



Living Principles

Bonnie Rushmore

Living Principles

**Gleanings from
Unnamed and Named
Bible Characters**

By Bonnie Rushmore

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Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to Louis, my husband and friend, who encouraged and prodded me to step out of my comfort zone to teach ladies' Bible classes and to speak on lectureship programs for women. Furthermore, it was through his urging that I began writing articles for religious magazines and finally, after several years and his frequent encouraging words to finish this book. I am thankful for the Christian ladies who have listened to these lessons and offered reinforcement and appreciation for the Bible truths expressed on the pages within the covers.

Publisher's Statement

Have you ever wondered about the many “Mrs.” in the Bible who were not given names, yet who must have had significant impact in their husbands’ lives? Perhaps a closer study would reveal more than we might previously have realized.

Bonnie Rushmore has developed this excellent class book, analyzing what is biblically known about thirteen women of Scripture. Yes, we are told the names of some of them (they fill the second section of the book: “The Well Known”), and others remain unnamed (They are the subjects of the first section: “The Unknown”), yet we can learn specific points about the character and the influence all of these wives had on their families and their circumstances.

If you were asked to enumerate characteristics of Mrs. Noah, what would you answer? Of Mrs. Jeroboam? Of Mrs. Peter? What would we learn from a study of Sapphira’s life, or of Miriam’s, or of Hannah’s? Not only has Bonnie made a careful analysis of what the Scriptures reveal about each of these women, she has made direct application to our lives, as we function in the 21st Century. Ages and situations change, but qualities of character remain the same, and their positive or negative effects in life’s events also remain the same. From the facts revealed about these women of Scripture, we can draw profitable lessons for our own lives.

As a publisher, we are happy to make this book available for individual study and for ladies’ classes, confident that it will produce eternal fruit for good.

Betty (J.C.) Choate

January 18, 2011

Author's Preface

I began teaching a children's Bible Class a few weeks after being baptized into Christ. I do not recommend this practice. However, sometimes, small congregations are so desperate for teachers they will take anyone willing to attempt to teach. That was the scenario for my first teaching assignment. I was not reared in the Lord's church. As a child, my religious training consisted of a two-week long VBS hosted by a community church that I attended with a neighborhood friend. As I reflect upon those classes, I do not remember the Bible lessons although I am sure one was taught. I do remember the games, crafts, treats and an opportunity to do something fun. As a teenager, I occasionally attended a denominational church with my boyfriend as an excuse to see him and to get out of the house. Again, I do not remember the Bible lessons taught.

Needless to say, when I agreed to teach that children's class, I had no idea what I was doing. I was a new Christian with the Bible knowledge that I needed to be baptized to be saved. I did not know the typical Bible lessons that any child who regularly attends Bible Class can recite. The only qualification I had to teach that class was that I loved (and still do) children, and I felt a responsibility to serve God however He deemed me useful. I still feel that responsibility 35 years later.

So, when I was handed a teacher's guide and student's workbooks for that first class, I had no background information on which to build those lessons. I had to learn even the basic lessons before I could teach them to the children.

A few years later as a young preacher's wife, I was expected to teach the Ladies' Bible Class that met once a month. Again, I was thrown into a situation I was not adequately qualified to fill. However, with much study, prayer and encouragement from others, I did the best I could. At one time, I found myself teaching the cradle roll class on Sunday morning, a primary class on Wednesday evening and the monthly Ladies' Bible Class.

The most important lesson I have learned from my experiences as a teacher of all ages for more than 30 years is: teachers need to teach more than just the biblical account of an event. We need to

teach each student from the youngest to the oldest how to apply biblical principles to his or her life. We have failed as teachers if we neglect to teach the student how to apply each Bible lesson so that they will develop into dedicated Christians in service to God.

Character studies of Bible people are a wonderful way to learn Bible events with an application to contemporary times. I once heard it said, “There are no new sins, just new toys with which to commit the same old sins.” Living Principles is written with the prayer that as we study people from Bible times our faith can be fortified in their righteousness, and we will learn from their successes and mistakes.

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Section One: Unknown

The Bible records the acts of many individuals throughout its pages. Some of these people are called by name, and others are unnamed. Unfortunately, we often overlook these unannounced Bible characters, simply because their names were omitted from the inspired Word of God. A diligent study of the context surrounding these unnamed individuals can generate a wealth of knowledge. Applying this knowledge to our everyday lives will contribute to a Christ-like attitude in our daily walk upon this earth.

This section is designed to evaluate a few of the unnamed women of the Bible. Since these individuals are not named in the Scriptures, the contextual study of the unnamed individuals will be required to gather a fuller understanding of these women. As we study their roles in the biblical accounts, we will learn what characteristics need to be emulated and remove those traits in our lives that fail to portray Christian behavior. One of the goals in this section is to encourage the student to become more than a reader of God's Word and dig deeper to gain other lessons found therein.

Chapter 1 Mrs. Noah – A Steadfast Helpmeet

Character Study

Genesis 6:18

God created a perfect world. Unfortunately, His children chose to listen to Satan. God surveyed the world and was heartbroken with the behavior of His people. “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The perfect world transformed into total wickedness in approximately 2,000 years. God regretted (human terminology accommodating communication with mankind despite the Omniscient, changeless nature of God) creating the world and determined to destroy all living things upon the earth. However, Noah found favor in God’s eyes because he lived a righteous life. Although not stated in the Scriptures, Mrs. Noah lived a righteous life as well. We know this because Genesis 6:18 says, “But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark – you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.” God would not permit any unrighteous individual to enter the ark. Noah and all his family members were righteous.

