Levite:* Known by all as a worker, it was the Levites who cut wood, carried water, cleaned, and successfully kept the temple in good repair. As he approached, he too avoided the man in need. Our accomplishments and our work are nothing compared to God and His majesty. Heaven will never be earned by our feeble attempts at good works.

*A certain Samaritan:* A most unlikely candidate for a solution. A despised half-breed, disdained by Jewish society, became the hero in the story. Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The religious establishment of the day

refused to recognize who He was, and treated Him with blatant contempt. The story pointed to a “certain” Samaritan, a precise, special one. Jesus was the only one who could fulfill all of the Scripture prophecies concerning Him. He was very specific, chosen and planned before the foundation of the world, to fulfill the task before Him—our salvation.

*Came where he was:* It is most humbling and remarkable that Jesus left the glory of Heaven, laid aside all of His heavenly prerogatives, and came to where we are. The great I AM set his foot upon the same dirt we do.

*Had compassion on him:* God loves us while we are still in our sinful state. That is beyond comprehension.

*Bound up his wounds:* By his wounds we are healed spiritually. The implication of the parable is that the victim had no possible method of taking care of himself and his deadly problem. Without help, he would surely die. Notice that the Samaritan did all the work. Likewise, our salvation is a product of “the strong arm of the Lord”, a solution we could never provide for ourselves.

*Pouring on oil:* Often in the Bible, oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit, and this is no exception. We understand from the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is poured into the life of everyone who becomes a Christian—we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

*When I come again:* The glorious hope and confidence of every saved individual is the eventual return of Jesus Christ someday.

Jesus, the Great Teacher, gave an incredibly precise and accurate answer to the most important question anyone on this earth can ever ask God. So it is asked again of you, what have you done to inherit eternal life?

## “Ox-Goads”

### Genesis 4:1-16

Essentially, the story found in the passage, is uncomplicated, and comparatively simple to follow. The narrative tells of two brothers and an altercation that culminated in the first murder. Straightforward and to the point, to be found here is a great spiritual truth applicable to us today. On the surface, the story is relatively transparent. But just below, available to those who aspire to do a bit of study, is a fascinating consideration of atonement, from God's point of view. A tremendous lesson is to be found in Psalm 39:5b, one of redemption, atonement, and salvation. The Psalm itself is a reflection on the shortness and uncertainty of life. The words chosen by David are unique and quite specific.

The structure of Psalm 39:5b is also significant. The word “verily” appears, followed by a short phrase, and then the word “Selah”. Verily is an expression that denotes earnestness, as if to say, “Take note of what is to follow”. Selah, generally suggests the reader “stop and take heed.” Contemplate and consider what was just read. Used jointly, it would ostensibly be appropriate to study the phrasing that falls between those two words of notation. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.* This study will be word by word, considering the original Hebrew.

*Every man.* Each man, each person, is responsible for his or her self. Your relationship with God is constructed upon you and God and no one else.

*At his best state* is a very specific term. A farmer of the era would recognize it immediately. Oxen were common beasts of burden and work in those days. To maneuver an animal of such size necessitated something physical—an ox-goad. Typically, these were made of wood or metal, depending upon the owner's financial status. Shaped like a pointed stick, they were used by the farmer as a steering mechanism. To guide the animal to the right, the farmer would touch the goad to the left flank of the ox. The animal would instinctively shy away from it, because it remembered and

respected the sharp point of that stick. An iron ox-goad was a prized possession. Iron, being of poor quality then, could easily break, and require a blacksmith's expertise to correct. The expression translated *at his best state* is the same term a farmer would use when requesting to have a new point restored to his ox-goad. The valued implement would be fabricated back into its originally intended condition, one of usefulness to the owner. Let's move that thought over into a spiritual application. Man is damaged, in need of repair, and ineffectual as is. However, when placed back into his originally intended condition, that of fellowship with God, (also known as salvation), he becomes useful to the Master once more.

The last phrase *is altogether vanity* is one word in Hebrew also. It refers to a brief duration of time. It is also a proper name. Abel. Because Abel lived such a short time on earth, his name came to mean fleeting or unfinished.

Assembling the Hebrew meanings together, we have the following idea. Every man who has been corrected, who has been restored to his originally intended condition, is like Abel.

That conveys us back to Genesis 4:4. There we find that *The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.* The words *to look with favor upon* carry with them an interesting thought. Not all expressions translate well from one language to another, and so it is with this one. The best description is the example of a marshmallow on a plate. Pour chocolate syrup over that marshmallow, coating every bit with chocolate. Technically, you cannot see the marshmallow, but you know it is still there. What you do see is the chocolate. And my, doesn't that chocolate look good! A simple taste confirms your beliefs. It looks good. You are "looking with favor upon" that marshmallow. Spiritually speaking, as Christians, our sins were dealt with by the atonement. We are covered by the blood of Christ, the supreme sacrifice, and God looks at the blood of Christ enveloping our imperfections and can look at us with favor and have a relationship with us. For the Christian, the atonement of the blood of Jesus and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ are truly amazing things.

# “Family”

## Genesis 5

Most skip over passages such as this one. The names are difficult to pronounce, and with no accompanying stories, quite frankly, verses like these are classified as tedious. God, in His Omniscience, declared them worthy of being in His written Word. They are not just taking up space. They are there for a reason. We will take the opportunity afforded us here to glean a few things from this first family tree. To do this efficiently and clearly, we will take the information found in this chapter and place it in a chart that will show a number of interesting results.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>YEAR BORN</b>	<b>YEARS TO SON</b>	<b>TOTAL AGE</b>	<b>YEAR OF DEATH</b>
<b>Adam</b>	0	130	930	930
<b>Seth</b>	130	105	912	1042
<b>Enosh</b>	235	90	905	1140
<b>Kenan</b>	325	70	910	1235
<b>Mahalalel</b>	395	65	895	1290
<b>Jared</b>	460	162	962	1422
<b>Enoch</b>	622	65	365	987
<b>Methuselah</b>	687	187	969	1656
<b>Lamech</b>	874	182	777	1651
<b>Noah</b>	1056	500+	950	2006
<b>Shem</b>	1559			

A simple list of observations follows:

Take note of the year that Adam died. Notice that Noah was born shortly after Adam passed away. But Noah's father could have known Adam personally and talked with him.

Enoch was taken at a relatively “young” age. The Bible tells us here that he walked with God. That is said of no one else in scripture. What a remarkable man he must have been. Other passages tell us that he was a preacher of the message of God. One would imagine him to have been a wonderful example of a godly man in every respect. His son would have witnessed his father's life first hand, and no doubt, respected it. Remind yourself at this

point of the commandment to “Honor your father and mother”, and note that it came with a promise of an extended lifespan. Methuselah is on record as the man to have lived the longest. Is that just coincidence?

The great flood came in the year 1656. It is the belief of this writer that God took his people home and spared them His wrath and destruction. Only Noah and his immediate family survived God’s judgment as the flood came upon the earth. They were miraculously and wonderfully saved.

Tremendous lifespans in those days allowed for overlapping of many generations. Imagine the experience and knowledge that could be passed down through the family. That could also work negatively, in that a poor example of a father would continue to influence many generations of impressionable minds.

This generational account also pins down time for us in an interesting way. The earth is not as old as the world says it is. It was created with the look of age, and to say otherwise, is to disregard Genesis 5.

# “Water”

## Genesis 6-9

Little is known about the world prior to the flood of Noah’s day. It is mathematically possible that the planet could have been populated by billions. People living nearly a thousand years would have the potential to be very skilled at many things. They may have been quite educated and even advanced technologically. Consider how far we have come in just a couple of centuries with our knowledge today. But God notes only their malevolence. It had covered the earth. A small group of people behaving deficiently would hardly be described as filling the earth with violence.

We can, however, be confident of a few things. Scripture discloses that men and animals were all vegetarians then. In fact, the implication is that the animal kingdom did not exhibit a natural fear of man until after the flood. The genealogical record supports the idea that most people lived much longer than we do today. Furthermore, rain had never fallen. Water came from under the ground and watered the earth. The first mention of wind is recorded after the flood.

If the Bible is to be considered absolute truth, then this story is more than just a cute legend about a floating zoo. In our culture, new parents sometimes decorate their nursery walls with rainbows and little arks full of animals. That practice almost seems inappropriate when the realities of the flood are considered. Unimaginable death and terror, the wrath of God is a fearful thing to behold. The flood was absolutely worldwide. Except for Noah and those on the ark, everyone and everything died at the hand of a righteous and vengeful God.

Grace is best defined as being given something that is certainly not deserved. God chose Noah, came to him, and offered him a way out of the impending destruction. The narrative describes man as brutishly evil. Left to himself and his sin nature, man will always degrade and achieve lessor and lessor things. Other passages describe Noah as a preacher of righteousness to an

ungodly world. God granted mankind years to repent, but not one person beyond Noah and his family responded appropriately.

The world was provided quite an object lesson. This huge monolith called the ark, stood as a visual testimony to God and His message. For 100 years passers-by could see, hear, and even talk to those working on this tremendous private project. God is longsuffering, but His patience has a limit. When that threshold is crossed, the wrath of Jehovah God will be displayed and experienced. II Peter 3 says that, as it was poured out then, it will be again at the last days. Peter, through the Holy Spirit, points out that the waters of the flood were put in place at creation and held in store for the moment the flood began. In the same way, the fire that will one day destroy the earth in God's judgment was also created, and is being held in store for that day.

God presented Noah detailed instructions for an ark. Hebrews says that Noah's faith was crucial to his obedience to God. When it was completed, God summoned Noah into the ark. God always has an invitation to avoid disaster. Noah had to accept the gift and enter, and after entering with his family, it was God who closed and secured the door. The subsequent flood was doubtless quite violent. Reading carefully, one notices that the water depth increased for 40 days. It then prevailed upon the earth for 150 additional days. And ultimately began slowly subsiding for nearly another half year. After more than a year afloat, the ark rested. Noah then became a bit of a bird watcher, sending out several fowl to see if the water had receded enough to disembark.

The raven and the dove in this story can be considered parallel to our dual nature—the old man and the new man—the old sin nature and the new creation of salvation. The raven represents the old nature. Noah released it into the world and it did not return. It was a bird of carrion, content to feed on rotting flesh that it could detect. Our sin nature is devoid of good, comfortable with the filth of this world. The dove represents the new man, not content with the sin of the world, and coming back to where it belongs. Finally, it found an acceptable place to remain and continued there. 371 days had passed. The great flood was concluded.

Noah and his family began a new life in an obliterated world, and a new covenant with God was inaugurated, but notice that it was God doing all of the promising. Many things had changed, and Noah had the responsibility to follow up with his requirements, and train his offspring to do the same.



# “Tower”

## Genesis 10-11

In the pages of the Word of God, the name Babylon first occurs in Genesis. The thread attached to the name wanders through the Bible, until, in the book of Revelation, the future demise of this world system is recorded. God holds Babylon responsible for the introduction and perpetuation of much wrong in this world and will judge her appropriately.

The story commences on the plain of Shinar, present day Iraq. Subsequent to the great flood, mankind balked at the command God gave to proliferate across the earth. In disobedience, they determined to construct a monumental tower to Heaven. Conceivably, it was a platform from which they could study the heavens and ultimately worship someone or something other than God. That stood as unacceptable, and God chose to confuse their speech, separating the population by force. However this was not the end of Babylon. It was just the beginning.

The Bible speaks of the early days of Babylon in relation to its founder, a man identified as Nimrod. Archeologists and scholars have discovered this same man in secular history, fitting many puzzle pieces together to create a remarkably clear picture of this first world leader. Indications are that he was most likely dark skinned, of Ethiopian background. He married a woman named Semaramis, but the two had no children during their relatively short marriage. Together they began assembling a nation, by force when necessary, that they would then be able to control and lead. A recognizable, world dominating authority began to emerge. Their power and prestige had barely taken root when Nimrod, an outdoorsman and hunter, met an untimely, gruesome death on one of his hunting expeditions, leaving his widow behind to manage the country. Semaramis had grown accustomed to being royalty and had no desire to relinquish any of her sovereignty or position.

The influence of Satan in the affairs of man is mentioned many times in Scripture. His intent to destroy mankind was first seen in the Garden of Eden, and his persuasion and manipulation of

the new religion of Babylon cannot be denied. Semaramis resolved that the most efficient method of retaining her dominion was to proclaim her husband to have been divine. And that a god who had been incarnate, and had returned to his original state of being, was worthy to be worshipped. One can imagine that it was not long before that reverence and adoration was soon channeled her direction, as she began promoting herself as a deity also.

After the death of her husband, her behavior became increasingly immoral. Soon, she was “with child” and needed a story to cover her problem. A straightforward solution emanated, bearing the fingerprints of satanic inspiration. She enlightened her followers that the child was immaculately conceived and would be born a god. She named him Tammuz. This introduction of an unholy trinity-Father, Mother, and Son was readily accepted by the Babylonians, and as time went on, stories were invented and circulated through the nation acknowledging the new gods and their accomplishments. The art of the early civilization began to reflect the impact of the newfound religious practices.

Artifacts from this fledgling world power reveal a significant number of ideas that have been passed down through countless generations and religions. Many have quite noticeably been significantly influenced by the schemes of Semaramis and those who helped her to promote her designs. Numerous rituals and symbols introduced in the worship of Nimrod, Semaramis, and Tammuz are still in use, found in existing religious practices throughout our world today.

It was the ancient Babylonians who introduced portraits with haloes placed above the heads of the subjects. The circle had become a symbol for Tammuz, who was promoted as a sun deity. Centuries before our culture adopted dressed trees as a part of our Christmas celebration, the Chaldeans decorated trees as a part of their worship rituals celebrating the birth of Tammuz. In fact, the word for “child” in Chaldean is “yule”.

The signs of the Zodiac and the gods of Greek and Roman mythology are their construction. The ever familiar shape of the heart, that they referred to as “the Sacred Heart”, found on millions of valentines each year, first appeared in a worship ritual for Semaramis. Babylonian influence, still visible today, is striking.

Our English language has at least one vestige of ancient Babylon. The Chaldean words for “priest of Baal”, is *khana baal*. We recognize that this pagan culture stooped to offer child sacrifices at times. In payment for their services, we also understand that it was customary for the priests to receive a small portion of each sacrifice, which they would then eat. Our language often struggles with foreign pronunciations, but it is not too difficult to see where our word “cannibal” has its origins.

A few things remain from Babylon that achieved no spiritual significance. Our 24 hour day is their invention, as well as a 60 minute hour. Their influence was substantial and enduring.

From this small beginning, fast forward to the days of Daniel. Judgment fell on Judah and God gave them over to Babylon for 70 years of exile from their promised land. Through Daniel’s interpretation of a dream, God gave the king of Babylon a glimpse of the world to come. Babylon, by God’s own description, was the greatest world power in history—bar none. No one has ever, or will ever, match or equal them. God said that even the wild animals would submit to Nebuchadnezzar in a unique way. Ancient documents corroborate that understanding as they relate the spectacular hunting expeditions he conducted, using trained leopards. These large cats would, on command, hunt down, kill, and return with their trophy and deposit it at his feet. Secular history describes an amazing city nation of vast wealth and accomplishments. But their sin was ever before God, and would be judged. Interestingly though, the final and complete destruction of Babylon does not occur until the end of time. Revelation 18 is dedicated to a description of the fall of Babylon. It will be the final task of God before the Millennial Reign of Christ on earth. God holds Babylon responsible for much and will judge them accordingly.



# “Promises”

## Genesis 12-25

Abram, later known as Abraham, is a worthwhile character study. We will begin with his family tree. The genealogical record found in Genesis 11 is interesting when placed on a chart (that continues from page 23). A few observations follow.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year of Birth</b>	<b>Years Until Son</b>	<b>Years After Son</b>	<b>Year of Death</b>
<b>Noah</b>	1056	503	447	2006
<b>Shem</b>	1559	100	500	2159
<b>Arphaxad</b>	1659	35	403	2097
<b>Shelah</b>	1694	30	403	2127
<b>Eber</b>	1724	34	430	2188
<b>Peleg</b>	1758	30	209	1997
<b>Reu</b>	1788	32	207	2027
<b>Serug</b>	1820	30	200	2050
<b>Nahor</b>	1850	29	119	1998
<b>Terah</b>	1879	70	135	2084
<b>Abram</b>	1949	100	75	2124

Notice that Noah was still alive when Abram was born. A first hand, eye witness account of the flood was available to those who lived in Abram’s day. Also, take note of the hasty decline in life spans. We can only speculate upon the attitude of Shem in his old age. He lived long enough to bury seven generations of his own descendants!

Abram was called by God in 2024. God is sovereign. He does what He wishes. The story of Abram is evidence of this fact. For no apparent reason, God chose him, to make him into a great nation and display to the world His capabilities. Further study of the text reveals that Abram had some latent character traits that God would use as his life progressed. Hebrews makes mention of him for his

faith. However, there was more to this man. We will look at a few key moments in Abram's life and learn about him along the way.

Genesis 15 records the covenant God made with Abram. This was God positioning Himself with a tremendous promise—He would make Abram into a great nation. Verse six says that *Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness*. That was the occasion and circumstance of his conversion, his salvation. From that moment, he was a child of God. God gave him the faith to believe. Remember, Abram did not grow up in a God fearing home. Neither his father nor grandfather worshipped God. In fact, Joshua 24 states that they worshipped idols. Abram instituted a complete change of direction and learned to follow God implicitly.

Sometime later, God issued Abram an additional challenge. He proposed the covenant of circumcision, a physical mark to remind him always of the fact that he was distinctive and contrasted to the rest of the world. It was then that God changed his name to Abraham. Do not skim over the commitment Abraham showed here. Approaching the subject delicately—to cut oneself in that manner, on that portion of the anatomy, was not a flippant decision to make.

An additional trait appears in Genesis 18:19. Abraham was an exceptional man, a man who understood that the most important legacy anyone can leave is in the children. Reading the text carefully, we get the impression that God chose Abraham knowing that he would be sure to tell his children about his relationship with God, and raise them accordingly, to be God fearing young men and women. That is immensely important to God and is reiterated and reinforced in Scripture.

Abraham's relationships with other people demonstrate that he was human and as fallible as anyone else. God gives us the good, the bad, and the ugly when telling his story. One episode provides a little insight into what the rest of the world may have become by this time. Our sin nature devolves us into base creatures. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah showcases how far man had slipped in only 400 years after the flood. We know the torrid, despicable story and the destruction that followed and are confident that at least we are not that bad. However, from the perspective of Almighty God, the destruction came because of sins more heinous

than the sexual promiscuity. Ezekiel 16 itemizes them for us. They were proud, over-fed, had too much free time, and had no concern for the weak or the poor. That is the real reason God destroyed them. Unfortunately, that list resembles us many times.

God promised Abraham a miracle son, who arrived at the time God foretold. Then a tremendous test was placed in front of Abraham. He was to sacrifice his only son to God. Consider the emotions that would go through any sane person's mind if given a command like this one. One additional bit of information needs to be inserted at this point. Isaac, most likely, was at least 30 years old at this time, well able to create a defense strategy or run away. Abraham, being the man of faith that he has learned to become, followed God unreservedly. He set off immediately with wood, fire, and his son to the *region of Moriah*. He dutifully climbed the mountain, built an altar, and prepared to slay his son. At the last possible moment, he was stopped by God. Scripture elsewhere tells us that Abraham fully intended to kill his son! He was not participating in a charade. God told him to get a ram, a substitute that was caught nearby, and sacrifice it instead. Abraham then said, *On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided*. What a statement, considering what we find in II Chronicles 3. Mt. Moriah is the very place where God chose to place, and Solomon constructed, the temple. Abraham experienced a wondrous gift that was a foreshadowing of a much greater miracle that God ultimately performed many years later with the presentation of His only Son, the perfect and complete sacrifice.



# “Happy”

## Genesis 21-35

God had promised Abraham, by a covenant, that he would be the father of a great nation. That required a son. Abraham and Sarah were childless and waited, but not always patiently, for a promised heir. In one moment of weakness, Ishmael came to be from an illicit relationship with another woman. Though he was technically Abraham’s son, he was not the child of promise. God had other plans. Twenty-five long years after that covenant, Isaac was finally born. This was the son God indicated would lead the family forward into the future.

That birth was anything but ordinary. Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah 90. Physically, pregnancy should have been impossible in this situation. With God, though, it was very possible. And after 25 years of waiting upon God to fulfill His Word, Abraham and Sarah received a very special gift. One could imagine the happiness and joy that came to this little, very old, family. It is fitting that they named their son after laughter, for that is what the name Isaac means. He was a “promised” child, an “impossible” child, and a child with a tremendous legacy and destiny.

Surprisingly, very little is actually recorded about Isaac. The Bible speaks more about those around him. However, there are a few things to be gleaned from the pages of scripture that showcase his exceptional character.

As a young man of about 30, Abraham took him to the top of Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him to God. Indications are that Isaac went voluntarily. It is not likely that Abraham, a man of about 130 years old, could have forced Isaac to do much of anything. But he faced death quietly. And at the last moment, God provided a substitute animal for the sacrifice. There is little doubt that this experience would have never been forgotten. It would have unquestionably affected his life profoundly.

Probably, because of the advanced age of his mother at his birth, she was very attached to him, and he to her. The Bible

records that when his mother died when he was 37 years old, he mourned the loss deeply for years.

At age 40, Abraham found a wife for him, a young lady named Rebekah. The Biblical description of the process of locating her and negotiating for her takes an entire chapter in Genesis. She was significantly younger than Isaac, quite attractive, and the story gives the impression that she possessed a servant's heart. Her entrance into his life filled the void in his heart. He loved her.

They had difficulty producing children, and the Bible records that Isaac prayed specifically for his wife concerning this matter, and God answered his prayer. Rebekah gave birth to twins, Jacob and Esau, when Isaac was 60 years old. 15 years later, Abraham passed away. Isaac lived a total of 180 years, and many of his last eight decades were spent watching the turmoil in the lives of his two sons.

The story of Isaac ends here. Clearly, he was a man with faults, but more importantly, he was a man who served God. He, no doubt, understood the covenant God had made with Abraham. He realized his part in the program of God and played it well.

# “Deception”

## Genesis 25-50

In the record of Jacob, we discover an interesting character. A cheat, a deceiver, a schemer, yet a man with an important place in the plan of God, his early life was filled with questionable acts of selfishness. This character flaw came to the forefront when Jacob conspired to cheat his twin brother, Esau, out of his birthright. That was no small thing. The rights of the firstborn were given by God, and were to be highly valued. They involved responsibility for the family in case of the death of the father. The firstborn was to be the spiritual leader of the family. Those rights also came with a paycheck of sorts—a double portion of the family inheritance. Isaac was quite wealthy throughout his life.

The second occurrence was a short time later when Jacob literally stole the blessing Isaac had intended for Esau. Deceit and trickery won him the blessing, but it destroyed his relationship with his brother completely, and he had to run away, for fear of his own life.

Forced to cut mother’s apron strings, the first night out alone was a remarkable time. God met him at Bethel, a forlorn, deserted place with boulders scattered about. That night, God renewed His covenant that he had made with Abraham and Isaac. He assured Jacob that he was to continue as his father and grandfather had done. When he finally fell asleep, God gave him a dream. It involved a ladder that reached to Heaven, with angels walking up and down upon it. We know exactly what the dream meant. In John 1, Jesus explained that the ladder was a “picture” that pointed to his own self. The truth about salvation, then and now, is that no individual is granted permission to enter Heaven one day, without going by the way of Jesus, “The Ladder”.

Many examples of the law of “Sowing and Reaping” are to be found in the pages of the Bible. Galatians 6:7-8 lays the truth out quite plainly. You reap what you sow. Examples of this law at work go all the way back to the beginning of time. Jacob was about

to reap a little of what he had sown, and it would not be pleasant for him.

Jacob found himself in search of someone who would take him in. He located family, and visited there for some time. His uncle, Laban, was a shrewd man. Laban's daughter, Rachel, caught Jacob's eye. An agreement was negotiated, and Jacob pledged to work seven years for the opportunity to take Rachel to be his wife. Few men have the dedication and love that Jacob displayed the next seven years, working selflessly for his bride to be. The years went by quickly, the wedding was planned, but Laban had a devious idea. He happened to have two daughters, Rachel, the object of Jacob's affection, and Leah, a rather homely girl. Concerned that Leah might never marry, he hatched a plan to substitute Leah at the marriage and trick Jacob into marrying her. It worked. In the morning, the deception was discovered, but too late, Jacob and Leah are officially married. Laban suggested a solution of course, another seven years of work for the second daughter, Rachel. Jacob agreed to the terms.

Multiple spouse marriages were never the plan of God. One man and one woman has always been the proper ratio. Scripture is full of stories of individuals, God's own people, even his leaders, involving themselves in the culturally acceptable practice of the day of taking multiple wives. A careful study of those families reveals that in absolutely every case, there was strife directly related to the polygamy. Jacob would discover that to be true also—the hard way. He would experience it. Eventually, he would have four women in his life, who would give him a total of twelve boys. But Rachel, and the two boys she brought into the world, would always be his favorites, a recipe for problems, indeed. It is interesting to note that the four boys that Leah gave Jacob were involved in some of the most sordid, distasteful actions recorded in Genesis. In chapter 34 we find Simon and Levi's mistake, Reuben's in 35, and in chapter 38, it was Judah.

Genesis 32 recounts for us the most important event in the life of Jacob. He found himself in a most difficult situation. He was running away from Uncle Laban after twenty years of mistrust and mistreatment. And ahead of him was his brother Esau, who, twenty years earlier, was intent on killing him. Unsure of what was laid in store for him in the morning, he sent all of his family and

possessions aside for safety. In the dark and all alone, he faced another adversary. That night changed his life forever—for the good. Until this point, Jacob lived his life in a very worldly manner. From this night on, there was a noticeable difference.

The passage says that a man wrestled with Jacob through the night. Who was that man, and why was he there? Hosea 12:4-5 answers that question satisfactorily. The angel, the man he wrestled with, was none other than God, the pre-incarnate Christ Jesus. The passage seems contradictory at first. He prevailed (or won) and yet begged for mercy. The spiritual truth here is that Jacob was wrestling with God Almighty, who simply matched him hold for hold, wearing him down and getting rid of his worldly, proud attitude. That arrogance and insolence had to be dealt with. By daybreak, Jacob was unpretentiously simply holding on to his challenger. God lightly touched Jacob on the hip and significantly wounded him. He finally surrendered his will to his opponent and “won”. The only way anyone wins is to surrender to God. It is what the Christian walk is all about. Jacob came away from this event a transformed man. He knew in his heart that he had met God face to face, and the result was a limp, a changed life and a new name, Israel.

God was ready to renew His covenant that had already been made with Abraham and Isaac. It was Israel’s turn to hear from God personally. Notice that Jacob commanded his family to get rid of all foreign gods, and put on new clothes. God demands absolute loyalty from all of His children, and following his wrestling experience, Jacob understood that in his heart. God promised Israel that His plan would now pass on to him to follow. He was no longer in the background merely observing, he was to be a participant.

Unfortunately, Jacob would never eliminate the problems incurred from his polygamous lifestyle. In our language today, we would articulate that his was a dysfunctional family. His last years were spent watching his children make mistakes and experiencing intense heartache over and over. One bright spot at the end of his life cannot be ignored. His beloved son, Joseph, who he thought had been dead for years, was found in Egypt. In an incredible turn of events, he saw his son again, moved to be with him in Egypt, and was allowed to spend his last years with his grandchildren there.



## “Parallel”

### Genesis 37-50

Few stories are as thoroughly documented in the Bible as is the life of Joseph. More time is spent with the tragedies and triumphs in his life, than with any of the other patriarchs. A careful study of these twenty-four chapters in Genesis reveals an excellent, real life example, of a man who lived his life by the concept laid out by the words of Philippians 4:8. The Bible does not give any record that God ever appeared to Joseph as He had to Abraham and Isaac, yet the life of Joseph is a shining example of a godly man facing incredible challenges well. The hand of God is clearly evident in his experiences, and Joseph never doubted that fact, even though, on the surface, his troubles were tremendous. Joseph modeled the walk of a godly Christian in a dark world.

Beyond the lessons to be gleaned from the individual episodes in the adventures of Joseph, lies a remarkable parallel between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus. God uses this method, in the Bible, to teach truths that might otherwise be overlooked, and to tie His Word together. Biblical history is more than a mere retelling of events. There exists an underlying spiritual truth intended to be discovered and understood. The Bible is not a random assortment of various stories assembled by man. It is the Word of God, carefully presented, and astonishingly interconnected, to produce the most incredible document ever seen by man. What follows, are a few of the parallels to be found in the events in the lives of Joseph and Jesus.

1. The birth of Joseph and the birth of Jesus were both miracles.
2. The Bible specifically mentions that Israel loved Joseph. Several times in scripture we find God saying that He loved His Son.
3. Joseph knew he would be a ruler someday. His dreams pointed that out early in his life. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

4. Joseph was sent to his brothers, who were out in the fields nearly one hundred miles away. Jesus came all the way from Heaven.
5. Joseph was rejected by his family. Isaiah 53 records that Jesus was rejected also.
6. Both obeyed their respective fathers.
7. Both were sold for a sum of money.
8. There was a plan afoot in both of their lives that placed them at risk of death. Their own brothers wanted to kill them. For Joseph, it was his physical brothers. For Jesus, it was his own people, the Jews.
9. Joseph was jailed in Egypt. Jesus was counted with the transgressors.
10. Joseph was the physical savior of the world in his day. Jesus was the physical and spiritual savior of the world.
11. Joseph took an Egyptian bride—a Gentile. The church, full of Gentiles, is the bride of Christ.
12. Joseph was thirty years old in the court of Pharaoh. Jesus began His ministry at thirty.
13. Joseph served his brothers food when they came to him. Jesus is The Bread of Life.
14. Joseph made himself known to his brothers at a feast. Christians will one day take part in the marriage feast of the Lamb in Heaven.
15. There will be a day when Jesus will reveal himself to the world as Joseph did to his brothers.
16. Joseph understood the purpose for his presence in Egypt and why everything happened to him to lead him to that position. Jesus also knew the real reason he had come—to die for a world perishing in sin.

The story of Joseph takes God's chosen people into the land of Egypt. They were saved from the famine that wreaked havoc on the world of that day. But they forgot to go back home when the famine was over. Egypt was comfortable and exciting. It was also permeated with sinful practices. During the next 430 years, they ignored God, and delved into the Egyptian ways. God never forgot them. He had promised Abraham, Isaac and Israel that they would become a great nation by the hand of God. From that original small family group of sixty-six persons came a formidable nation of millions, as the story of the Israelites continues in Exodus.

# “Rescue”

## Exodus 1-4

Three and one half centuries in Egypt may have started pleasantly, but the Israelites came to experience the harsh reality of strict and cruel taskmasters. God did not forget them for even a moment. Their census increased continually, until the Egyptians began to be frightened by their sheer numbers. The once comfortable lifestyle they enjoyed transformed to a dreadful existence. Oppressed in slavery, and forced to accept a despicable form of population control, they slowly began to remember the God of their ancestors.

God heard their cries for help. He did not help them because they deserved his attention. God is sovereign, and does as He desires. He remembered his covenant promise with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and acted for that reason. His plan included a leader, who was introduced as a baby. Moses was recognized by his family as no ordinary child. Though they did not understand any details regarding this baby boy, they were led by God to take extraordinary measures to protect him, and keep him alive.

Moses was placed in the hands of God by his family when they put him in a basket in the Nile. Through a set of circumstances that only God could order, Moses was raised in the royal court of Egypt. The Bible recounts that he was schooled in all the knowledge of Egypt. That was a noteworthy education. Egypt, at that time, had the greatest library in the world, and technology and accomplishments that we are still discovering, even today. The first forty years of his life were spent in the highest levels of Egyptian culture. Secular references identify a Moses who was a great General in the Egyptian army. God was working in the deep recesses of his heart.

A study of the personality and character of Moses reveals a hot tempered individual, one capable of murder. That moment of anger changed his life forever. He had to vacate his royal upbringing and hide in the wasteland of the desert to escape with

his life. The next forty years of the life of Moses were years of God patiently tempering and mellowing his personality, until it was finally in a condition to be used of God. The word God then used to describe the character of Moses was “humble”.

Humility, as God uses the term, is best defined as power and strength under control. Imagine a powerful horse, full of spirit and personality. Unchecked, it is a very dangerous animal to be near. Put a bit, bridle, and saddle on that same horse, adding some hours of training, and the magnificent animal is under the total command of the rider and is ultimately useful. That is the Biblical definition of humility. God never intends for his children to become “milk toast” Christians. He does not quash individuality or character, but rather, He desires to use those spirited traits. Many of the heroes of the Bible had strong personalities, but they were under the influence and leading of God. It took forty years before God got Moses’ disposition bridled and under His control.

Finally, eighty years after his humble beginning, Moses was ready to obey God and lead His people out of bondage. God has never employed age limits, young or old, on his servants. Samuel served in the temple as a mere boy. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions as an old man of eighty plus. Moses was labeled as a man of faith, but God still gave him some supernatural signs, completely convincing him of the role He had in store for him. Moses showed some hesitation and reluctance at first, but God was ever patient with him. He was placed in the very presence of Pharaoh, where he proclaimed the message he had been given to deliver to the king.

God’s plan was to bring the nation of Egypt to its knees, along with the individual gods of the Egyptians. The people of Israel had been born and raised in an idol filled environment. The nation they served, worshipped innumerable gods. It was important that God’s people be convinced of the foolishness of these practices, that they recognized the one, and only, God. A series of plagues, brought by God, decimated the country of Egypt. It is interesting to note that the first three miraculous signs performed by Moses were duplicated by the magicians and enchanters of Egypt. Satan was a powerful presence then, and still is today. Ten plagues and thousands, maybe even millions of deaths later, Egypt was devastated, irreparably. The once proud, brutal nation never

recovered from this incident. The entire world of that day heard detailed accounts about these miraculous events and trembled at the thought that such a God existed and was leading and protecting a nation of people called Israel.

A significant blow was meted out upon Egypt with the death of every firstborn child, man, and animal in the vast nation. The Bible records that there was not one house in all of Egypt without someone dead that night. That night was forever to be remembered by Israel as The Passover. The Passover is one of the most eloquent portraits of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, and will be dealt with in detail at a later time. The Israelites who placed blood on their doorposts that night were saved from the wrath of God. The truth about blood and atonement for sin begins in Genesis and finishes at the cross of Christ.

Pharaoh was broken, the nation was destroyed, and yet, God had an additional humiliation for them. He commanded His people to go door to door and ask for items of value—gold, silver, and jewels. These they were gladly given, and so, Egypt was plundered and stripped of her wealth. The picture painted by the Word of God describes the nation of Israel calmly walking out of Egypt. Those left behind were watching the procession as they were burying their dead. Nothing green was left in Egypt. It was a depressing sight to see what little was left of this once great nation. The events recorded in the Bible struck the entire realm. This was not just a localized phenomenon. And, as you might imagine, there were many Egyptians who left with Israel. They recognized the one true God and were ready to follow Him.

One final blow remained. A change of heart occurred in Pharaoh, and he ordered his chariots and army to pursue and bring Israel back. They had, by this time, cornered themselves against the Sea, or so it would seem. God again provided a way. A puff of wind, walls of standing water maybe hundreds of feet high, a dry sea bed, and Israel crossed the ocean floor. As the Egyptian army attempted to follow, God rolled the water back over them and they all perished. Many bodies floated up on the shore at the feet of those watching. The emotions experienced by those who witnessed these events must have been incredible—most likely a mixture of fear, terror, joy, humility, and reverence.

God came to the rescue of His people, His treasured possession. The Bible says that Israel left Egypt four hundred thirty years—to the very day—after the family of Jacob arrived at the invitation of Joseph. There was probably no one alive who kept track of such a trivial thing as that date, but God did. The reports and descriptions of what happened to Egypt preceded every step the Israelites took. God adamantly made certain that the entire world knew what had happened. The stories struck fear in every heart that heard. He did not forget Israel, the apple of His eye, nor will He ever.

# “Law”

## Exodus-Deuteronomy

Israel had bid farewell to the oppression of Egypt and was traveling through the desert. God was leading them day by day, by way of a cloud. A group of probably millions, with no government or laws to order their new society by, relied upon God absolutely. With Moses as their leader, challenged by a multi-faceted social structure with many types of personalities, success would be a miracle. Remember, most of these people were Israelites, but few had been followers of God until witnessing the judgment of the mighty hand of God upon Egypt. At Mt. Sinai, they received from God a complete set of laws to live by, simply known to them as “The Law”. This set of laws governed every aspect of their normal lives, and especially, their worship of God. Through the Law, they would learn right from wrong, good from bad, and live accordingly.

Jesus said in the New Testament that He had come to fulfill the Law, not do away with it. That statement reinforces the idea that much of the Law pointed to, or foreshadowed, the coming Messiah. This discussion will focus on a handful of examples of that concept, pulled from the pages of the Scriptures.

Rephidim is an excellent place to initiate our tour. The Israelites had been moving about as an assembly at the direct command of God. The community lacked water and began to express their dissatisfaction. They congregated around a large rock, and at God’s explicit direction, Moses struck the rock and water came forth. They praised God for His provision and continued on their way. Interestingly, thirty-seven years later, they again found themselves at the very same location, experiencing an identical challenge. On this occasion, however, Moses was instructed to speak to the rock. In anger, he struck it in the same manner as he had previously. Water came forth, but Moses was severely reprimanded by God for his actions. This rock was a picture, a type of Jesus Christ, The Rock. Jesus was to be “struck” once by going to the cross. That was a one-time event, never to be performed again. Moses, in anger, had tarnished that picture. God

felt so strongly about Moses' behavior, that he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land expressly as a consequence of this action.

Most people have a familiarity with the Ten Commandments. Few realize what the "eleventh" was. Immediately following the first ten are the remaining laws. At first glance, it may appear peculiar, but the eleventh law addressed slavery. An acceptable practice in those days, it should be described as being culturally similar to an employer/employee relationship. The technical points in this particular law allowed a servant voluntarily to become a permanent slave of his owner. Due to the way slavery was to be structured and practiced among the Israelites, this was not necessarily a repugnant idea, and so it was a very real possibility. It required the piercing of an earlobe, and the slave was to repeat these words specifically—I love my master, I love my wife, I love my children. Let's move now to a New Testament thought. Jesus was voluntarily pierced for us. Jesus loves the Father, His master, He loves His wife, Israel, and He loves His children, the Church. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it.

An extensive portion of the Law dealt with an incurable disease called leprosy. Rules were in place governing how an infected person was to be placed outside the camp and avoided. To be declared a leper was a sentence of a lifetime of loneliness and despair. Leprosy, in the Law, is a picture of sin. It is to be avoided completely and disdained. There is an interesting clause that considers the possibility of a cure. In that eventuality, the healed individual was to appear before a priest, submit to ritual cleansing, and then sit outside his home for a week. What may seem incongruous initially begins to make sense when you contemplate the spiritual picture here. God is able to forgive us when we do wrong, but many times the sin has spoiled our reputation. The cured person was to be seated outside his dwelling for a week as a testimony to his healing. Interested or curious persons could come by and see for themselves that the individual was definitely now cleansed of leprosy. Likewise, a sinner may indeed be forgiven, but human nature is wary of those kinds of claims, until proof can be seen of a genuine change of heart. It requires time to re-establish a tarnished reputation.

In our fast paced world, many overlook the seemingly archaic idea of a Sabbath, a day of rest. The Law was adamant that there

was to be a minimum of one day of total rest each week. Failure to follow this command carried the death penalty. Why would God impose such harsh punishment for something so trivial? The Sabbath was, in reality, a gift from God to His people. The concept of a day of rest transcends The Law. God described the seventh day of creation as a day of rest. Some things are God-ordained and structured and are to be unquestionably respected. Marriage, the family, and worship of God are some of the basic tenets that should not be altered to suit cultural norms. God established them as He wanted, and they are to be revered as such. Rest falls into that category. Consider the following list.

1. The last day of the week of creation was a day of rest.
2. The Jewish day begins at sundown. Each day for God's people began with rest and sleep. Note the Genesis account of how the day was structured—evening and morning, the first day.
3. The Law, when seen in total, was filled with feast days and celebrations and Sabbath Years. We would be very envious to have equivalent time off from our regular responsibilities, if we were to calculate the total number of Sabbath days. A minimum of 59 days was commanded, but that number did not include implied travel time to and from the celebrations, or the Sabbath Year, or the Year of Jubilee.
4. The New Testament talks of a Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God. Our ultimate resting place, our completeness, will be found when we finally arrive in Heaven to be forever with Jesus.

The Day of Atonement cannot be overlooked. The Jewish rabbis referred to it simply as "The Day". This day was as important a picture of Christ as can be found in Scripture, for it pointed to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It was not a day for celebration. They were to consider it as a solemn day, a sad day. The day that Jesus went to the cross was a day of intense grief for man, as well as God Himself. All the activities that took place in the tabernacle on that day were to be performed by one man, the High Priest. Jesus went to the cross alone. This was also the one day per year that someone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. The Priest would approach with fear and trembling into the very presence of God to make atonement for the sins of the people. The New Testament states that because Christ entered into the

Heavenly Tabernacle with his own blood, we can now boldly go before God ourselves. In addition, the scapegoat that was sent off into the desert is a picture of how our sins have been removed far from us because of what Jesus accomplished.

The Law pointed towards Jesus Christ in many other ways. Some occurrences are quite understandable and obvious. Others are more subtle. The Law showed the truth about God. The attention to order and method was incredibly exacting. This was important to God because it all spoke about His Son.

# “Lamb”

## Exodus 12

Deliverance from Egypt was to be remembered by Israel for all time. God instituted the Feast of Passover to memorialize this turning point in their history. They were to recall how God released them from slavery and set them free. But it was so much more than just a trip down memory lane for the participants. From our perspective, we can see the foreshadowing of an ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who rescued us from our bondage to sin.

God commanded them to choose a lamb on the tenth day of that first month and set it aside. It was to be without blemish, an innocent, perfect animal. Each family was then to observe their cute little creature until the fourteenth day of the month. One could imagine that something that adorable, brought near their homes would become almost a member of the family. That was part of the plan of God. The sacrifice of that lamb was not to be easy. They would have experienced a certain amount of personal loss when the throat of that innocent lamb was cut. Likewise, there was tremendous loss felt by God when His Lamb was slain.

On the evening of that fourteenth day, at sunset, it was to be killed, roasted, and eaten with bitter herbs. The blood from the animal was to go onto the doorposts of the house, and when the Angel of Death came to that house, He would see the blood and pass over that house and the inhabitants. A somber, thought provoking evening for all.

Fast forward now to the New Testament where we find that John recorded one very special Passover. John is the disciple who quite often included dates and geographical locations with his stories about Jesus. The text says that six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany. That would be on the ninth of the month, because Passover Day started at sundown on the fourteenth and continued through the fifteenth at sundown. He had supper that evening with friends and the story continues the next day with Jesus entering Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. By the way, that is

the way a king of Israel would enter the city. That Triumphal Entry took place on a Sunday morning on the tenth of the month. You see, the fifteenth was a Friday, the day of the crucifixion of Jesus. Counting backwards from that Friday, you find that the tenth was a Sunday. The Law of Moses commanded the people to choose their Passover lamb on the tenth of the month. The rest of Israel was no doubt doing just that. However, the cheering crowds that hailed Jesus into Jerusalem that day, were picking The Lamb, the ultimate, complete, and final Passover Lamb!

We celebrate Palm Sunday every year in our culture. It is no coincidence. God put an amazing picture in place, and did not want us to miss it. His Lamb, our Passover Lamb, is Jesus Christ.

# “Light”

## Exodus 25

Never before had the world witnessed an enormous nomadic nation travel across the countryside. With the visible presence of God ever before them in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night, the Israelites moved with precision and order. The entourage was very organized and always moved in an identical manner. They never knew God’s plan for the upcoming day, until the morning. Their encampment could be for only the night, or they might remain for a year. When the cloud would lift and move, they would pack up everything they owned and follow. This required ease of mobility, and tents were fitting for the cause. Even with something as important as the building in which they centered their worship of God, there was the need for portability. God gave Moses the plans for a Tabernacle. It was, quite literally, a large tent and courtyard that could be broken down with relative ease and reassembled at the next camping spot. When a suitable site was determined, the carriers of the Tabernacle materials would erect the courtyard and tent. The entire assembly would then be allowed to come near to set up their tents. They were required to always camp in the same order, in a prescribed location, leaving the Tabernacle perfectly centered in the middle of the complete encampment. It was to be the focal point of everything they did. The Tabernacle was not exceptionally ornate, nor would it even be considered particularly beautiful from the outside, but it was very, very special. The building is, in fact, an astonishing picture of the character and attributes of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. We do not have the venue now to look at each detail. An entire book would be needed to discuss all that can be found in the chapters that chronicle the construction of the most amazing tent ever made.

A few moments will be spent here examining some furniture. The actual Tabernacle itself was a tent sitting just off center in a good sized courtyard enclosed by curtains. A rectangular structure, it was divided into two rooms. With only one entrance and no windows, curtains made of various types of

hides and materials formed the ceiling and walls of the structure. The first room was called the Holy Place. Day to day activity occurred there continually. The second, slightly smaller room was known as the Holy of Holies. That room was to be entered only by the High Priest one day per year, the Day of Atonement. The two rooms were divided by a heavy curtain. An imaginary tour would be in order at this juncture to help explain what we will discover here.

As we enter the tent through the singular door, it is noticeable that there is only one source of light for the work that transpires here. To the immediate right, stands the Table of Shewbread, a gold covered table with twelve loaves of bread, meticulously replaced each week. The bread reminds us that Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is our Daily Bread. Moses was instructed by God to place a jar of manna into the Ark of the Covenant. God fed His people for forty years with this bread from Heaven. The manna that appeared each day was also a picture of Jesus Christ. They named this unique substance manna, which literally in Hebrew means "What is it?" When Jesus came to this earth, many of the people who met him and heard His message had the same question weighing heavily on their minds, "Who is He?"

Directly ahead and center, next to the curtain divider, is the gold covered Altar of Incense. With a fire continually burning and smoke from incense rising, the aroma would be quite noticeable. The book of Revelation tells us that the smoke of the incense represents the prayers of the saints rising up to God, a sweet savor to Him.

Immediately behind the Altar of Incense, on the opposite side of the curtain in the Holy of Holies, is the Ark of the Covenant. This ornate, gold covered, wooden box is itself, a picture of Christ. The wood speaks of the humanity of Jesus and the gold, His deity. In the chest is a copy of the Law, (Jesus came to fulfill that Law), a jar of manna, (Jesus is the Bread from Heaven), and the rod of Aaron, the priest, (Jesus is our High Priest). The lid to this box had two angels facing each other looking down upon a bowl-like place called the Mercy Seat. This is where the Shekinah Glory of God would appear. When Jesus died upon the cross, the Gospels tell us that the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom, exposing the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies to the first

room. That placed the Altar of Incense adjacent to the Ark. We now have the right to go boldly before God with our prayers. No longer do we need an earthly priest to do that for us. Jesus, our High Priest, is ever before God on our behalf.

One additional furniture item is to be found in the Holy Place. Upon entering this room, looking to the left, one would see the only light source, a Lampstand of incredible beauty. We will spend some time discussing this object, as it prefigures the Messiah more completely than any other in the Bible. The Lampstand was made of solid gold, emphasizing His deity. Standing with its base touching the bare soil floor, we are reminded of the fact that Jesus left Heaven behind and put His feet upon the same earth that we tread upon. It was not cast or welded or jointed. It was beaten into its shape. On His way to the cross, Jesus was beaten severely, to the point of being unrecognizable. The craftsmanship that went into fabricating this lamp was so incredible that God gave the person who made it special dispensational ability. It was a remarkably beautiful piece of workmanship, breathtaking in detail. Seven arms protruded upwards, each holding a bowl of oil. With wicks in place and lit, the shower of light cascading down the intricate gold detail would have been beyond words. Jesus is the Light of the World, and He is to be the focus of our lives, just as that Lampstand was a focal point in the Holy Place.

One of the great mysteries of God is His triune essence. How He can be three distinct, unique persons and yet be one person is beyond the comprehension of our feeble intellect. It is sufficient that God says that it is so. Perhaps the eternity of Heaven will shed light on the subject for us. Until that time, we have a few hints in the Bible to help expand our understanding of this very difficult concept. The Tabernacle pictures for us all three Persons of God working in concert. Above the Ark of the Covenant, on the Mercy Seat, the very presence of God the Father was manifested in a blinding light display, called the Shekinah Glory of God. God the Son is seen in the Lampstand, voluntarily beaten for us, a beautiful example for us to behold and see, God in human form. God the Holy Spirit is pictured in this room as well. The Holy Spirit is never calling attention to Himself, but pointing us to Christ, and illuminating Scripture. The oil in the bowls illustrates for us how The Spirit works. Odorless, tasteless, and colorless, all but invisible, but still there, the oil is expended in a chemical release of

power we call fire and light. That light illuminates the Lampstand for all to see, making something beautiful even more so. The Holy Spirit works similarly. He is always pointing us to Christ, illuminating the Word of God for us, making God more amazingly beautiful to all who are looking.

# “Walls”

## Joshua 6

A dozen fidgety preschoolers sit in a semi-circle as a young lady begins to tell them of an amazing story found in the pages of a big black book. They hear names like Joshua and Israel, but it is the inflections in her voice and the look in her eyes that keep them seated and still. Her animated storytelling has them spellbound. The tale is filled with marching and trumpets and walls crashing down—everything a young mind needs to create a picture so real, that it remains with them forever. Educating children about the Bible needs to begin at a tender, early age. The method just imagined here is effective because it inspires them. They are challenged to use their ingenuity to fabricate in their own mind a picture far more detailed and personalized than a printed picture ever could. However, sometimes, notions conceived in the beginning years of education can cloud the true reality of the story. Details not required in that simple, early version of the narrative may have been omitted. Adulthood offers an excellent opportunity to revisit those childhood memories and adjust them if necessary. This article is an invitation for the reader to look at the story of Joshua and the battle for Jericho.

Found in Joshua, the sixth chapter, the story is anything but complicated. Jehovah God had commanded them to destroy the city of Jericho completely. All the inhabitants, men, women, children, and animals were to be devoted to the Lord. Simply stated, they were to all be put to death. Consider the realities at this point, and try not to cringe. The bloody carnage must have been incredible. Everyone, from frail old grandmothers to helpless little babies, was to die. This was straightforwardly God’s judgment upon them. Israel would simply be His tool to accomplish His plan, nothing more, nothing less. God reminded His people on more than one occasion that they were in the Promised Land not because they were better than everyone else. They were in an amazing position, with unlimited potential, because the current inhabitants were sinning greatly and no longer deserved to live there. The nations were to be destroyed completely.

How could God command something like that? It is part of His nature. Isaiah 59:17 records the character of God quite succinctly. An infinite God describes His essence in four words--Righteousness, Salvation, Vengeance, and Zeal. All the other words that we use to describe His character fall into at least one of these categories. To ignore that Jehovah is a vengeful God is to erase much of the history found in the Bible. God is Judge, Jury, and Executioner, and that makes us very uncomfortable. That is not all bad, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." God hates sin. He despises it. Yes, He is gracious and merciful, but with limits. The Book of Revelation delineates to us how He intends to destroy all that is sin one day. Jericho was a sin filled city, given every chance to change. The phrase used in the Scripture is that "their sin had reached its fullness". They were a cursed city that was unrepentant. They had earned their wages-death.

Jericho was a walled city with gates. That much we know from scripture. The dimensions of the walls, their height and width, were left out of the Biblical narrative. Unfortunately, archeology, at present, gives few, if any clues regarding their size. Assumptions based upon information presently available would conclude that the walls of Jericho were not very formidable at all. This writer would challenge that type of hypothesis. The implications in the Bible record are that the city walls were quite impressive. Remember, the original twelve men who spied out the land came back with stories of cities with amazing fortifications. Please weigh the following possibilities.

The uniqueness and originality of God are evident immediately. Joshua was given marching orders for seven days. Round and around the city they were to go, quietly. Millions of people marched without talking or shouting, they just walked along. What a daily parade that must have been. On the seventh day, they were to march seven times around, and then at the command of Joshua, they were to blow trumpets and shout. The walls miraculously came down. Everyone who hears this story probably has a different picture in their mind at this point. Influences from childhood no doubt come into play. Some see walls falling over, or crumbling, or maybe even flying apart, and then the Israelites scrambling over the debris and taking the city. But what does the Bible say?

The King James Version says that the walls “fell down flat”. That is actually a very good translation of the original language. Allow me to draw your attention to the word “flat”. If God is as big as we say He is, He is capable of doing anything He wishes. Consider this scenario. Instead of the walls falling or crumbling, what if God chose in a moment of time to release the physical bonding agents in the building materials of the walls, and everything instantaneously turned into the equivalent of dry sand or dirt. The walls would indeed fall down flat—very flat. The Bible goes on to say that the Israelites went straight into the city and took it. Dry sand or dirt lying on the ground could support that idea as well. God could have very easily extended the disintegration of the walls on down through the foundation layers, leaving no trace evidence for archeologists to find in our day and time.

Joshua pronounced a curse upon the city—no one should attempt to reinstate those walls or gates. If God had left the building materials just lying around with the foundations still intact in the ground, the temptation to reconstruct would have been enormous. After the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in less than two months with that very scenario. But with materials turned to particulate and the foundations dust as well, reviving the city defenses would have been extremely difficult.

Is there any evidence to support these possibilities? Admittedly, none, except that this proposal does not negate or discount the Biblical text in any way. To pronounce even one small entry in Scripture as being inaccurate is to cast doubt on all other difficult passages that do not seem to line up with our thought patterns. That can be a slippery slope indeed.



## “Ed”

### Joshua 22

Conquering and possessing the Promised Land had been a long, arduous task. With many mistakes along the way, the Israelites were no longer as dedicated to the cause as they once were. Joshua aged, and the intensity and commitment of the people waned. They decided to call a halt to the conquest for a while, and the sad truth is that they never concluded what they started. God had clearly delineated for them the exact geographical boundaries for each of the twelve tribes to inhabit. He had promised them unequivocal success if they would but obey Him. All they had to do was walk in and claim the land—flowing with milk and honey, with houses they didn’t have to build, trees they didn’t have to plant, and crops already in the ground—absolutely free. They grew tired and complacent, not willing to trust God entirely.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, had requested that they be allowed to reside on the East side of the Jordan River. God permitted it, but do not think for a minute that it is what God would have preferred. He simply allowed them to live there, knowing full well that problems would lie ahead of them if they refused His perfect inheritance in the Promised Land. The two and one half tribes had committed themselves to cross over the Jordan with the rest of the nation and assist the other tribes as they conquered the land. Much time passed. Having kept their word, tired and worn, they wanted to go home. Joshua warned them explicitly to keep the commands of God, and never forget Him.

With permission to leave granted to them by Joshua, they headed for their inheritance. Upon reaching the Jordan River, they decided to build a very large, imposing altar to God. All of Israel heard of it and misinterpreted their actions. Thinking that the two and one half tribes had turned their backs on God, they prepared to go to war with their own brothers. Tempers flared until it was learned that the tribes that they had assumed to be rebellious weren’t wayward after all. The explanation given for their

questionable behavior was this—they had fear and concern that someday, they would no longer be considered part of Israel because they lived on the East side of the Jordan. The dramatic altar was to be a witness to future generations that there was indeed a link between the two groups of people. The clarification calmed emotions, and everyone went their separate ways.

Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh called their altar “Ed”, which means “a witness”. On the surface, the building of this monument seems like an appropriate gesture. A more in-depth look at the altar named Ed exposes a few complications. First, the nation of Israel was to have one and only one altar, and God had mandated that it be located in front of the Tabernacle in Israel. Sacrifices were to be offered only there. Ed was a bloodless altar, and represents the theology of today that ignores the blood sacrifice of Jesus. The church today is a divided entity. There are those that hold to the fundamental truths of the Word, and others who define the Word down so far as to try to make it say what “their itching ears want to hear”. The actions of these errant Israelites were indicative of their true hearts. Many hundreds of years later, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and visited the Gadarenes. That visit was memorable. They were pig farmers, a ceremonially unclean animal under the Law. They had a problem with demonic possession, and upon seeing Jesus work miracles, they told Him, in no uncertain terms, to leave their land.

Liberalism has divided the Church. It has erected a bloodless altar named Ed, redefined Bible stories as mere legends, and ignored the true Christ in favor of caring for unclean things—all in the name of religion.

# “Circles”

## Judges

Solomon stated that there is “nothing new under the sun.” The book of Judges is a shining example of that truth displayed in the lives of the people of Israel. This portion of their story could be called the Circle of History. Round and round they would go in an ever cyclical pattern. From the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel, thirteen leaders arose in Israel to lead the nation. The theme and premise of the narrative was always the same.

1. The nation served God.
2. The nation turned from God.
3. The nation was sold into slavery or war.
4. The nation cried out to God in their distress.
5. The nation repented of their ungodly ways.
6. The nation watched as God raised up a judge.
7. The nation was saved by the judge.
8. The nation served God.

The Circles rolled on for many years. Only the names and a few details changed from one cycle to another. It has been said that “those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it”. That truth became very evident, as each new generation of Israel seemed bound to the Circles, never learning the lessons of their fathers and grandfathers. A brief look into several of these stories will highlight the typical difficulties faced by God’s chosen people.

Shamgar is not a commonly recognized name. He was the third judge to lead Israel during this bleak era of their existence. We find only one verse in Scripture devoted to this man, but quite a lesson for anyone who has their heart set on serving God. An entire lifetime of accomplishments and experiences are totally ignored except one that God found worthy of recounting in His Word. Shamgar put to death six hundred Philistines with an ox goad. Let’s put that into different words. With nothing but a pointed stick, he did what God commanded him to do! How many times do we find ourselves thinking that we need this or that great thing before we

can accomplish wonderful things? Shamgar needed only a stick. He used what he had, and God thought it worthy to remind us that it is not our money, or our programs in the church, that will usher in success. It is God, working through our simple obedience.

The adventures of Gideon are a favorite among small children. He was a man chosen by God to lead his people out from under their oppression. The Bible first mentioned him as threshing wheat in a winepress. Normally, that process occurs on the top of a hill where there is a breeze, not down in a secreted hole in the valley. He was hiding from the Midianites who were ravaging the country, and confiscating everything they found. God appeared to him and communicated to him His plans. Gideon was to be a mighty man of valor, not a scared, timid farmer. He needed to be convinced. So he asked God for physical proof of His promises, and the Bible says that one night the fleece was wet, the next night it was dry. Gideon's doubts were assuaged by a very patient, loving God who was willing to go the extra distance with a man who had some initial reservations. After the nation recognized him as a man chosen by God to lead them, an army gathered around him, but God whittled the size of that huge army down from thirty-two thousand to just three hundred men, none with a normal weapon of war. The odds were unthinkable, three hundred unarmed men against the numberless hordes of Midian and Amalek. But God. A statement that, when factored into any equation, changes the outcome drastically. The three hundred carried clay jars, lights, and trumpets and surrounded the enemy encampment. At the signal, they simultaneously broke the jars. The torches burned brightly in the darkness, and then they blew their trumpets loudly and shouted. The armies of Midian and Amalek turned on each other in the confusion, and Israel, through God and Gideon, won a great victory that day.

The attack orchestrated by Gideon pictures for us a spiritual lesson not to be overlooked. We are the jars of clay, useless to God unless broken. Our humbleness is of great value to Him, for only after we have set our own ideas and pride aside will we be ready to do things as God desires. The torches that were exposed when the jars were shattered, depicts for us the illumination that we as Christians carry inside us, the truth of the Gospel. We are to let our light shine in a very dark world. The trumpet call is a very clear, piercing sound. Our message to this

dark world should be as distinct and concise. We have a great message to proclaim, and like Gideon, we have God on our side.

The thirteenth judge also has a familiar name, Samson. The Biblical account of his life actually begins just prior to his conception. He was a promised child, a gift to his mother, but ultimately, a gift to the nation of Israel, a deliverer. God told his parents that Samson was to be a Nazarite from birth. That label comes from the Law, and in the book of Numbers, we find that designation had a threefold constitution. He was not to drink wine, a picture of earthly cheer. His joy was to be in the Lord alone. His hair was to never be cut. The New Testament refers to a man with long hair as being shameful. He was to be willing to endure dishonor. And he was not allowed to go near a dead body. Never attending a funeral indicated that there were no natural claims on him—he was to put God first, always. All three of those ideas apply to the walk of a Christian today.

To study the life of Samson is to see a life of failure. His personal story is filled with sin and seeming aimless attempts at success. Anger and immorality hardly seem acceptable character traits for a leader, but they were his calling card. He could have been so much more than a man noted for amazing physical strength. Instead of using his muscle to lead, he died under the rubble of a pagan temple, and we are left wondering what could have been.



# “Kinsman”

## Ruth

Though the story of Ruth takes place many years ago in the days of the judges, it has direct and current lessons for us today. The Bible recounts for us the beautiful character qualities of Ruth, and her personal search for the One True God and His salvation. Contained in the story are events that describe family, displacement, death, sadness, marriage, more death, bitterness, loyalty, romance, love, redemption, another marriage, and birth—in that order.

**Family:** The basic building block of God’s society. We find it instituted in Genesis, reinforced in the Law, and under attack in our day. The book of Ruth opens with a description of a small family with everyday struggles. A poor decision was implemented, and the family suffered as a result.

**Displacement:** To escape the struggles imposed by a famine, the choice was made to relocate the little family to a foreign country. That was in direct violation of the recommendations of God. Exposure to the pagan idolatry of those godless people was not an acceptable thought.

**Death:** After some time there, the father died, compounding the difficulties faced by the family members. The spiritual leader of this little family was gone.

**Sadness:** A natural emotion at the tremendous loss suffered. The culture of the day was not kind to widows and orphans. And with the spiritual guidance of the father missing, the children made some potentially disastrous commitments.

**Marriage:** They married foreign women. A practice warned against in the Law. Cross-cultural marriages are difficult at best, and under strained circumstances, such as these, even more so.

**More death:** The two sons died prematurely, leaving the young ladies they had married as widows, with no male offspring,

and a culture that will ignore and detest them. They were perceived as nothing but a drain on society, incapable of establishing their own security.

**Bitterness:** How many disappointments can one heart absorb before sadness becomes soured and bitter. Naomi allowed her frustrations to take root. She became a sad, pathetic woman who was angry with the life she had been dealt.

**Loyalty:** Finally realizing the error of residing in a godless environment, she resolved to go home. The two daughters-in-law were encouraged to go back home and attempt to build something of the little they had left. One went, and one stayed with Naomi. Ruth had grown up in an unspeakably grotesque religious environment, and for the first time in her life, she caught a glimpse of the true God. She was not about to lose that. She chose to remain with Naomi, even though it would probably mean a life forever plagued with poverty and disdain. Loyalty may be problematic at times, but it is advisedly a character trait worth nurturing. Our ultimate allegiance is always toward God. The prodigal family returned.

**Romance:** In an attempt to provide for their basic needs, Naomi convinced Ruth to glean in the fields for grain. The providence of God placed her in a field belonging to Boaz, a righteous, godly relative. They were introduced at about ten in the morning, and by noon, he had invited her to have lunch with him. Boaz recognized a quality woman when he encountered one.

**Love:** Six weeks passed, and Boaz had definitely taken notice of her. He encouraged his harvesters to “drop” several bundles when she was in the proximity. Under the Law, they were forbidden to pick them up, but she certainly could. Ruth recognized that something was developing between them. We don’t often think of our relationship with God in this fashion, but there is a bit of romance to be found in the love of God towards us.

**Redemption:** We have no parallel in our culture for the law of the kinsman-redeemer. This is the only passage in the Bible where this law is played out. On its surface, it may seem archaic and even a bit strange, but it is a tremendous picture of our relationship with Jesus and the salvation that He provides. The law

simply stated that, in the event of a husband's untimely death, if there have been no children born to the marriage, a woman may ask her brother-in-law to sleep with her and father a child to carry on the deceased man's name. This law extended to certain property rights as well. The kinsman-redeemer was also the one who was responsible for justice in legal matters for individual family members. Abiding by the rules of the Law, Naomi recognized that Boaz was in an excellent position to take Ruth as his bride. But his hands were tied. Ruth must make the first step. He had made his availability known, but the law of the kinsman-redeemer declared that the woman must ask the kinsman to do for her what the Law required. So Naomi urged Ruth to ask the question. Understand that the kinsman had every right to refuse. But the refusal would engender some open humiliation, as the request was usually made in a very public way. Ruth had class. She did not wish to embarrass or disgrace Boaz, should he decide to not take her as a bride, so the plan was formulated to approach him quietly at night in a very refined, dignified way. If he then refused, it would only affect the two of them. The request, however, was enthusiastically accepted. Boaz then took care of all of the details required by the Law.

Marriage: Ruth and Boaz became man and wife. Joy, love, happiness and completeness are in stark contrast to the earlier years in Moab. Ruth, a most unlikely candidate for this position in life—a Moabite by birth, a widow by chance, married by choice, and redeemed by her personal savior, Boaz.

Birth: The happy couple finish their story here with a child, Obed, the eventual grandfather of King David.

To a Hebrew, the New Testament term of redeemer would be more accurately defined as kinsman-redeemer. The Old Testament law of the kinsman-redeemer provides some interesting insights into the concept of calling Jesus our Redeemer. The Biblical narrative says that Ruth washed (we are washed, born again, forgiven), anointed herself (we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit), dressed in her best clothes (we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ), and she claimed her redeemer (we, too, must accept our Redeemer). Staking that claim was her only requirement. Everything else became the responsibility of Boaz. (God performs all the work in our salvation.)

There is also mention of a redeemer who was of closer relationship who refused to do his duty, and thus Boaz could fulfill the request. That nameless kinsman represents the Law. It cannot save, because no one is able to keep it. The kinsman-redeemer was also responsible for justice. If we claim Jesus to be our Redeemer, He is our Kinsman-Redeemer, and we have no need to seek personal revenge for wrong done to us, he will ensure that justice is applied.

The romance of redemption is a beautiful thing to behold.

## “Sam”

### I Samuel

Another special child walked onto the pages of history. A distraught mother, desperate for an opportunity to have a child to call her own, made a faith-promise to God. She exhibited her faith in her request for a son, and pledged that he would be offered to the Lord to serve his entire life. Samuel was born, nurtured for a number of years by his parents, and then he was shipped off to the Tabernacle at Shiloh where he became a permanent fixture there, attending and serving God. The faith and trust that Hannah, his mother, displayed was truly amazing when you consider the reality of what she accomplished. To present a son would be a bitter-sweet moment; sorrow at saying good-bye, and confidence in a son dedicated to the Lord’s work. Blend into the situation the concern that the High Priest, Eli, was not an outstanding, highly respected man. He was getting along in years, and was allowing his sons to do unspeakable things in the Tabernacle. The uncaring disrespect he showed was troublesome, but Hannah was confident God would take care of her son. A tender, impressionable young man exposed to such degradation and disgrace was a risk she was willing to accept.

Few people receive a personal call from God as did Samuel. An audible conversation with God would never be forgotten by him. And, in spite of those who surrounded him during those early years, Samuel grew to be a highly respected and revered prophet of God, a man of God like no other. The nation of Israel learned that Jehovah God was going to speak directly to them through this man. He led them spiritually, Eli and his sons were in no condition to do so, and God finally took them out of the picture by putting them to death.

The nation wanted a king. That displeased God and Samuel, but God allowed them to have their way and introduced them to a man named Saul. He was anointed king of Israel, and one of the strangest, most troubled men in the Bible arrived center stage. One

moment Saul looked like an outstanding man of God, and the next, he was brooding, depressed, and homicidal.

Responding to the greatest failure of Saul, Samuel exhibited his resolve to do whatever was required of him. Saul had been commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites, and their king Agag. Instead, he brought Agag home, for whatever reason. Samuel was furious, took his own sword, and hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord. The demonstration would have been shocking, to say the least, but God demands justice, and Agag had earned the death penalty for his ways. Samuel administered the judgment.

God turned away from Saul, and began working in the life of a young man named David. Samuel found him and anointed him to be the king of Israel, even though he did not take office until many years later. Samuel was probably a buffer between Saul and David. If it were not for him, the bitterness of Saul would have had more impact upon David. Samuel lived his entire life in the public eye, a true man of God, and yet he was a failure as a father. His sons failed to follow in his steps. When Samuel died, David moved a long way from Saul. Scripture is very brief about his death. The importance of Samuel was not his death, but the way he lived his life as a servant of God.

# “Dark”

## I Samuel 9-31

Occasionally, strange characters appear in Scripture. Like creatures of the night they move about, appearing in the bright light of inspection for mere moments before darting off into the darkness again. First Samuel Chapter 9 introduces an abstruse individual, whose problematical character leaves more questions than answers. In our visually motivated world, this debonair, tall, dark, and handsome young man, if alive today, would undoubtedly be well received by the general population.

Israel wanted a monarch to rule over them. God, being patient and permissive, allowed a man to be appointed as king of Israel. The individual chosen for this all important position was a young man named Saul. Taller than most and described as an impressive specimen, he seemed an excellent choice for the job. Following an initial period of esteem and admiration by the nation of Israel, a troubled personality arose to the surface. Remarkable moments recorded in Scripture illustrate acute and profound defects in his behavior and temperament.

Chapter 13 of First Samuel recounts a moment when Saul, rationalizing to suit his own ideas, intruded into the arena of the duties of the priests. The dreaded Philistines had gathered for war, and Samuel did not arrive at the specified time. As events unfolded, they were not progressing in the manner Saul had envisioned. His solution involved him personally presenting an offering before God. This encroachment upon the office and role of the priesthood was a serious offense before God. Arrogant disregard and disrespect of the Law was not a small blemish in character. It was a huge stain.

The darkness in the heart of Saul continued to deepen. Chapter 14 records an event that, under the auspices of a true leader, would have been a great time of victory and celebration. Jonathan, his own son, had just led Israel in a small but significant victory over the Philistines. In an attempt to look pious and

religious in front of his men, Saul made a hasty, foolish command. Not a person was to eat even one bite until evening. Jonathan was unaware of the oath taken by his father and tasted a bit of honey that the men happened upon when going through the forest. That evening, the truth came to light, and Saul was prepared to kill his own son for this minor infraction. The men of Israel came to the rescue of Jonathan, and refused to allow Saul to accomplish his ill-conceived plan.

The clouds hovering over Saul and his personality continued to darken. God gave Saul a very clear, precise command. He was to totally annihilate the Amalekites. They had proven themselves to be a particularly troublesome people, and God no longer would tolerate their presence on the earth. He failed at this miserably. He brought their king, Agag, back to Jerusalem. Others had also escaped, and God was not pleased. Samuel was incensed at Saul's behavior and, in righteous anger, took a sword and performed ultimate extreme surgery by hacking Agag into pieces before the Lord. What a sight to behold! God rebuked Saul that day and turned away from him. This failure of Saul was not a trivial matter. Centuries later, a descendant of Agag nearly succeeded in destroying the entire Jewish nation.

Leaving Saul to his personal flaws, God turned His attention upon a young boy named David who would eventually become king. Saul knew in his heart that God had turned from him and was now grooming His own choice as successor to the throne. This idea galled Saul, and in his bitterness and hatred, he tried to kill David on numerous occasions. His homicidal thoughts became actions against his own son Jonathan, and anyone else that stood in his way. Even innocent priests did not have immunity from his raging anger. The Bible portrays a man sitting on the throne who behaved almost as if demonically possessed. Saul had become a dark, brooding, depressed murderer.

Nearing the end of his life, Saul dabbled in witchcraft and the occult. Expressly forbidden for any individual, his decision making processes were in shambles. He failed miserably in nearly everything he did. Ironically, even his attempted suicidal death was bungled. Saul is remembered as a disappointment and an example to history of the conclusion to a self-destructive life.

# “Heart”

## I Samuel 16-I Kings 2

Red hair and freckles are not physical characteristics most associate with those of Middle Eastern descent. However, the Bible describes one young man in Jewish history as exhibiting those traits. He was portrayed as a fearless fighter, possessing a hot temperament. A man so fraught with character flaws, that many of us would probably shy away from him as a person. Presiding over the poster family for domestic dysfunction, he was found guilty of marital infidelity and murder. In spite of all the negative attributes, he was called by God a *man after God's own heart*. How could this be? The answer to that question necessitates a deeper look into the life of a man we know as King David.

That journey begins near Bethlehem, where David, as a boy of probably sixteen, tended sheep. God identified him to Samuel, who then anointed him to be king of Israel. We find out later in the Biblical text that, at this young age, he had fearlessly killed a bear with his bare hands! Even as he told the story to others, it was not in arrogance, but in humble recognition of God's mighty hand at work in his life. *A man after God's own heart*.

Still a young man, David traveled to visit his brothers, who were with Saul, fighting the Philistines. It was here that he was introduced to a giant of a man named Goliath. Nearly nine and one half feet tall, this angry Philistine, each morning, would stand in front of the armies and shout a condescending dare for anyone to step forward and fight him. No one accepted the challenge, and in naiveté, he volunteered. Or, was he actually oblivious to the realities here? No, David understood the power in the hand of God. With confidence, he stepped forward to fight Goliath with only a sling as a weapon. Take note that he grabbed five stones in preparation for the fight. As he ran toward the man, he loaded his sling and let a stone fly. It struck the giant in the forehead, knocked him unconscious, and David took Goliath's own sword and cut off his head. David's confidence and trust in God displayed here is multiplied many times over, when we find in Scripture the reason

for the five stones. Goliath had four relatives, probably brothers, who David met later in life. But he was prepared to face all of them together in that first meeting. *A man after God's own heart.*

The accolades David received became a thorn in the heart of Saul. David soon had to run and hide in the wilderness. A relatively large group of men gathered around him there. The Bible describes them as being fraught with personal problems of their own. David learned to be a leader under the most difficult of conditions. He made many mistakes, but each time, when reminded of his failures, he humbled his heart immediately and sought the forgiveness of God. His songs recorded in Psalms give us a picture of his heart—complete trust and reliance upon God. *A man after God's own heart.*

Among the many bright spots in the life of David, few shine brighter than his treatment of the son of his best friend. After the untimely death of Jonathan, David had a choice to make. The prudent reaction, in the eyes of the world, would have been to hunt down and destroy any remaining members of the family of Saul, to ensure his own throne and security. He had made a promise to Jonathan, and was determined to keep it. Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth was located and brought to live in the palace of David for the rest of his life. In this touching story are some spiritual lessons for us to see.

1. We are all spiritually crippled in God's sight.
2. David extended kindness to Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake. God extends his kindness to us for Jesus' sake and the price he paid.
3. David never mentioned Mephibosheth's physical problems. He treated him as if nothing was wrong at all. God has so completely forgiven us, that He treats us as sons and daughters.

David was indeed *a man after God's own heart.*

The Bible records the faults as well as the failures of men and women. It is easy to focus upon those blemishes. On a large white canvas, a black smudge is easily seen and gathers attention. That dark spot becomes the focus of consideration instead of the vast white areas that are unscathed by discoloration. David made

an enormous mistake with Bathsheba. He compounded that sin by murdering her husband—a man whom David had known and considered a friend for many years. Nathan, the prophet, confronted David openly. Nathan put his life on the line when he challenged David. The king could have had him executed right then and there. Instead, David immediately admitted his guilt and asked for forgiveness from God. In Psalms we are given a first-hand look into the private thoughts of this man as he dealt with this issue. His instant humility and heart condition are traits God desires in all. He was *a man after God's own heart*.

Few families have suffered as much heartache as did David's. Partly as punishment by God for David's behavior and sin, and partly because of poor parenting skills, this was a dysfunctional family with a capitol "D". Within the confines of his immediate family David witnessed disrespect, the untimely deaths of four of his children, incestuous rape, a political coup to take over his throne, and murder. Through all the sorrow, the Bible reminds us of the fact that David never lost sight of his God and the strength that can be found in a personal relationship with Him. *A man after God's own heart*.

To understand the heart of David is difficult from our vantage point. We see a boy with his sheep, a young man challenging giants, and a man with huge mistakes as well as huge successes in his life. Remember it was David who brought the nation together, who planned and financed Solomon's temple, and who wrote many of the Psalms that today still touch many hearts. One Psalm, written by David, places our attention appropriately upon the secret of his success as a man of God. It is not found in the Book of Psalms. It is a song he wrote as he neared the end of his life and is now recorded in II Samuel 22. Verse 36 places everything into perfect perspective. *Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness has made me great*. Our relationship with our Lord is based upon his gift of salvation. It is the foundation block that everything else stands upon. David also understood that nothing in his own self was of any lasting value. The gentleness of God, His bending down towards man in love, His tender care for us, His compassion delicately touching our lives—that is what makes anyone great. The understanding of that truth may allow any of us to develop into men and women *after God's own heart*.



# “Smart”

## I Kings 1-11

When the name Solomon is used, thoughts immediately turn toward stories of his wisdom and his building of the Temple, and rightly so. He has been defined through history by these two accomplishments. Often thought of as a role model for anyone in leadership, his personality and character were as multi-faceted and difficult to comprehend as any from the pages of history. Introduced as the son of Bathsheba, the implications and hints left for us to consider suggest that he probably was not much like his father David. Where David was rough and tough, a “man’s man”, Solomon most likely grew up around his mother. Probably a bit delicate, maybe almost a sissy, he was not David’s first choice for a successor to his throne. He was God’s choice, though, and David recognized that fact. David was the only king of Israel who lived to see his own son’s coronation.

God appeared to Solomon in a dream immediately following the initialization of his kingship. The story reads almost as a fairy tale. He was granted one wish, to ask for anything his heart desired. Most are astonished and impressed by his choice. A closer look at the request for wisdom shows a slight miscalculation. I Kings 3:4 states that Solomon asked for *an understanding heart to judge thy people*. That is a wonderful entreaty, but it is focused upon political wisdom. Solomon desired to lead the people well, and that is indeed an inspiring cause, but woefully absent is a request for spiritual wisdom—a situation better by far. Intelligence and wisdom that does not center itself upon Jehovah God is inept and doomed to eventual failure. He began traveling down that wrong road straightway.

God initially described the character and actions of Solomon by highlighting two key problematic areas in his life. Solomon errantly married an Egyptian woman. God had repeatedly warned his people about intermarrying with those of foreign nations, but that caution was ignored. Eventually, Solomon would have so many wives that even he could not possibly keep count of

them all, and many of those were of pagan backgrounds. Next, he amassed forty thousand horses. Coincidentally, God had specifically disallowed this practice as well. No doubt, the rationalization of having a strong military presence for protection seemed a wiser choice to Solomon.

Despite those slips, he is best known for his wisdom and knowledge. The entire world heard of this amazingly gifted king and his accomplishments, and they beat a path to the foot of his throne. God graciously gave Solomon a phenomenal understanding of the world around him. Every indication is that this was not just a general knowledge, but a scientific view of biology, zoology, ornithology, entomology, ichthyology, geology, and meteorology. In a world that had not yet discovered science, this was astonishing and stunning. Those who sought his audience were very willing to pay for the privilege. The Queen of Sheba stands as an example of the curious and impressed. The result of this prestige was massive amounts of wealth and respect, directed towards Solomon personally, but also by association, to the whole of Israel. The nation enjoyed the awe and veneration of the world of that day.

David had conceived and organized the concept of replacing the Tabernacle with a permanent structure. God agreed to the plan, but with one caveat. Solomon must be the actual builder. The funding, architectural plans, raw materials, and workers were all pre-arranged by David, but it would be the name of Solomon associated with this Temple. One of the most intriguing building projects ever undertaken was begun. An extensive record of the process is given, in complete detail. The craftsmanship was incredible, and reverent. No tool or noisy hammer was to be heard on the building site at any time during construction. The final product was a relatively small building, replete with massive amounts of gold, untold labor, and a price tag that would astonish us today. In the current economy of our day, to duplicate this structure would very likely cost billions of dollars! The world watched Israel in awe and admiration. They respected Solomon and revered God.

Solomon carried Israel to the pinnacle of their development as a world power and influence. Worldly, scientific, and political wisdom is to be desired, and rightly so, but more importantly should be the pursuit of Godly, spiritual wisdom. In the end, the

multiple marriages and taking of an enormous harem was Solomon's Achilles heel. His many foreign wives led him to worship other gods. We do not know how committed he was to these forays into pagan idolatry, but his presence there was reason enough to have been a tremendous problem. From history, we know what these religions practiced. Some were known to stoop so low as to condone and even encourage child sacrifice. The nation, and the entire world, could watch the wisest man associate with these idols. Human nature is to follow our heroes. God was displeased. Incensed might be a better word. In condemning the behavior, God also chastened Solomon. He was told that the nation would be split into two parts because of his behavior. We will find that the Northern Kingdom was doomed from the start. They never found a good king to rule them. The one tribe left for David's sake, the Southern Kingdom, struggled intensely. A few good men, but largely bad men ruled them until the final end came for the nation.

Solomon, a king known for amazing achievements, building one of the most incredible structures the world has ever seen, and his understanding of the world around him, did not finish well.



# “Gold”

## I Kings, II Chronicles

Construction projects are evaluated uniquely by those who have spent years in the industry. Subtleties overlooked by many, are noticed and assessed in the light of experience. The temple built by Solomon was a truly extraordinary building project. Biblical passages give a fascinating look at a surprising number of seemingly secondary issues and aspects involved in this amazing venture. Following are a few observations based upon the Word of God, and a reasonable amount of familiarity and proficiency in the arena of general construction.

To build a structure worthy of Almighty God was a thought provoking and daunting task. The process began with King David. He is credited with the initial idea, but was not allowed to see it through to completion. The requirements laid out by God Himself in the matter condensed into two major divisions of the total project. David would be allowed to design, engineer, architect, procure and amass materials, and finance the Temple construction. Solomon would be the person selected by God to administrate all the pre-arrangements, and actually construct the building and courtyard, and all the many items used in the temple worship experience.

By our standards today, a building with the physical dimensions recorded in the Bible would not necessarily be very impressive. The entire facility, temple and courtyard, covered less than two football fields. It was “off job site” that the effort began to take on monumental proportions. The Word tells us that Solomon had 153,600 people who worked in the stone quarries. There were lumbermen that cut timber in Lebanon, and metal smiths who worked out in the desert casting and fabricating in gold and bronze. As an enormous work force employed for all or part of the eleven years of construction, they assembled a structure worthy of note in any list of World Wonders.

Technical aspects of the construction details are no less amazing. Beginning with the stone work, some stones were fifteen feet in length, questions begin to arise. How were those involved able to quarry, transport, and place these huge monoliths so accurately that no mortar was needed? Any fitting of parts and pieces were done off site, for no hammer or chisel was allowed at the temple. Extreme reverence by everyone working there would have been immediately evident to any observer. The descriptions of the castings of the two pillars and The Sea show an astonishing comprehension and expertise to work in bronze. With the technology available today, these would be extremely difficult, if even possible. The foundry facilities in that era must have been quite advanced, for to handle quantities of metal that the Bible describes would require tremendous heat, and the ability to pour vast amounts of molten material quickly.

Compared to the Tabernacle from the wilderness march, this new building was absolutely beautiful. Remember that, from the outside, the Tabernacle was a quite plain looking structure. The Temple Solomon built was ornate and opulent in every feature. And multiplication became the theme. Where the Tabernacle contained one of a particular item, the Temple now contained 7 or 10! Only the best materials available were even considered for use, and the marketplace was worldwide. Add to the entire equation eleven years of the most accomplished craftsmen in the world doing their finest work, and the result was a magnificent structure as worthy of God as mankind is capable of crafting. It is of interest to note that most of those artisans were Gentiles, not Jews. The Israelites oversaw and organized the project, but the Tyrians did the actual “hands on” work.

God graciously allowed the Israelites to finance the Tabernacle in the wilderness. As Pharaoh had finally reached the breaking point and decided to let God’s people go, they had simply asked the Egyptians for anything of value. God so worked in their hearts that they were glad to give to the Israelite women everything they asked for, and Egypt was “voluntarily” plundered of nearly all valuables. A goodly share of that fortune was given to the Tabernacle and those that built it. Individuals and families were granted an opportunity to have an active part in the Tabernacle construction by giving to the Lord valuables they had

collected from Egypt. The funding of the Temple was from an entirely different source.

King David, during his time as the King of Israel, had amassed vast amounts of materials and valuables. These procurements were specifically designated to the Temple project. Solomon would never have to synchronize a campaign to secure capital or funds or materials. I Chronicles 22:14 is, without a doubt, the most “expensive” verse in the Bible. The Word states that David had accumulated and donated to the cause, 100,000 talents of gold, 1,000,000 talents of silver, and an unimaginable weight of bronze. At current market prices of today, the gold, silver, and bronze would have a fair market value of at least 250 billion dollars! The gold, 3,300 tons of it, is equivalent to nearly three percent of all the gold that has ever been mined in the history of the world! And in the days of Solomon, may have been half to two thirds of all the gold in the world. Add to the total dollar amount, the wood, precious stones, and the vast amount of labor. The conclusion one must reach is that Solomon’s Temple was the most opulent, lavish, expensive, and exquisite building ever constructed in the history of the world—fitting attributes for the place that God said that His presence would be found.

The awe inspiring edifice was yet one more cog in the mission program of God for that day and time. He had placed Israel at the crossroads of the world of that day, blessed them with untold wealth and influence, given them a chance to worship the One True God, and allowed them to construct the most incredible structure ever built. As the remaining nations of the world experienced interaction with God’s chosen people, they would see firsthand the awesome majesty of Jehovah as displayed in the everyday lives of His people, and desire to become a part of Israel and partake in the free gift of salvation offered to all who accepted.



## **“Broken”**

### I Kings 12-II Kings 25, II Chronicles 14-36

Israel was a nation selected by God to be a light to the world. They were to be an example to all of the majesty of Jehovah as He worked in their everyday lives. The promises given by God to these people were spectacular. If they would but follow His decrees and laws, His blessings upon the nation would be incredible! The unlimited potential of this people to have led the world was unrealized, but not forgotten entirely by God. The implication in Scripture is that one day, when Jesus Christ has returned to rule and reign on this earth, a time we often refer to as the Millennial Kingdom, their potential will be seen by the entire world. Jesus will sit on the throne and govern the world for 1,000 years—perfectly. The world will look to Israel in awe, and worship God.

The people of Israel turned away from God once too often, and judgment fell on them because of their unbelief and lack of trust. Solomon happened to be on the throne leading the nation at the time, but do not blame him entirely for the division of the kingdom. God gives us leaders we deserve. That truth can cut both directions. A godly, trusting nation may deserve a godly, trusting leader. A distrusting nation, bent on following its own imaginations, may deserve a leader with like character.

Granted one wish, Solomon requested wisdom to lead Israel. In retrospect, he should have refined that request to include personal spiritual wisdom as well, because the evidence of his life suggests that he fell woefully short in that area. A man who began well, finished poorly, drawn down by his marriage partners who pulled him into idolatry in the final years of his life. God’s response was severe. The kingdom would be divided, with nine tribes becoming the Northern Kingdom, retaining the name Israel, and one tribe, Judah, remaining with the royal line of David, because of God’s promise to David. The Civil War type split took place during the reign of his son Rehoboam. Solomon’s personal sin was the triggering point in the plan of God, but the nation as a whole, most

assuredly, was living sinfully as well, and was deserving of any punishment dealt by God.

At the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam was proclaimed king. He was young, arrogant, ignorant, and foolish, and his first judgment as leader was a horrendous mistake. Attempting to portray himself as a strong, iron-fisted ruler, he disenfranchised many of the Israelites, and they turned their backs on him in revolt. A disgruntled resident of the northern area, Jeroboam, observed an opportunity to lead an angered nation and pounced upon the prospect immediately. The fledgling administration, guided by Jeroboam, initiated a new direction for the kingdom by installing calf idols in two cities in the northern areas. Their intention was to provide an option for worship, to keep the population from travelling to Jerusalem. Jeroboam wished to limit the influence of anything related to the one true God. Largely, it worked, for Israel never had a good king from that moment on. Their sin would eventually destroy them and they would fall to the Assyrians in a relatively short period of time.

Throughout the Bible, God uses a unique method of recording history. Many times He will recount a complete episode or era, and then, almost immediately, retell the same story, but with additional important details. Genesis contains an excellent example of this technique. In the first chapter, verses 26-30, God tells us that He created man. Chapter two follows with a much more in-depth look at that creation story, filled with details that are vitally important for us to understand ourselves and our relationship with God.

A careful study reveals that Kings and Chronicles are indeed different in their respective records of history. I and II Kings are a documentation of the story of Israel from man's point of view. I and II Chronicles are a record from God's point of view. Chronicles emphasizes David and his progeny, the Northern Kingdom is almost entirely ignored. David's sin with Bathsheba is not even mentioned. God had forgiven David—completely. In Kings, history is given in respect to who is on the throne, Chronicles recounts from the standpoint of the altar. In Kings, the palace is front and center, in Chronicles, it is the temple. Kings is the political history of the nation, Chronicles is the religious history. A key phrase to understanding this concept occurs

throughout I and II Kings: *“Is it not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?”* God is reiterating that Chronicles is the interpretation of Kings. Both must be read and studied to understand what is most important to God.

The division of Israel was the judgment of God upon a sinful people. God has always, and continues, to hold his people to a higher standard. Those who have seen and experienced the truth will be judged more harshly than those who have not. What a sobering thought in our day. Our nation today has the opportunity to see God more fully and completely than any other time in history. Thousands of books, innumerable chances to hear the truth taught, scientific discoveries pointing to the awesome majesty of God Almighty, we are without excuse. We started well, but will we follow in the footsteps of Solomon and fail in the end? Will we be judged someday soon as well?



## “Trampled”

### I Kings 16-II Kings 9

Notorious couples color history in hideous shades and tints. We read of the activities of Herod and Herodias, Ptolemy Dionysius and Cleopatra, Phillip the First and Bloody Mary, Henry II and Catherine de’Medici, Louis XV and Marie Antoinette, but none compare to Ahab and Jezebel. Move them to the topmost spot on the register of evil duos who have disgraced the earth with their presence. Despicable in his own right, Ahab’s wickedness was magnified many times over by the sheer maliciousness and malevolence of Jezebel—probably the most heinous human to have ever walked the earth! Her complete and total disregard for any decency or morality is striking.

Jezebel was the daughter of a king who was a priest of Baal, and had murdered his own brother. This was not a family secret hidden somewhere in a closet. Jezebel was no doubt aware, and followed the example of her father well. Introduced to Ahab, they were married, and immediately set about their lives in active disregard of God, purposely quashing anything or anyone who dared to distract them from their goal. She is credited to have masterminded the plan that systematically killed anyone who held the distinction of being a prophet of God. Hundreds, maybe thousands, died at her vile command.

Scripture gives a few hints as to her personality and character defects. No doubt she was most likely beautiful physically. A king such as Ahab would not marry an unattractive female. The name, Jezebel, means “chaste”. She was cold, asexual in her nature, a masculine woman devoid of love and care, possessed with a passion for evil. Her dominant personality overshadowed King Ahab, and she behaved in the vilest manner in everything she did, using physical seduction to achieve her goals. After killing off most of the prophets of God, she imported her own—450 priests of Baal, and 400 priests of Astarte. An incident with Naboth and his vineyard resulted in cold-blooded, calculated

murder. This was the final allowance given, and God and his judgment stepped into the picture forcefully.

Enter Elijah. A man of memorable character and a strong, forceful personality, he was the only kind of individual who could stand up to challenge Jezebel face to face. A severe nationwide famine, an incredible episode on Mt Carmel, even the death of her husband, did not dissuade her from her evil. But God is not mocked. The law of reaping and sowing is in effect always. Jezebel was not immune to its consequences, and by the hand of a man named Jehu, justice was realized.

II Kings chapter nine is as bloody, sordid, sadistic, and gruesome as any chapter in the Bible. Ahab had been dead fourteen years, and Joram, the son of Jezebel, had just been slaughtered by Jehu. He had resolutely proceeded to the palace in search of Jezebel, to put her to death also. A normal woman might have run and attempted to hide. But true to her nature, (and by the way, a woman with a grandson twenty-three years old), she put on her makeup and slinkiest dress and attempted to seduce Jehu as he rode into town. He was not impressed, and had her thrown out of an upper window to the ground, where she lay, crumpled and lifeless. The horses that Jehu and his men were riding thoroughly trampled the body into the street, leaving behind a bloody, mangled corpse. Calloused to the events that had just transpired, he turned and went for supper. After a nice meal, he directed his men to pick up what was left of her and dispose of the body. Upon returning to the scene, dogs had eaten all but the skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands. Jezebel was removed from the face of the earth with an exclamation point.

Even today, many centuries later, it is considered a derogatory statement to call someone by the name of Jezebel. The Bible mentions very few women who could be categorized as wicked. It is interesting to note that the ladies who successfully attained that distinction were thoroughly dissolute. Male or female, the sin nature unchecked is a hideous monster.

## “Eli”

### I Kings 17-II Kings 9

God placed His man squarely in front of Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah must have been a rugged individual to stand up to that dastardly pair. He served God with confidence to spare—most of the time. There were moments of doubt and despair, times when he considered giving up. The Bible records the positive with the negative, and we see a man of God, a hero, convinced and sure of his actions, and a man of God, a runaway, uncertain and questioning his very existence. Superman only flies in comic books. In real life, there are men and women remarkably similar to us, but controlled and used mightily by the Holy Spirit. Elijah was one of those normal people.

We first meet him as a weatherman. God had directed him to inform Ahab that it would not rain for an additional three years. The drought had already been in progress for six months, and rainfall in this arid region was critical to survival. Elijah delivered the weather report, and proceeded to hide in the desert. God has a seminary in the wilderness that boasts some well-known graduates. Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, and Paul all attended that campus, and Elijah got his degree there also. It was in the desert and at Zaraphath that he learned to trust God on a daily basis. He was never sent a month of supplies, or a week, or even a full day of necessities. He was fed meal by meal, without fail, for the entire three years. During his time at Cherith, he learned patience and reliance upon God in his day by day existence. At Zaraphath he discovered that God is a never ending resource, capable of providing in impossible circumstances. He was also shown that during difficult and trying times, relationships with others are vitally important.

Three years passed, and the silence of Elijah was finally broken. He was now ready to challenge the poor leadership of Ahab and Jezebel. The showdown is well known by most, and was a tremendous public display of the power of God and the faith of His servant Elijah. The euphoria and excitement of that ultimate

mountaintop experience soon dissolved into fear and hopelessness. Like Peter in the New Testament, he took his eyes off the One, and began to sink into depression. Before we become too harsh in analyzing his behavior and condemning him, remember that he was not Superman. The Carmel experience most likely left him physically exhausted, and his emotional state was collapsing as well. In his despair, death seemed a reasonable alternative, the end of all the heartache. We find here that the rough and tough Elijah exterior sheltered a sensitive inner personality. In a tender moment, God bent down and drew close to his child. Elijah experienced wind, earthquake and fire, but it was the still, small voice of God that brought him to tears. The world watched the activities on Carmel, and it was grand and glorious. But the most lasting, life changing events in anyone's life are small, personal episodes of close contact with a loving and caring Heavenly Father.

The life of Elijah had drawn close to the final act. God had supplied a successor, Elisha, and the curtain rose for the final scene. A departure fitting for a larger-than-life prophet of God, a whirlwind and chariots of fire carried Elijah from the face of the earth. But this was not the last time we see him in the pages of Scripture. He appeared briefly talking with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and many believe he will be one of the two prophets who will be prophesying to the world in the future during the Great Tribulation.

Elisha inherited a double portion of the Spirit of God upon his life and was a greater prophet than his predecessor. He performed many more miracles than Elijah had, and none were as strange as was his second. The story begins in II Kings 2:23. Elisha was walking along when a group of young men began jeering at him and making fun of his bald-headedness. He called a curse down upon them, and two female bears came out of the forest and mauled forty-two of them. Many see this passage as an excessive use of force, saying that the youngsters did not deserve this kind of treatment. However, a closer look at the original language indicates that these were not little children. Elsewhere in the Bible, the same words translated as "little children", are used to describe Isaac at twenty-eight, Joseph at thirty nine, and others whose ages are clearly understood to be above thirty. These were not small, innocent children. They were old enough to know better and they would, in our culture, be considered adults. God judged them

according to their actions. God's man is special, and is to be respected by all. Recall that God is a God of vengeance and judgment. As uncomfortable as that may seem to us, it is none-the-less true.

During his lifetime, Elisha met many influential people. Naaman is a familiar name to most. A Gentile, he suffered the slow death of the disease of leprosy. From a nameless young slave girl in his household, he learned of Elisha, and the possibility of being healed of the dreaded disease. His meeting with the prophet left him angry and incensed. God had a plan not only to heal him of his leprosy, but to address his pride as well. The Biblical text goes into detail describing the accomplishments of the man. He was successful and honored in his home country. Naaman was told to bathe in the Jordan, a muddy, disgusting river. Repulsed by his treatment by Elisha, this command just added to his disdain and disappointment. When he finally set his pride aside, he was miraculously and wonderfully healed, and had a heart change as well. With all the people in Israel suffering from leprosy at the time, this foreigner was the only one God chose to heal.

The Old Testament is replete with pictures, or types, of New Testament truths. One episode in the life of Elisha is worthy of a second look. An un-named prophet of God had passed away, leaving his wife and family saddled with an unfortunate amount of debt. In the stress of her heart, the woman came to Elisha for help. He told her to gather jars into her house, *not just a few*, then close the door and pour oil into those very jars. The Bible says that the oil kept flowing until every jar was full. She then sold the oil and paid the creditors their money.

Oil, in the Bible, is often times a picture, or type, of the Holy Spirit. Such is the case in this passage. As Christians, we know that we are called by God to serve Him, but the task is impossible from a human standpoint. From within our own selves we have nothing of value or importance to bring to the table. However, God has a solution. We are but jars of clay, vessels, to be filled by the Holy Spirit and used by Him. In the story of the miracle, note that the only limitation on the quantity of oil was in the number of clay jars the woman collected beforehand. Likewise, in our own lives, we curb the influence and impact of the Holy Spirit by "collecting and filling" a limited number of "jars" in our hearts. God places no

restrictions upon the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Recall that Elisha requested a double portion of the Spirit of Elijah. What might be accomplished in the life of a man or woman completely filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit?

Near the end of Elisha's ministry, the king of Aram was foiled in every attempt to capture the king of Israel. God regularly gave Elisha knowledge of the Aramian plans. He then relayed the information to the king and frustrated the Aramians immensely. They made the determination that the "traitor" who was giving out their secrets was not among them, but was, in reality, Elisha. So, they came to Dothan where Elisha and a young man lived. The account in Scripture tells of a morning unlike others. When the prophet and his servant awoke that day, they were surrounded by the vast Aramian war machine. The young servant was terrified until God revealed to him a huge army of fiery heavenly host protecting them from harm.

Inquiry is appropriate at this point to determine if this is indeed the normal method used by God in dealing with difficulties that face His people. God's man was under extreme pressure and danger, and a supernatural deliverance saved the day. It is notable that Dothan is only mentioned twice in Scripture. Both times, there was trouble brewing for the man of God. Here we see an amazing rescue. God placed His hand directly into the situation and everything went well. Elisha and his helper were saved from hardship. The other mention of the location of Dothan occurs in Genesis. Joseph, a youth of about seventeen, was looking for his brothers, who were tending sheep. He was told that they had gone to Dothan, so he headed in that direction. Before he arrived there, the brothers acted upon their hatred of him, and plans were made to sell him into slavery. Joseph was definitely God's man for that day, but instead of saving him from hardship and difficulty, God put Joseph into the middle of seemingly impossible circumstances. Joseph never doubted his calling. He had no encounter with God as Elisha had, he never performed a miracle, and yet he served his Lord faithfully. God is sovereign. He may choose to save us from hardship, or He may choose to put us in the middle of it. Our choice must be to serve Him regardless of circumstances.

## **“Grandchildren”**

### **II Kings 11-12, II Chronicles 23-24**

It is said that an acorn does not fall far from the tree. So was the case of Athaliah. The daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, she undoubtedly watched their godless, wicked lives and patterned her behavior in imitation. Politics has always created strange bedfellows, and in an effort to align the northern kingdom of Israel with the southern kingdom, Judah, she married into the family line governing Judah. Her true character came to the forefront when her son, the king of Judah, was assassinated. Instead of seeking justice or mourning appropriately, her first instinct was to ensure her place as queen as she proceeded to murder every young boy in the family line of David. We shudder as we attempt to imagine what kind of animal would do such a thing, even putting to death her own grandchildren. It would be wise to remind ourselves at this point that there was a spiritual battle being fought here as well. Satan knew of the promise God had made to David about a man on his throne forever, and this was just another attempt to foil and spoil the plan of God. It failed in its intent. One boy slipped by under the radar and survived, having been kept hidden for six years from the bloody Athaliah.

A priest by the name Jehoiada administered the entire process. When Joash was seven years old, the time had come for Athaliah to be overthrown. The Bible says that Jehoiada showed his strength in this bold move. He had quietly gone about his activities, watching for an opportune moment to exact justice and place the rightful heir on the throne. With guards and Levites all heavily armed, the moment arrived in the temple, and Joash was anointed king. II Kings 11:12 records an obscure but noteworthy point. Jehoiada showed his Godly wisdom as he presented this seven year old boy his own personal reference copy of the Law. In the Law it had been commanded by God that anyone who became king of Israel was to pen a handwritten copy of the Law to have beside him all the days of his reign. Transcribing this Law was to be his first accomplishment as leader. One can only wonder how this act might affect politics in our day if it were practiced!

Scripture records no other attempt at observing this little known, but potentially life changing, law.

One can imagine the shock and surprise experienced by Athaliah upon seeing the little boy she missed. Screaming “treason, treason”, she ran for her life, but was executed after she left the temple grounds. The Bible uses an interesting phrase to describe the way the city of Jerusalem felt about the activities surrounding the death of Athaliah—*the city was in quiet*. A godless, wicked person in a position of governance leaves everyone restless and uneasy. This woman had killed many times over. No longer did anyone have to wonder who would be her next victim. She was her last victim—the wages of sin is death, and in this particular instance, physical death as well as spiritual.

Revival came to Judah for a short while. Joash had in mind to repair the temple. It had previously been mistreated by the sons of Athaliah. The king commanded the priests to accept money from the people and conduct the necessary renovations. Years later, nothing had yet been done. The priests had misappropriated the money for their own use. Joash made the decision to have a locked chest made with a hole in the top for collection of monies for the temple repair. This kept the money seeking, sticky fingers away, and suddenly things began to happen in the temple.

Memories of the final days of Joash are disheartening. As long as Jehoiada lived, his spiritual guidance given to Joash was significant. The elderly priest advised the king in a godly way, but nearing the end of his life, he was not as influential. After Jehoiada died, idolatry reared its ugly head. Pride and arrogance played a notable part in Joash’s last moments, as he had Jehoiada’s son, Zachariah, stoned to death in a very public way for condemning the pagan practices of the people. The end came for Joash as he was assassinated in his own bed. Jehoiada, the priest, had been buried with honor. Joash did not finish his life well and was buried in dishonor for his apostasy.

# “Fishy”

## Jonah, Nahum

Call me Jonah....Critics of the Word of God see a whale of a tale here. Others see an allegory or a dream, but Jesus referred to the account of Jonah as truth and not fiction. The book contains some fascinating New Testament truths that should not be overlooked. We will take some time here to investigate these ideas in detail.

**First:** This may well be the only book in the Old Testament that sets forth the idea of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our first hint is from Jesus when he refers to Jonah as a like example, or sign to the world. The wording in Jonah is specific and unique. As Jonah was swallowed by the great fish, he describes his descent into Sheol, or the grave. One basic question requests a verdict. Was Jonah alive or dead during his three days in the fish? Reading of the text carefully, suggests strongly that he died, was kept in the fish grave for some time, and then miraculously raised back to life before being deposited on shore. This concept fits perfectly with the comments made by Jesus, and God is definitely capable of performing something of that magnitude.

**Second:** We see in this first-hand account that salvation is not by works. Our righteousness cannot buy or credit us anything. Jonah 2:9 states that *salvation is of the Lord*. Orthodox Jews read this entire book on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Our relationship with God is based upon the blood that Jesus shed for our atonement. As Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, they repented and believed—and God forgave. That is an astounding declaration when you consider how wicked the people of that city had become. They were known for their extreme brutality. Secular history recounts that when they conquered a city, their common practice was to kill every man, woman, and child, cut off their heads, and pile them all in the middle of the city gate as a testimony to the world that the destroyed city belonged to them. These people were guilty of heinous crimes, yet God was able to forgive

and save—there is no record of God requiring penance before He would accept them.

**Third:** The purpose of God and his grace cannot be frustrated. God had told Jonah to go to Nineveh. He refused and tried to run away, but God turned him around in a miraculous way. Had Jonah absolutely refused, there is no doubt that God would have sent someone else in his place. God will see His plan accomplished.

**Fourth:** Regardless of how we may behave, a child of God will never be cast away in disgust by God. Jonah conducted himself in a most despicable fashion, blatantly running away from God, traveling as far in the opposite direction as he could. He had been told to go east to Nineveh, and instead, he sailed west to the farthest port he could find. God was disappointed, certainly, but Jonah was still His child. Even human parents love their children when they do wrong. How much more does God!

**Fifth:** God is infinitely good and gracious. Jonah 4:2 spells it all out quite succinctly. God is kind, merciful, gracious, patient, and forgiving. We see God judging the people of the earth with great finality, as in the flood of Noah. Another time, hundreds of thousands of people are put to death with a single blow of the hand of God, and we cringe in awe of the majesty and righteousness of God on display. With those grand pictures peppered through the Old Testament, it is easy to overlook the tender hand of God upon individuals as well. He is a kind and loving Father, bending down in concern for His own.

**Sixth:** Gentiles have a definite place in the plan of God. It would be appropriate to write Romans 3:29 across the pages of the book of Jonah. There Paul writes *Is He the God of Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes of the Gentiles also.* What took place in Nineveh was the greatest revival recorded in the Bible. One hundred twenty thousand people were saved in that time. The entire city turned to God—everyone. And all of them were Gentiles. In the Mosaic Law, there was only one requirement that needed to be met for a Gentile to become a fully functioning member of Israel. They simply were to obey the Law. That was all. There were no special sacrifices, no trial period, no exclusions pinned upon them. If a Gentile wanted to come to the Lord, he

would live by the Law, and everyone was to treat him as a brother Israelite.

**Seventh:** We are to love others as God loves. Leviticus 19:18 says that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. That is sometimes most difficult. Jonah struggled with this as well. After going through the city and preaching the warning message to all of Nineveh, he took a seat overlooking the entire valley and waited for the fire of God to fall and annihilate every man, woman and child. Jonah had undoubtedly either seen or heard of these people and their brutal practices. He did not want them to be forgiven. He detested them, but God clearly loved them. If we were in Jonah's shoes, would we have been any different? Because God loved **us**, we will see many of them in Heaven one day.

God is loving, and He saved all of Nineveh, every one. God is forgiving, and He forgave the unimaginable deeds of the Ninevites. God is patient, and for nearly a century and a half God dealt with the people of that capitol city, until they crossed a line. Only God knows where it is located, but once crossed, judgment falls upon the guilty. The book of Nahum recounts a promise and prophecy of horrendous judgment upon Nineveh and the Syrians in general. In this book, we find that God is jealous, patient, powerful, righteous, vengeful, and good. Those attributes require the actions spelled out in Nahum.

God has always had His hand in the preservation of every small detail in His Word. The faithfulness of the early scribes who copied manuscripts of the Bible is to be commended. There is no better example of the importance of accuracy and exactness in dealing with Scripture than the one found in Nahum 1:12. For many years, the phrase *quiet and likewise many* had no relevant interpretation, and was literally translated with fidelity word for word from the Hebrew. Excavations in Ninevah during the last century have brought to light the real meaning of this phrase. It was an Assyrian legal formula, well known and used in their day. In our culture today, we have legal formulas as well. The best known might be the words repeated by law enforcement at every arrest, commonly referred to as Miranda Rights. The Assyrian legal system was not based upon the same code of ethics that we are familiar with. Their culture emphasized corporate responsibility, where ours focuses on individual accountability. The message that

God was sending to these people was right out of one of their legal textbooks. In using the phrase *quiet and likewise many*, God was, in essence, telling them that even if their entire nation joined as one against Him, God would still overcome them.

Many years ago, the Russian leader, Nikita Khrushchev threatened the United States publicly when he said “I’m going to bury you.” We took it all quite seriously. The USSR had a huge stockpile of nuclear weaponry, and that made us very uneasy. He was not the first to use that phrase. In Nahum 1:14, God said that He would bury Nineveh, and He did.

The three chapters of Nahum give a very detailed picture of the fall of the Assyrian empire. Everything that he warned them about happened within the following one hundred years. If you are keeping score, the total is now approximately two hundred fifty years from Jonah’s message until total destruction. The message of Nahum can be summed up by Nahum1:15. Nineveh will be destroyed, and the Gospel of God will go forth through the world. We carry that same Gospel to our world today.

## “Three”

### II Kings 18-20, II Chronicles 29-32, Isaiah 36-39

History from a textbook consists of names, dates and events of interest. The Biblical record, divine history, is not merely a chronicle of past occurrences. There are spiritual truths cast, and many times hidden, in the narrative. Scripture details past experiences rarely more than twice. God saw fit to pass down to us a few facets of Hezekiah's reign over Judah. He did so with three distinctive authors, three varying viewpoints, and placed the information in three different locations in the Bible. That act flags this small portion of the historical record as noteworthy, even though the events are relatively insignificant and minor compared to the rest of the world of that day.

Of the twenty-one kings who ruled over Judah following the reign of David, none are equal to Hezekiah. If David was number one in God's eyes, Hezekiah was number two. His reign is one of transforming the struggling southern kingdom back into what it was meant to be, a nation the entire world would look upon with respect because of their relationship to Jehovah God. His father, Ahaz, had boarded up the temple and urged the nation to worship pagan gods. Hezekiah took his position as the leader of Judah upon the death of his father, when he was but twenty-five years of age. One has to admire his conviction and drive. He opened the doors of the temple again, and cleaned it. He, having discovered the truth of the Law, for the book had been lost and forgotten, reintroduced the practices once again. Temple worship had been restored after a very long time of neglect. Return to the Word of God always results in great things.

It is fitting that the first nationwide celebration would be the Passover. That meal in Egypt was a turning point for Israel, and an appropriate place to begin again this second time. Recall that the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken by Assyrian invaders during the reign of Ahaz. Hezekiah did one of the classiest, most proper and admirable things any king could have

done. He invited everyone from the northern kingdom who would like, and was able, to join in the celebration in Jerusalem. Many availed themselves of the opportunity, and a wonderful time was experienced by all, so much so that they extended the celebration an extra week in length. Revival had begun in Judah, a very rare commodity to be sure.

Hezekiah immediately began clearing the land of idols. The very successful campaign netted at least one interesting catch. Many years before, when Israel was wandering in the desert, they disobeyed God. He promptly sent deadly serpents among them. Many died, but God chose to supply a remedy. Moses built a brazen serpent, put it on a pole, and anyone who looked to the serpent on the pole lived. We are told of the parallel to Jesus in John 3:14-15. The pole, with its bronze sculpture, was a picture of the future cross that Jesus would die on. Over the years, there were those who attributed the healing in the desert to the pole and its serpent, rather than to God, who had performed the healing. They developed a more than mere sentimental attachment to it and began worshipping it, calling it Nehushtan. Hezekiah found this relic, called it what it was, and destroyed the four or five hundred year old artifact.

Midway through his reign, troubles came to him to test him. The Assyrians were a formidable enemy. Judah had seen their sister nation, Israel, fall to them in the not too distant past. And now Sennecherib, was at their doorstep and had surrounded Jerusalem. They were under siege and their situation seemed hopeless. We get a glimpse into the heart of Hezekiah as he took the threat of invasion and laid it all out before the Lord in the temple. How much better would our world be if our politicians behaved accordingly! God listened, and so worked, that 185,000 of the Syrian army died that very night. They withdrew in defeat and humiliation. But Hezekiah had an even tougher enemy to face. He became sick during this time and was informed by God that he would die very soon, and that he should get his affairs in order. He cried out to God, who heard his prayers, and gave him fifteen more years of life. The accompanying supernatural sign, the shadow of the sun traveling in the wrong direction for a short period of time, was evident elsewhere in the world, for even Babylon traced the odd occurrence to Jerusalem and Hezekiah.

God allows His children options. It would seem that He has a perfect will, and a permissive will. The first is always the best choice. The second can also be a proper selection, but there are pitfalls and potholes along that route that must be recognized and negotiated safely. The extra fifteen years granted to Hezekiah were marred by three substantial failures. Manasseh, his son, was born during this time. After the death of Hezekiah, the Bible describes him as the most evil king of all those to disgrace the throne of Israel. It was he who offered his own sons as child sacrifices to idols. Blood flowed in Jerusalem because of his actions. Manasseh was despicable, and Hezekiah a failure as a father figure.

Because of the kindness of God upon his life, Hezekiah became proud. Pride is a dangerous commodity, and he owned much of it. In his arrogance, he made an additional, potentially fatal decision. Babylon, upon hearing of the tremendous sign God had given Hezekiah, sent emissaries to Jerusalem to congratulate him. Personally puffed up over the turn of events, He committed an act that ultimately came back to haunt him. The ambassadors from Babylon were given a tour of Jerusalem. They saw everything there, including the world's largest cache of precious metals and gems. Babylon took note, and it was not long before they came back in force to take the gold back to their city nation. And in the process of collecting all of that wealth that Hezekiah had foolishly shown them, they destroyed the city of Jerusalem completely. The second greatest king of Israel started well, but finished so poorly.



# “Future”

## Isaiah

Our understanding of God is limited by our context. We are human, and find it difficult to see beyond the corporeal. Isaiah introduces the world to the most important part of reality— there is far more beyond the physical universe than we can possibly imagine. Heaven, in its unlimited grandeur, is befitting Jehovah God, and our feeble attempt to understand the superlatives fall woefully short.

Known as a prophet of God, Isaiah focused his attention and time on Judah. His book is sprinkled generously with prophecies and warnings for the people alive in his day, and as each came true at the appropriate moment, proved beyond any doubt that he was a man called by God. However, the ultimate weight of the book of Isaiah is to be found in the promises given by God that have come to fulfillment since that time, and many that still remain to be experienced by the world. The images that Isaiah brings to our thoughts point to a coming Messiah, who will rule the world one day in absolute perfection, sitting upon the throne of David. Ironically, the Jews of today have an abiding, profound respect for this manuscript, as it amplifies the concept that they are the chosen people of God and He will one day remember them again and reinstate them as the head of all the nations.

Scripture is intensely purposeful in the presentation of the Messiah. Salvation and atonement by the blood of Jesus is the theme of the Bible from cover to cover. Isaiah does not fall short of his role in the exposition of redemption and propitiation. The Old Testament is replete with foreshadows of the promised Messiah. Many are to be found in this book. Nowhere else in God’s Word do we find history recorded with such intricacy and attention to detail—prior to its occurrence. And no other texts give the unique insight into enmeshed emotions as does Isaiah. Passages such as the fifty-third chapter are well known by many. Not as commonly recollected are five that we will look at in this short overview of this wonderful book of Isaiah.

The concept of the Trinity has been debated for many years. The Bible teaches that Jehovah is Three and yet One. Our minds stumble as we try to wrap some kind of container around this thought. The reality is, we will not understand fully until we reach Heaven and see God in His complete Glory. The dark prism we presently look through reveals only bits and pieces and shadows. One remarkable view into the majesty of God is found in the fourth chapter of Isaiah. The context of this passage revolves around what we commonly refer to as the Millennial Reign of Christ. For one thousand years, Jesus will rule on earth with absolute perfection. Many things will be different in that day, as much will return to a Garden of Eden-like similarity. A question comes to mind—what part will the Holy Spirit have in the future? God is unchanging, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Continuing from our introduction to the Holy Spirit in Genesis, He comforts us, pointing us towards Jesus, illuminating Scripture, making that which is beautiful, even more so. Isaiah 4:5 says that *the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night.* The Israelites wandering those many years in the desert had a canopy very similar guiding them on their journey. Comfort from the extreme heat of the day, comfort and a light to see by at night, a wall of protection when needed, the glorious cloud was a type of the Holy Spirit. During the Millennial times, the perfect presence of God will be stunning and beautiful. His glory will fill the earth. Verse five ends with an interesting phrase. *For upon all the glory shall be a defense.* The word *defense* is translated from the Hebrew word for canopy. Traditional Jewish wedding ceremonies involve the exchanging of vows under a canopy, a *chuppa*. The ceremony's beauty is accented and made wonderfully exquisite by the canopy. The Holy Spirit will be present and active in the future and in eternity, pointing towards Jesus, and making His glory, majesty and beauty even more so, by His presence.

Christmas season and the accompanying celebrations remember the passage in Isaiah 7:14. As remarkable as is the content of these verses, so is the physical location they were first quoted. God wanted a face to face meeting between the king of Judah, Ahaz, and His prophet, Isaiah, at a very specific location. Few places in Scripture are as exacting in description as this one. That fact spurs some interest and inquiry. Isaiah 7:3 presents these geographical notes. The meeting was to take place at the *end*

*of the conduit.* God had promised David that his family line would always sit upon the throne of Israel. That family tree was the conduit through which Jesus claims rightful ownership of the throne. He is at the end of that line, the final King who will rule and reign forever. The conduit empties into *the upper pool.* In Israel, water is precious and a blessing. A body of water, a pool, is literally the word for blessing in the Hebrew. And the word *upper* elsewhere in Scripture is translated Most High when referring to God Himself. Jesus, the Most High God is indeed a blessing to all. The remaining phrase, *in the highway of the fuller's field,* is an allusion to an elevated roadbed, one that keeps the traveler out of the mud and muck through which the road extends. As we look to Christ in our everyday walk, we need holiness. It is essential to keep our lives out of the dirt and filth that the rest of the world so easily entangles itself in. *The fuller's field* is a laundry of that day. The only way that we can be truly sanctified in our daily walk, is to be cleansed of our sin and that can come by no one but the Savior Himself. It is no accident that God chose to articulate one of the promises of His coming Son at this very allegorical location.

Many begin their study of eschatology in the book of Revelation. Early in the book are letters to seven churches. Each letter includes a short descriptive phrase that clearly points to Jesus Christ. Chapter three contains the letter to the Church in Philadelphia, and in the letter we find the phrase *He that hath the key of David.* Clearly, it is a hint of the well-known fact that Jesus is in the family line of David. The mention of the key of David occurs only one other place in the Bible, in Isaiah 22, which brings to light a unique story. During the reign of Hezekiah, two individuals had prominence in his court, Shebna, a secretary, and Hilkiyah, the palace administrator. Interestingly, we first meet them at the very place we just discussed in detail in the previous paragraph. Sometime later, Shebna allowed his pride to become a hindrance to his responsibilities, and God condemned him for his behavior in Isaiah 22: 15-24. That is where we find the reference to the keys of David. They were to be taken from him and given to Hilkiyah. Immediately following this episode is verse twenty-five. To be grammatically correct, this verse should be seen as a new paragraph, a new thought, separate from the previous ten verses, but introduced by them. *In that day* (points to a specific time frame), *the nail,* (alludes often in Scripture to a king), *fastened in a sure place,* (placed in a solid position of responsibility), *shall be*

*moved*, (translated better with the concept of giving way voluntarily), *and be cut down*, (cut down in the prime of life), *and fall*, (death), *and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off*, (a load removed and put away). As we look at the description of what Jesus did upon the cross, a parallel shines forth. At the time picked by God the Father, He sent His Son, the King of Kings, giving Him the awesome responsibility of saving us from our sins, where he voluntarily gave His life at the age of thirty three. He became sin and carried an enormous burden, the sin of the world, to the cross, where that burden was dealt with and paid for by his blood once and for all.

As Jesus began His ministry on this earth, the Devil took Him through a time of extreme testing. Upon returning from the forty days of temptation in the wilderness, Jesus preached his first sermon in the synagogue in his home town. The account is recorded in detail in Luke 4. Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah, unrolled it to a passage we know as Isaiah 61:1-2, and began reading. It was familiar to all who heard it, and as He read, they, no doubt, followed along mentally. However, He did something noticeably strange when He stopped one phrase short of reading the complete passage, put the scroll away, and sat down to teach them. Upon confirming to them that He was the long awaited fulfillment of that scripture, they became angry and attempted to kill Him, but they were not successful. Of note, is what He did not read in the Scripture that day, the one phrase left out of the sermon text, *the vengeance of God*. His moment on earth, recorded for us in the four Gospels, was purposed to fulfill every aspect of Isaiah 61:1-2 except vengeance. Jesus came that first time in love and mercy and grace. There is coming a dreadful day, when God will unleash His frightful vengeance upon this world, in finality and judgment. The very same Jesus we saw in Luke as meek and mild, will come again in all of His glory, and judge the earth in righteousness.

Jesus will one day rule the world from His throne in Jerusalem. For a period of one thousand years, the inhabitants of this world will experience the righteous and perfect rule of God, a theocracy unlike anything that the world has ever seen. Isaiah tells of this amazing time in detail in numerous places in his writing. Worthy of note is the fact that only one remnant of the Law will be observed during that time, the Feast of Tabernacles. One aspect of

the celebration enumerated in Leviticus states that the people were to live in booths, or tents, for the duration of the feast. It was to remind them of their wanderings in the desert and how they lived in tents the entire forty years. The spiritual application for us today is that we also live in a temporary "tent", our frail physical body, as we walk this world. We look forward to the day when our corruptible body is exchanged for an incorruptible one. The Messiah came to this earth in human form, in a physical body just like ours. This feast, in its topic and practice, points subtly to the humanity of Jesus. What began many years ago as simply a picture, will become reality one day, when Jesus takes His rightful place as King of Kings. A God who became a man is truly an incredible thing to be celebrated. Zechariah 14:16-18 points to this concept. The Jewish rabbis tell us that one of the unique cultural traditions that the people included in their Feast of Tabernacle celebrations is seen in the New Testament. On the last day of the feast, barrels and barrels of water were poured out upon the temple floor and allowed to run out of the building. This was to commemorate the time at Rephidim when the Israelites were in dire need of water. Moses struck the rock at God's command, and water came forth for the entire company of people. That rock was a picture of The Rock, Jesus Christ. John chapter seven recalls one very memorable feast celebration. Verse thirty-seven of that chapter says that *in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.* Etched in my own mind is the figure of Jesus standing in the temple portico, ankle deep in the freshly poured water cascading down the steps, His arms outstretched and loudly proclaiming those very words! God in human form as a normal man, is an amazing concept, and will be remembered through the end of times.



# **“Babylon”**

## **Habakkuk and Zephaniah**

Scripture describes the love of God as perfect and complete. His chosen people, Israel, defied Him repeatedly, deliberately refusing to bow their stiff necks in reverence and respect for what He had accomplished on their behalf. God was ultimately patient with them in their repeated refusals to honor Him, and as a result, we can see from the Biblical account, the character of God in action. His merciful, kind and longsuffering nature did not destroy Israel even when they probably deserved such treatment. The honest individual will admit that their own behavior is, at times, just as abhorrent to God, and is deserving of judgment. We owe our lives to the fact that He is slow to anger. However, a line does exist over which a child of God should not cross. Where that line is technically, only God knows. The patience of God does have a limit, and we would do well not to test that limit. The prophets Habakkuk and Zephaniah explore a concept we will call “the dark side of love”. Consider the following story.

Under cover of darkness, two vehicles arrive at a small rural home. Some hushed words are exchanged between the three armed men as they exit their vehicles. One runs up to the front door, and finding it locked, kicks it open with a blow. All three then run hurriedly through the domicile, searching. One of them finds a small girl lying in her bed. He grabs her up. She is now screaming and does not want to go. She does not know these men, but they take her from the home, lay her in the back seat of one of their cars and tie her down with the seat belts, so she cannot move. All three quickly get back in their automobiles, and they are gone as swiftly as they arrived. As they drive to the other side of the county, they ignore many traffic laws. Moving with haste and arriving at a tall building, the young girl, still sobbing, is taken to the third floor where a fourth man has been waiting. She is laid out on a hard table. He places something over her mouth, and her cries are stifled. He then plunges a knife deep into her abdomen.

We think to ourselves, what an unfortunate turn of events. But a few key pieces of information were purposely subtracted from the account. The three armed men were policemen. The young girl was crying in pain, not fear. She had been home alone, and was suffering a severe attack of appendicitis and had called 9-1-1. This was a small town situation, and the law enforcement officials made the judgment call to take her to the hospital immediately, rather than wait for an ambulance. The doctor, waiting on the third floor, deftly removed the burst appendix and promptly saved her life. That information changes the complexion of the story completely. The trauma, caused by the actions of the policemen, was for the young girl's ultimate good.

God had chosen Israel as His people and His covenant with Abraham would not be ignored or vacated by Him. But they were sinning greatly and sin left unattended will ultimately lead to death. In His sovereignty, God chose to salvage His people with love—the dark side of love. No parent enjoys punishing a child, and neither does God find pleasure in disciplining His children. The necessary reprimand is meant to admonish and correct a bad behavior.

Habakkuk was a curious prophet, a man of many questions. His inquiries are relevant even today, and worthy of a closer look. He understood God's relationship with Israel, but as many today in our world wonder, how can God permit sin to continue and not be dealt with? It seemed then, as it does now, that the ungodly go along in life unchecked, able to do as they please, and the righteous suffer at their hands. God's solution to the uncaring, wandering hearts of His people was a nation called Babylon. Habakkuk was informed that the Chaldeans would become a world power, the greatest the world would ever know, and they would be His tool of judgment upon His people. The prophet then points to the fact that the Babylonians were a ruthless horde. It seemed unconscionable that Jehovah God would raise up a godless nation to judge His own people. But God reminded him that Babylon, too, will be judged for her sins, eventually.

The warning of impending judgment rang clearly from Zephaniah. The patience of God is not to be mocked or taken lightly. He will ultimately judge. It will be a righteous act, and those who are guilty will be punished. The chastening of a loving God, and the repercussions accompanying that act, are not

comfortable at implementation. Romans 8:28 reminds us that all things work together for the good of those who are His. The ultimate goal of God in the ensuing rebuking and disciplining of Israel, was to bring them back to Himself. They would see seventy years of captivity in Babylon for their sins. The severity of the consequences of their disobedience was mediated by the love of God. Displacement from Jerusalem was difficult for any Jew, but a hint of mercy is seen in the fact that God chose to send his people into captivity in the most technologically advanced nation of the day.

Babylon was a fabulously wealthy realm, a world power unmatched in any day. The capital described by ancient historians was one of astonishing architecture. A thirty story tall wall surrounded a city of two hundred fifty-six square miles. With stores of food, arable land to grow additional crops, and a river flowing through the city, they could withstand a siege forever, completely self-sufficient. Written accounts describe eighty story buildings inside the city, with indoor plumbing. This was also the home of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Reportedly, it was built by the king for his wife who was from Lebanon and was homesick for the mountains where she had grown up. Nebuchadnezzar promptly built a huge “mountain” garden for her personal pleasure. Historians describe it as a tiered structure, a multilevel horticultural paradise, watered by pumps capable of lifting the necessary amounts of the precious liquid to the top of his five hundred foot tall edifice. Full size trees and plants beyond imagination, populated the various levels. Incredible to behold, it was just one of many achievements of one of the greatest rulers the world has ever known. The Israelites would face difficulty, but they would do so in a most luxurious environment. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God even urged the displaced Jews to pray for the welfare of the country to which they were being deported. He clearly told them to flourish while they were there and that if the nation of Babylon prospered, they would also.

God chose seventy years of captivity for His people for a very specific reason. The Law required the observance of the Sabbath. Clearly detailed for the Israelites was the fact that the Sabbath rests were not just a one day per week occurrence. Among the many additional times of rest, God pointed to a special Sabbath

rest for the land. Every seventh year, the land was to lie fallow, unworked and unplanted. God had issued a challenge to his people. If they would abide by His commandments, their crop production would be augmented abundantly during the sixth year to survive the year of no production. In fact, He promised sufficient excess to ensure the need to throw out surplus grain at the harvest on the ninth year. Scripture says they chose not to trust God in this area. His patience simmered for four hundred ninety years. The Bible describes the exile in Babylon as a time that God's Promised Land would enjoy the seventy years of Sabbaths that it was not given during the time Israel tended the land for God. They were reminded by Him, on numerous occasions, how the land belonged to God and He was simply allowing them to live there. Today, we too are stewards and tenants, faithfully administrating the things that God has entrusted to our care.

During a period of approximately twenty years, the Babylonians successfully took Judah captive. The temple was looted and destroyed, the walls of Jerusalem pulled down, and the city burned. Those who were not killed by the ravaging Chaldean army were taken back to Babylon as servants and slaves. Only a small handful of poor people were left behind to work the land for the Babylonians. God's own chosen people would experience the dark side of the love of God for seventy years. Before and during this time of trauma, several prophets of God warned and explained in detail exactly what was happening and why. They had tested the patience of God and lost. The loving God who had brought them to the Promised Land removed them in loving punishment for their lack of obedience.

The book of Habakkuk, though short, is quoted by the great theological books of the New Testament. Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews refer to passages found there as proof texts, to support the challenges Paul put forth to the Jews and Gentiles that Jesus was the Christ, and that the ultimate plan of God was the salvation of all men. Habakkuk, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, records an amazing claim in chapter two, verse five. *The just shall live by his faith.* Our salvation is not found in our observance of rules or regulations. It is to be found in a child-like faith in Jesus Christ, and a belief in what He did on the cross many years ago.

# “Faces”

## Ezekiel

Scripture contains passages which are difficult to understand. The first chapter of Ezekiel is arguably at the top of the list of the odd and strange. God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and beyond the scope of our limited intellect. He has chosen to reveal Himself to us in small increments, glimpses of the awesome majesty that is His essence. We find in the pages of the Bible everything we need to know about Him. An infinite God revealed to us in a finite number of pages means one thing—every one of those pages are important.

Diamonds are the most prized of gems. In the rough, uncut and unpolished, they are relatively unimpressive. Their ultimate beauty is realized when a truly gifted diamond cutter creates facets on the surfaces of the crystal, allowing the light to reflect and sparkle. An analogy can be drawn to our understanding of God. As we recognize and define an attribute of God, we cut an additional facet on the face of the “diamond” of our understanding of Jehovah. As those facets increase in number, the beauty of our Heavenly Father shines forth. Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel 10, Revelation 4, and Revelation 19, together, define four facets on the face of that diamond.

Ezekiel struggles to find words to adequately describe the scene before him in the first chapter of his prophecy. One cannot read through the entire narrative without asking “What in the world are we seeing?” Hollywood would struggle to recreate what is illustrated here, but we will focus on one particular aspect of what Scripture has for us to discover. Four creatures are introduced in the passage, completely beyond our comprehension, with four faces each. That particular attribute is more than just a bizarre oddity, it has significance. The Bible is not a mere piece of literature. It is an amazingly intricately interwoven collection of writings obviously inspired by God and put together by Him for our use to understand Him.

Each creature had four faces; the first, the face of a man, the second, the face of a lion, the third, the face of an ox, the fourth, the face of an eagle. A parallel can be drawn to the four Gospels found in the New Testament. Luke wrote his gospel from the viewpoint of a medical doctor. He saw first-hand the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was indeed a human being, and Luke referred to Him often as the Son of Man. The first face mentioned was the face of a man. The second face was that of a lion, a symbol of kings throughout history. A beginning to end reading of Matthew reveals that he saw Christ as a king. Matthew begins that portrayal with his record of the Magi visiting the Child shortly after His birth. Mark saw Jesus through the lens of a servant. He recognized that Jesus came as the Servant of God, a man who learned obedience as an example to us. An ox is a beast of burden whose life is dedicated to serving its master. The final face was that of an eagle. The eagle represents divinity. Jesus was and is divine—He is God. No other inspired writer explained that more clearly than did John in the first verse of his gospel. And through the remainder of his book, he focuses on the reality that Jesus was God in human form.

Revelation 19 describes for us in detail, a rider on a white horse. That rider, found in verses eleven through sixteen, is Jesus Christ. When He returns in the fullness of His glory, He is described by four specific names.

*Whose rider is called Faithful and True.* No one is more loyal than is the faithful servant. Mark mentioned that attribute.

*His name is the Word of God.* Immediately, we recall John's opening words. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the great I AM.

*He has this name written: KING of KINGS and LORD of LORDS.* Matthew couldn't have said it better.

*He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.* The fourth name is actually a secret in Revelation. The greatest mystery of Scripture is this simple fact: Why would God, the Creator, the Almighty, lower Himself to the condition of his creation, man, and walk among us? His love for us is astounding, a great unknown quality to us were it not for the fact that He demonstrated His love toward us by going to a cross and dying a very human death on our behalf. Luke recounts in detail the human being he touched and talked to face to face, who he also recognized to be God.

Four unique Gospels, four unique faces, four key attributes of God, masterfully intertwined in the Bible. The Word of God is unlike any other piece of literature, and the deeper one looks into Scripture, the more there is to be learned. Never discontinue that thrilling discovery.



# “Commands”

## Ezra

Will any of the Gentile world leaders, mentioned in the pages of the Old Testament, be found in heaven one day? There is a probable answer in the opening two verses of the book of Ezra, and a fascinating, intertwined story included for the student who wishes to dig a bit deeper.

Ezra is the second prophet to introduce Cyrus, king of Persia. The first was Isaiah. While Ezra had a firsthand knowledge of this great world leader, Isaiah had never met him. In Isaiah 44:28 through 45:1 we find Cyrus mentioned by name and described by God as a shepherd of His people, who would rebuild Jerusalem, and who stood with his right hand in the palm of God’s hand—two hundred years before Cyrus was even born!

World history and the Bible overlay each other perfectly. The original Babylonians, who took Israel into captivity, had been conquered by Darius the Mede in a spectacular display of ingenuity. The ultimately defended city of Babylon, with its three hundred foot high and ninety foot thick walls, had a fatal design flaw overlooked by everyone but Darius. The Euphrates River flowed under the walls of Babylon, through the heart of the huge city, furnishing a never ending supply of fresh water for the inhabitants. Engineers had built a flood control works upriver from the city, and had excavated a large canal to allow excess flood waters to bypass the city. This kept a constantly proportioned quantity of water flowing just under the city walls, prohibiting any incoming boat traffic or other unwanted guests. The Medes recognizing the potential afforded them, simply blocked the gates in the middle of the night and diverted the entire river flow into the canal going around the city. They then waited for the water level to recede, and marched their army under the wall through the now empty river bed, and took the city by surprise.

Daniel was there, an integral part of Nebuchadnezzar’s government, and was transitioned to serve in the new

administration. As an old man of nearly ninety years of age, he became a friend and confidant of Darius. It was during this time that we find the story in the book of Daniel, of how he was thrown into the den of lions. The Medes had an amicable relationship with Persia, and began coordinating their efforts, eventually conceding leadership to the much larger Persia. Daniel was again invited to serve the new leadership in the same manner as before. It was there, as an elderly, experienced prime minister, he influenced the life of the new monarch of Persia, Cyrus. The effect and impact of Daniel's walk with God is seen in the words of Cyrus, recorded by Ezra. God stirred the heart of this leader of the known world into action. In his own words, the man acknowledged who God was and recognized that He had placed him in his place of leadership. He fully understood his role before an Almighty God, and responded accordingly, giving unprecedented opportunity for anyone who wished, to go back home to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Every indication is that the heart of this Gentile world leader was tenderly bent upon serving God. This writer is of the opinion that we will see Cyrus again, one day in eternity.

Accomplishments define a man. Look at what he does, and you will also see the focal point of his heart. That was true of Cyrus, and in the case of the prophet Ezra, we find a man whose life and actions revolved around his lifelong pursuit of the Word of God. He is described as a student of the Word, a scribe, and his achievements stand as testimony to that fact.

Ezra was of the priestly line, but because there was no temple in Jerusalem, he could not serve in that capacity. So he devoted himself to the study of God's Word, sharpening his understanding in preparation for his role in the plan of God. He probably wrote the books of I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah and was the one responsible for organizing the Psalms, playing a large part in settling the canon of Scripture. It was he who stood before those who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, and positioned on the first pulpit mentioned in the Bible, simply read the text of Scripture to those listening and explained the meaning as he went. The revival and reformation that took place from this unassuming act was stunning. The Word of God is very sharp and will cut the heart in places no other implement can reach.

If a theme were to be assigned to this book, it would be "The Word of the Lord". There are ten direct references to the Word of God in this short book, with the key verse found in Ezra 9:4. They "*trembled at the words of the God of Israel*". Seventy years of captivity had an effect upon the people, but there was no revival seen during their time in Babylon. It was not until the day that all the people gathered in front of the Water Gate, and stood in reverence as Ezra read from the Scripture for over six hours, that something began to stir in their hearts. They began to see that the commands of God demanded performance. Obedience and holiness before an Almighty God finally became an issue to be dealt with, and it changed the lives of many, drastically. God's Word is powerful. Ezra understood that well, and his life reminds us of what is truly important.



# “Building”

## Nehemiah 3

Nehemiah 3 reads much like a boring engineer’s report of an ongoing construction project. It is a comprehensive account of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. The captivity in Babylon was over and the Jewish people who had returned were struggling to bring their lives back to normal. With the leadership of Nehemiah, the plan was orchestrated to reconstruct the damaged walls surrounding Jerusalem. The Babylonians had left the walls in ruin seventy years previous. Restoring the walls was a matter of pride, identity, and security. The work was difficult and even dangerous. God approved and took note of all of it and recorded this footnote in history for us to see. With organization in place, the construction project began, and finished less than two months later.

A beautiful spiritual lesson can be found in the names of the gates of Jerusalem mentioned here. The plan of salvation and our ensuing Christian walk can be seen in detail as we take a tour of the walls of Jerusalem by way of a construction progress report.

*The Sheep Gate.* We begin at the Sheep Gate. The sacrificial animals were brought in through this gate into Jerusalem. Jesus was the Lamb of God. He was the Passover Lamb, the ultimate sacrifice offered once for all of time. There is a notation that the men of Jericho worked on the wall next to this gate. Jericho was a cursed city, a city of sin. Jesus carried our sin to the cross, bearing all of the sin of the world. This gate also reminds us that we are sheep, wandering our own way, lost. Jesus is the Great Shepherd, who came to search for and save those who are lost. It is fitting that our tour begins with the person of Jesus.

*The Fish Gate.* We would do well to recall the first command given by Jesus to new converts. He directed them to go and tell others what God had done for them. As Jesus called his disciples, He said that He would make them fishers of men. In fact, He stated that even He had come to seek and to save that which

was lost. Spreading the good news about the salvation available to all is one of the most important aspects of being a Christian. Unfortunately, it is also the most neglected by many. The Fish Gate reminds us that we have an obligation to tell others about the love of God.

*The Jeshanah Gate.* Translated into English, the name would become the Old Gate. Our world that we live in today is one that accentuates and strives for that which is new. Many want the newest this or that, and it is human nature to look toward possessions or cultural practices from that view. But the Bible encourages us to look back to the old ways. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never changes and the Bible remains ever true. The human heart has not changed over the years. We need to look to that which has proven to be correct and valid in the past. We are fallen creatures with a sin nature, susceptible to degrading moral standards and ever increasing sinfulness. As I look back at my few years upon this earth, I can see a decline in the values of the society that I live in. Many of the old ways were better, and we need to grasp hold of, and embrace, those things worth keeping.

*The Valley Gate.* This gate reminds us that there will undoubtedly be times in our life when we will suffer deeply. Life is not a cake walk, and we can expect difficulties. King David understood the valleys well as he mentioned in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. For the Christian, the walk through the valley is not a lonely one. God has promised to be with us during the dark times in life, and it is a comfort to know that is true. It is also during these challenging times that we have the potential to grow the most. Our joy is in the Lord, even in the valley.

*The Dung Gate.* In a world that used beasts of burden to accomplish many of the normal day to day aspects of life, there was a need to clean up after them. Refuse of that nature cannot remain in a city for long or health problems will arise. This gate was devoted to this very unglamorous but most necessary task. The honest individual will admit that we all have things in our lives that should not have residence there. We are called to live a righteous lifestyle as children of God. There will be times in our lives when some unmentionable things need to be cast out through the dung gate of our heart. Our spiritual health depends upon cleanliness.

*The Fountain Gate.* For the Christian, the joy associated with our salvation and walk with God is not to be bottled up within us. We are to share the love of God with the very dark world that we live in. Jesus said that the result of the Holy Spirit indwelling us is that He will be a fountain bubbling up through our lives. We should not be afraid to pour out our hearts into the lives of those around us.

*The Water Gate.* Note that no repairs were necessary on this gate. In the Bible, we see the analogy of Scripture with water. We are washed by the Word of God. We are cleansed by the Word. The Bible is not in need of repair, it does not need to be adjusted to become useful for our day. It is the one thing in life that we can be absolutely sure of. It is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago, and will be in another two thousand years. Unchanging and applicable in every situation, the Bible, as is water, is not only necessary for cleanliness, but life cannot go on without it. We need the Word of God in our lives. We cannot live well without it.

*The Horse Gate.* In days of warfare, the army traditionally marched out through this gate, led by those on horseback and chariots. Paul emphasizes in the New Testament that we are involved in a spiritual battle every day. Our warfare is ongoing and very real, and we cannot let down our guard for even a moment, as the enemy will take advantage of any weakness found in our hearts.

*The East Gate.* Each morning, as the sun rose above the horizon and the new day began, the East Gate was the first to be opened. The uncertainty associated with the darkness dissipated, and the excitement of daybreak took root. We look forward to a time when our Lord will return. The dark night of sin will be ended and a glorious new day will dawn. Jesus will enter through the East Gate, and a new day that will never end, will begin.

*The Gate Miphkad.* Visitors to Jerusalem were to enter through this gate. It was the gate of inspection and review. Travel visas, or other documents, were checked at this gate before the traveller was allowed to proceed. This was also the gate through which a returning army entered back into the city. King David would meet his troops there, and the crowds were present to cheer them on in celebration of a job well done. We will one day stand

before Jesus in review, at the judgment seat of Christ. For the Christian, all that we have done will be open for evaluation, and our rewards will be handed to us personally by our Savior. It is not a matter of salvation at this point. That issue was settled at the cross. This time of inspection is focused upon our actions as a child of God since the moment of our new birth.

*The Sheep Gate.* We end our tour at the Sheep Gate. Our lives should revolve around the person of Jesus Christ. It is because of Him that we live and have our being. He is the sum total of all that is important. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Even a lowly engineer's progress report of something as benign as the building of a rock wall, when inspired by the Holy Spirit and included in Scripture, need not be overlooked and ignored. God included it to give us a modicum of insight into what He expects of our walk with Him as His children.

# “Soap”

## Daniel 11

The eleventh chapter of Daniel is the most incredibly detailed account of history ever written—before it came to pass! Approximately two hundred fifty years of time are predicted with accuracy so astonishing that critics of the Bible insist that it could never have been written before it happened. But it was, and while much of this chapter has been fulfilled, it retains the fingerprint of the miraculous hand of God in Scripture. We stand in awe of a God who exists outside the boundaries of time and space. He is above such things, and we cannot explain or fully understand His omnipotence.

Daytime dramas, commonly called “Soap Operas” or “Soaps”, are a staple of American television culture. The stories are intertwined, twisted, often morally questionable, but fascinating to many. The problems and difficulties experienced by the characters in the scripts are seemingly endless.

If there is a “Soap Opera” in the Bible, it would have to be the secular history that overlays what Daniel so profoundly predicted in chapter eleven of his book. We will take the risk posed by an almost excessively technical look at this chapter for one reason. God placed it there for us to see and to study. *All scripture is profitable* the Bible says elsewhere, and this is no exception.

Verse 1. Chapter 11 is a continuation of the previous chapter and the angel, who has been talking to Daniel, reiterates that he has been deeply involved in the politics and national security of the Median Empire, and Darius in particular.

Verse 2. God states that there would be four more kings of Persia before it fell. We know them as Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, (who was actually an imposter who looked like Cambyses’ son), Darius, and Xerxes, the king found in the story of Esther. Xerxes was a wealthy king who spent his reign attempting to conquer Greece. He successfully burned Athens, which infuriated a young man named Alexander.

Verse 3. The mighty king mentioned is Alexander the Great. He came to power as a very young man. A genius leader, he conquered the world, but did not live to enjoy his spoils, dying in 323 BC. His only living relatives, including his mother, an illegitimate son, and a brother who was mentally retarded, were all murdered within a few short years of his death.

Verse 4. With no surviving relatives to assume power, Alexander's four leading generals took the kingdom and split it four ways. Cassander took Macedonia, Lysimachus got Turkey, Seleucus I (Nicator) inherited Syria and much of the Middle East, and Ptolemy I received Egypt. Only two of these kingdoms were near Israel, and so they will dominate the remaining record. We will find the Seleucids and the Ptolemies fighting endlessly, and the Jews receiving a beating through it all because their country inconveniently was located between these two warring families. The Seleucids are the King of the North in Scripture because of their geographical location relative to Israel, and the Ptolemies, the King of the South, for the same reason.

Verse 5. Ptolemy I was quite powerful, but not as strong as Seleucus I, who at first went down to Egypt and fought with Ptolemy I against a common enemy, Antigonus. Seleucus I went north to begin his own rule after the twenty year war ended.

Verse 6. A period of time passed, during which the generals fought among themselves over trivial matters. And now the "Soap Opera" debuts a special cast of characters and drama. Ptolemy II (Philadelphus) sent his daughter Bernice to be married to Antiochus II (Theos), the Seleucid king, in an attempt to stabilize their political relationship. Antiochus II was already married, but Bernice was far prettier than his wife Laodice, so he divorced Laodice forthwith. Two years later, Ptolemy II died unexpectedly, and feeling that there was no need to remain married to Bernice, Antiochus II put Bernice and her son aside, and remarried Laodice. But Laodice was a woman spurned and was not at all ready to forgive Antiochus II. She secretly poisoned his food and, upon his death, put her own son, Seleucus II (Callinicus), on the throne. She then proceeded to use her influence to have Seleucus II kill Bernice and her son. If you are keeping score, Ptolemy II, Antiochus II, Bernice, and her son are all dead.

Verse 7. Ptolemy III (Euergetes), the brother of Bernice, was incensed at her treatment by the Seleucids, and in rage, came against the Seleucid empire, even taking the capital city and controlling it for a time.

Verse 8. His campaign was so successful that he carried off much treasure to Egypt. The records are specific:

4,000 talents of gold-today's price-\$4 Billion

40,000 talents of silver-today's price-\$1.5 Billion

2,500 idols-\$\$\$\$\$\$

He received the name Euergetes, (the benefactor), for obvious reasons.

Verse 9. Ptolemy III would have crushed the Seleucids, were it not for the fact that he was called back to Egypt to stop a rebellion inside his own kingdom.

Verse 10. The sons of Seleucus II, Seleucus III (Araunus) and Antiochus III (The Great), took their time to develop a very efficient war machine, and made plans to go to war against Ptolemy IV (Philopater) who was ruling Egypt. He received his name from the fact that he personally killed his own father, mother, and brother to gain control of the kingdom. Seleucus III died during the preparations for war, so only Antiochus III actually marched on Egypt. Initially, he recovered Syria and the other lands that had originally been part of the Seleucid Empire.

Verse 11. Antiochus III approached Egypt with 62,000 footmen, 6,000 men on horses, and, count 'em, 102 elephants! Ptolemy IV was stronger than anticipated, and Antiochus III lost 10,000 troops in battle, with an additional 4,000 men taken captive. Antiochus III was forced to retreat and beg for peace.

Verse 12. Ptolemy IV became proud and arrogant, and it dimmed his understanding and decision making process. He accepted foolish terms for peace, and spent the rest of his life chasing sensual luxury.

Verse 13. Ptolemy V (Epiphenes) succeeded his father at five years of age, and but a handful of years later, had to face Antiochus III as his father had. Antiochus III had spent fourteen years building an army of 300,000 men, and he came to the doorstep of Egypt with this huge force.

Verse 14. Israel had been pummeled as these two armies constantly fought back and forth, trampling the land of Israel with each expedition. It is no wonder that some mercenaries from Israel took sides in an effort to help quash the problem. Many of those paid fighters stood with Antiochus III. In spite of all the planning, the sheer size of the Northern army was no match for Egypt, and they retreated to their homeland.

Verse 15. But Antiochus III had not given up hope. He eventually came again against the cities that had been taken over the years by the Ptolemies. One by one they succumbed to his power, and he regained the cities of Palestine for the Seleucid Empire.

Verse 16. This series of battles was fought on the soil of Israel. The process consumed much of the wealth to be found there, and when it was all over, Ptolemy V was completely defeated, and Israel stripped bare.

Verse 17. Antiochus III intended to conquer all of Egypt, but he had other concerns as well. He wished to save the bulk of his fighting force to go against Rome, so he sent his daughter, Cleopatra I, to Ptolemy V in marriage, along with a huge dowry. He had hoped his daughter would function as a spy and return valuable information to him. This arrangement took place when she was only sixteen years old, and Ptolemy V was ten. He did not count on Cleopatra I falling in love with Ptolemy V, and completely turning her back on her father.

Verse 18. Antiochus III first goal was indeed Rome. He took many of the islands along the Mediterranean coastal area with 300 ships of various sizes. He eventually lost to Rome, and was sentenced to pay war reparations for the damage he had done at a rate of 1,000 talents a year—at today's values, approximately \$1 Billion.

Verse 19. Antiochus III returned home in shame, completely defeated. The public burden placed upon the country because of the war reparations was immense, and after he plundered a temple to get some needed cash, he was assassinated by his own people.

Verse 20. Seleucus IV (Philopater) attempted to pay the taxes due to Rome, but after just a short reign, he was assassinated by someone close to him.

Verse 21. This verse brings us to 175 BC. When Antiochus III was defeated by Rome, they kept his son Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) to guarantee that the payments they exacted from the Seleucids were made in a timely manner. The people of the Northern Kingdom saw Seleucus IV's son Demetrius I (Soter) as the rightful heir to the throne. In the background, Antiochus IV was lurking. A despicable, vile politician, he knew his craft and was able to insert himself into powerful positions.

Verse 22. Antiochus IV used a brilliantly subversive ploy to gain his popularity. He convinced others that his interest in consolidating and defining power was to protect the throne of Demetrius I. Nothing could be further from the truth. He wanted everything for himself.

Verse 23. Antiochus IV made a treaty with Ptolemy VI (Philometer), who was technically his nephew by virtue of his being the son of Cleopatra I, his sister. This "friendly" attitude set Ptolemy VI in a mindset of false safety and security.

Verse 24. Antiochus IV was unlike any of the kings before him. He was brutal, and very, very sly and untrustworthy. He spent the next years gradually taking Egypt and buying friends along the way. As he conquered an area, he would methodically bribe local nobles for their support.

Verse 25. The instability that this action created in Egypt was significant. Antiochus IV soon felt he could mount a full scale attack, and caught Ptolemy VI completely off guard, his own inside supporters had been purchased by Antiochus IV's treason.

Verse 26. Ptolemy VI was defeated from within his own country.

Verse 27. He was basically a captive of Antiochus IV, but invited him to Memphis for a banquet. Antiochus IV had been telling his huge lie about only being concerned about Ptolemy VI and wanting to help, but Ptolemy VI had ulterior motives as well.

He planned to form a coalition with his brother to go against Antiochus IV.

Verse 28. Having taken a tremendous amount of booty from Egypt, Antiochus IV started for home. The Jews in Jerusalem heard a false rumor that Antiochus IV had been killed, and they began celebrating. This action enraged Antiochus IV and he vented his fury on Jerusalem, killing 80,000 people indiscriminately, and desecrated the temple.

Verse 29. In God's timing, he returned once again to Egypt.

Verse 30. Antiochus IV was deep into Egyptian territory on his latest campaign, but was met by Roman Naval Ambassadors and told to leave. Ptolemy VI and his brother Ptolemy VIII (Euergetes) had gone to Rome to beg for relief from Antiochus IV. Adding insult to injury, the ambassador who rebuffed him personally was someone Antiochus IV had once considered a friend, back when he had been held in Rome. He became insanely furious, and vented all of his anger upon Jerusalem and the Jews, who once again just happened to be on his return route.

Verse 31. Antiochus IV built garrisons around the temple in Jerusalem, controlling all access to it. He profaned it in the vilest way, placing an idol of Jupiter on the altar of burnt offering and making the side rooms into a brothel. Antiochus IV had a nickname, Epimanes, which means "mad man." He was very likely the vilest, most profane anti-Semite the world has ever known, far exceeding Hitler and Stalin.

Verses 32-35. History describes valiant Jews who stood up against the overwhelming odds of Antiochus IV. We know them by their nickname, the Maccabees. They were a family of ruler-priests who guided Israel for nearly one hundred thirty years. Much of what they accomplished is recorded in the Apocryphal books, which are historically quite accurate. Their trifling numbers afforded only small but voracious attacks here and there, the eventuality though, was the elimination of Antiochus IV from their land and the restoration of the temple.

The historical portion of this prophecy ends here. The phrase *in the last days* takes us to a time in the future, a time yet to be.

Daniel was a man loved by God, a man who was faithful to God through many tough and trying times. Verse twenty-three of the eighth chapter contains a phrase worthy of note. Daniel is described as *a man highly esteemed*. That same word can also be translated *beloved*. It was not the accomplishments of this man that warranted such a comment, but his willingness to serve and be used by his God in any and all circumstances. Oh that we would live our lives and walk with God in such a way as to elicit that same response of God towards ourselves.



## “600”

### I Samuel 15, Esther

The “Six Hundred Year Story” begins in I Samuel 15. Saul was commanded by God to execute judgment upon the Amalekites. The nation of Amalek had proven themselves to be worthy of annihilation. Many years previous to Samuel and Saul, Israel had gained their freedom from Egypt. Led by God through the desert toward the Promised Land and arriving at the border, they sent a group of men over the Jordan to go through the land and bring back a report of what they saw there. Those men returned with a demoralizing description, one based in doubt and a lack of trust in God. The entire assembly agreed that it was indeed hopeless. In response to their disbelief, the Israelites were banished to wander in the wilderness for forty years. During that time, Amalek was an ever-present harassment. Troops from Amalek were known to come up behind the huge nomadic nation of Israel, and pick off inevitable stragglers who lingered behind the main group for one reason or another. Guerrilla tactics were effective from their viewpoint, but extremely offensive from God’s view. As Saul took on responsibility as the newly appointed king of Israel, Samuel informed him that he was to devote all of Amalek to the Lord. They and all that was theirs was to be destroyed, totally.

Saul failed at this directive miserably. He did not kill all the people of Amalek. He allowed some to escape, and brought at least one back to Jerusalem—Agag, their king. Neither did he destroy all the livestock. The explicit charge given by God forbade the taking of any articles or animals owned by the Amalekites. Ignoring the clear instruction he had been given, he brought many of them back, using the excuse that he would sacrifice them to God. In our culture, we look back at such incidents with a bit of horror at the bloodshed decreed by God. God is righteous, and the judge of all mankind. Scripture clearly states that those whom God deemed to be destroyed had been given many chances to repent and be forgiven. In failing to do so, they had made the choice to reject His salvation and had earned the wages of death.

Samuel arrived on the scene and confronted Saul face to face. Saul, true to his character, made excuse after excuse for his actions. This seemingly simple request made by God concerning Amalek, was not unimportant, or a minor concern. God understood the potential problems in the future posed by this lack of Saul's obedience. Samuel reflected that disappointment in his extreme display of anger. Moved by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate to those present the significance of this offense, Samuel, in righteous anger, hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord. One can imagine the surprise and shock on the faces of the witnesses there as an old man of nearly ninety years old performed a physical feat that in any movie of today would require an extreme warning label.

Agag was now dead, Saul was reprimanded by God, through Samuel, and life went on. But the story was far from over. Years later, Saul faced his final moments. Mortally wounded in battle, with no hope of survival, he attempted suicide by falling on his own sword. He failed, and was found in an awkward predicament, dying, but not yet dead, afraid that he would be found by the enemy and mistreated horribly, probably spending his last moments in torture. Coincidences do not exist when God is involved. The man, who stumbled upon the gasping Saul in the final throes of death, was ironically, an Amalekite! Responding to the request made by Saul, he promptly finished what Saul began, with his own sword.

For most people of that day, the issues represented in this story, and the actions displayed, were probably disregarded over time. But God was still interested. The story was not yet over. Six hundred years later, everyone but God Himself had forgotten. As the seventy years of Israel's captivity in Babylon drew to an end, the issue was rekindled. God would have His judgment fully realized six centuries and eight hundred miles from where it all began.

A new cast of characters is introduced in Esther. The place is Babylon. Immediately following the end of the Jewish captivity there, anyone who wished could return to Jerusalem. Some chose not to go back. Our "Six Hundred Year Story" continues here. The king of Babylon made a choice to put aside his current wife and find another. Those close to him recommended that he begin by collecting a huge harem made up of young ladies to be found in the kingdom. He could make his choice from this group. Esther was

one of the girls forced into the palace harem. The king took a special liking to her and proclaimed her queen. She happened to be Jewish, but told no one this fact because her adopted father, Mordecai, had told her to keep her background a secret. He was a part of the inner court of the king, with access to some levels of government. At one point, Mordecai was privileged to information that exposed an assassination threat to the king of Babylon. Esther informed the king of the plot, giving Mordecai credit for the intelligence.

Haman appears in chapter three. A politically ambitious person, he was arrogant, proud, and despicable. His anti-Semitic feelings came to the forefront immediately. Mordecai showed him no reverence. Responding to the apparent disrespect, Haman made plans to have him put to death and destroy the Jews as well, because Haman knew Mordecai was a Jew.

The stage was now set to play out the final judgment of God upon Amalek. Six centuries are nothing to an eternal God. But a moment has passed for Him. His justice will not be postponed or delayed any longer. What has transpired here is not a random series of events with little or no significance. The characters in this story were specifically chosen by God, their positions not accidental, and their ancestry of special importance. Mordecai is introduced in the beginning of Esther as a son of Kish. Kish was Saul's father. That places him directly into the same family tree as Saul, most likely a descendant of one of Saul's brothers. Haman is labeled as an Agagite, a direct descendant of the king of Amalek, whom Samuel so efficiently dispatched six hundred years previous. Only God could orchestrate something this complex and perfect. The confrontation between Saul and Agag commences once again, this time with Mordecai and Haman, but with dramatically different results.

The plan put in place by Haman denoted a special day on which Jews could be killed at will. He had presented them to the king as a nuisance to be eliminated, and the king, ignorantly respecting his opinion, agreed to his plan. Esther was informed of the heinous proposal through Mordecai, and in response, invited the king and Haman to a banquet. Her secret intention was to ask for relief for the Jews. Haman was puffed up by the invitation, completely oblivious to the impending disclosure, and had a

wonderful time the first evening. Esther put off the question that night, and extended a second banquet invitation for the following evening. Haman was elated and agreed to attend. He went home in high spirits until he remembered Mordecai. Through the night, Haman had a construction crew working to build a gallows seven stories tall, a challenge for any contractor during the daytime, and much more so at night. By morning, the project was finished.

Humor is not absent from the character of God. Irony and comedy mesh as the story unfolds. Haman had made plans to have Mordecai hanged publically on his brand new gallows. As he stepped into the king's presence to request a public execution, he found that the king had suffered through a sleepless night. To combat his insomnia, he had a servant read the annals of his reign to him, and found that Mordecai was a hero who had never been rewarded for his actions. Before Haman could ask anything, the king looked to him for suggestions on how to honor a hero. Thinking that the king was referring to him, he recommended some wonderfully public appreciations, only to find out that the man who would be the recipient of all this fanfare was Mordecai. Adding insult to injury, he was the one responsible for implementing it all. (Now, is that a wry smile creeping across your face?)

Haman spent that day leading Mordecai around as a VIP. By the end of the day, he was mortified at the turn of events, but did not have much time to reflect upon it before he was whisked off to the second banquet with Esther. At the banquet, Esther shocked the king and Haman with her statements as she explained the problem with the newly implemented Jewish extermination program. She also surprised the king with the fact that she was a Jew. The king was furious with Haman and left to get guards. Haman, in pure terror, attempted to beg for his life. He stumbled as he began walking towards Esther, who was seated at the table, and fell on her just as the king walked back into the room! (That smile is getting bigger.) Haman's fate was sealed, and he was hung on the very gallows that had been built for Mordecai.

That ends the "Six Hundred Year Story". There are many lessons to be learned in the study of these scriptures. Through this story, we meet people of dubious character who failed, and we also encounter others worthy of admiration, those who succeeded in doing the will of God. The book of Esther is a shining example of a

notable characteristic of God—His purpose and perfect will cannot be frustrated or stopped. He will accomplish that which He desires, and we can rest assured that God's attention to details is capable of spanning centuries.



# “Devoted”

## Malachi 4

Malachi’s soliloquy is the concluding scene in the final act of the Old Testament. As the curtain begins to descend, the closing expression we hear, the last word spoken by God, is *curse*. The audience sits in reverent silence, unsure if applause is appropriate at this point. The lights go down; it is a somber ending to the story to be sure. Four hundred years of silence follow. God will say nothing more until His Son steps out onto center stage in Matthew.

The Old Testament would seem to be merely backdrop scenery, were it not for the New Testament. It is there that we realize what God was doing, and why. The panoramic background on the stage is filled with the colors and subtle hues and tints that point to the person of Jesus Christ. We began this exercise with a study of the first word in Genesis. It would be appropriate to consider the final word found in the Old Testament.

Verse four, of the fourth chapter of Malachi, is a reminder that the Law given to Moses was much more than just a piece of legislation. David reassures us in the Psalms that the decrees of God are wonderful and are to be studied and meditated upon, and that a close walk with the Lord is predicated on that truth. They are a *lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*. The godly coordinate their lives by the commandments of the Lord. But as we have found, many of those laws also pre-figure the person of the Messiah, making them doubly delightful to contemplate and reflect upon.

God’s warning in the last verse is delivered with a cautionary portent. His exact words are, *lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*. That final word immediately takes us back to the Garden of Eden and the fall of man. When Adam and Eve sinned, a curse was pronounced by God upon mankind, as well as all of creation. Since that moment, the scourge of sin and the consequences of the judgment of God plague our daily existence. But our merciful God foreknew that, and planned a solution in eternity past. Salvation, and the eventual complete redemption of

man from that curse, is the central theme of the Bible, from cover to cover.

In the original language, the word translated *curse* is quite interesting. It carries with it the subtle idea of a net or snare. Picture, if you will, a fisherman along the shore, working with a casting net. His polished technique is evident as the net unfurls in the toss and then drops into the water. Attached to his hand is a cord which he deftly begins gathering back towards himself. As the net descends around an unsuspecting fish, he has already drawn the bottom closed, sealing off any chance of escape for his prey. Likewise, if the hearts of God's people are not focused upon Him, His judgment will be a shocking, sure, deadly surprise to the unprepared.

The common usage of this word also takes us into the realm of the camel driver. The more stubborn of these animals, at times, require a supplementary method of persuasion to submit to the master. The process of placing a large round guide ring through the soft cartilage between the nostrils is a bit unpleasant to imagine, and God is warning His people that He will administer the painful implantation of devices that will coerce obedience if necessary. God demands compliance with His Laws.

In addition to these nuanced definitions, the clear warning God communicated was a direct reference to Leviticus 27:29. In times past, as the Israelites were conquering and occupying the Promised Land, God had specific requirements assigned to individual battles for various reasons. In some instances, as in the case of the battle for Jericho, everything was to be *devoted* to the Lord. The identical Hebrew term translated as *curse* in Malachi, is translated differently in Leviticus. Everyone *devoted* to the Lord was to be killed. All that was flammable was to be burned. Nothing in the plunder could be ransomed, no one could be redeemed. Every living thing died, every combustible thing was destroyed, and anything that was left after those two ravages, was God's. Consider the fact that those who were *cursed* or *devoted* to the Lord were not eligible for redemption. No price could be paid to bring them into a condition of relationship. Here we find the most significant concern of God. If His people were distracted and unconcerned with God and His love for them, they might miss the gift that was to come. He was planning to send a Savior, Jesus the

Messiah, who would voluntarily go to a cross and shed His blood, and pay the necessary redemption price for all mankind who would accept the offer extended to them. Those not watching, those not attentive, would suffer the *curse* and miss the only possibility of redemption from sin.

The Old Testament begins with a subtle reference to the person of Jesus, and ends with a warning not to miss the Messiah and the redemption plan of God. Jesus Christ must be the focus of our lives. I trust that as you continue in your walk with God, your fascination with the Savior never ends, and that the reading and study of the Word of God become an ever increasing part of your life.