Genesis 7:7-13

Noah built the ark while he preached to the wicked people. The ark was a barge 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high with one window and one door. The inside of the ark was divided into three floors. God told Noah to gather food for his family and for all the animals to eat while on the ark (Genesis 6:15-22). Finally, one hundred twenty years later, God told Noah to gather the animals. Of the clean animals he was to gather seven sets (male and female), and of the unclean a male and a female. Noah, his wife, his three sons and his sons’ wives as well as the animals entered the ark. God

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closed the door, and seven days later, the rain began to fall upon the earth. It rained for forty days and forty nights. Noah, Mrs. Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth and their wives lived on the ark for one year. Imagine living on a boat with all those animals for one year. For one year, Noah and his family tended to the feeding and cleaning up after the animals. For one year, eight precious souls lived together on a boat the length of one and half football fields.

Genesis 8:16-22

A year passed. The waters receded from the face of the earth. God told Noah, “Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee” (Genesis 8:16). Noah, his family and all the animals left the ark. The first thing Noah and his family did was build an altar to worship the God of their salvation. Eight souls were saved from the destruction of the whole earth. Everybody and everything that breathed through nostrils on dry land perished in the flood except those safely aboard the ark (Genesis 7:21-23; 1 Peter 3:20).

Applicable Principles

Eve is the mother of all (Genesis 3:20). After God created Adam and Eve, the rest of humanity arrived through procreation. Thus, all humanity came into existence through Eve. Sarah is considered the “mother of nations” (Genesis 17:16). Mrs. Noah could be considered the “mother of the new, post-flood world” since through her the world was populated after God destroyed it with the great flood. What characteristics would such a woman need to fulfill such an important role in God’s scheme for man? Listed below are a few.

Mrs. Noah Believed in the One God of the Universe

Contrary to popular belief, there is only one God. Many world religions believe in multiple gods and think that the God of the Bible is just another one of those gods. Paul faced this attitude in Athens when he observed the idol to the unknown god (Acts 17:22-27). Paul

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explained to the Athenians that their “unknown god” was indeed the God to whom they should direct their worship. There is “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6). Paul taught the Corinthians that there is one God by whom all things are made (1 Corinthians 8:6). Jesus taught about “...the only true God...” in John 17:3. Mrs. Noah knew this God — the God Paul, Jesus and others taught about in Scripture. When God said He would destroy the earth with a flood, Mrs. Noah knew He would destroy it. When God said He would keep those on the ark safe during the flood, she knew He would keep His promise.

Do you have the knowledge and understanding of the one true God that Mrs. Noah had? Do you believe that God keeps all His promises? Do you comprehend that God has the power to punish the disobedient and to reward the obedient?

Mrs. Noah Had Great Faith

Only a deep faith in God would permit an individual to leave friends and possessions to board a floating zoo, knowing that everything and everyone familiar would be destroyed. That faith was built upon the knowledge of the God of creation. Hebrews Chapter 11 is called the Bible’s Hall of Fame, listing many Old Testament characters who exhibited great faith in God. Noah is one of those named individuals, and by association, Mrs. Noah would be included as well. Hebrews 11:1 gives a biblical definition of the word faith. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” “Faith accepts the truths revealed on the testimony of God...” (Fausset’s) and is not based on what we can see. “True faith is confidence in God or Christ, not in oneself” (Nelson’s). This is the faith portrayed in the actions of Mrs. Noah. She trusted that God would keep His promise, keeping them safe on the boat while the earth was destroyed by the flood.

The word “faith” is used twice in the Old Testament in relation to God, and all New Testament usage of the word “faith” refers to God or Jesus Christ. Faith in God is a part of our salvation (Romans

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10:17). Studying the Scriptures will strengthen our faith (2 Timothy 2:15). A strong faith will furnish one with the tools needed to resist the daily trials and temptations of this life and bring us closer to God (1 Peter 1:7-9).

Do you have the faith of Mrs. Noah? Do you trust in God? Could your name be listed in the Bible's Hall of Fame alongside Noah (Mrs. Noah) and the others?

Mrs. Noah Was a Helpmeet to her Husband

God created a perfect world in the beginning. After Adam named all the animals, a helpmeet was not found for him (Genesis 2:20). God created a special companion for Adam from one of Adam's ribs. God planned from the beginning that man should have a counterpart or mate to help him along the way.

Mrs. Noah was a helpmeet to Noah. She may have assisted him in building the ark. She may have helped gather the food stored on the ark. She may have helped tend the animals for the year they lived on the ark. We do not know all the things that Mrs. Noah did with and for her husband. However, we can know that she was a good wife, fulfilling her role as Mrs. Noah. If she had failed to be a good wife, she would have been an unrighteous individual and prohibited from entering the ark. Mrs. Noah was a good wife centuries ago. What makes a good wife in the 21st century?

A good wife is submissive to her husband (Ephesians 5:22). She willingly and lovingly is obedient and subject to her husband just as all Christians should be submitting to each other (Ephesians 5:21) and as the church as a whole is subject to Christ (Ephesians 5:24). Titus 2:5 states that women should be "obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." When women fail to be submissive to their husbands, they literally defame or speak evil of God (Biblesoft's).

A good wife is a helper to her husband. A good wife will "hold up her husband's arms" as Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses during the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:8-16). She encourages

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him in his daily walk as a Christian. She supports him in his righteous decisions, even when those decisions conflict with the world around them.

Are you a good wife? Do you willingly submit to your husband and others who have authority over you? Or, do you only submit with grumbling and a bad attitude because you know what the Scriptures teach on the subject? Do you support your husband in the decisions he makes, even when those decisions may cause a conflict with friends and loved ones?

Mrs. Noah Refrained from Participating in the Evil around Her

“Every thought and imagination of man was evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). What a wicked, difficult world in which to live! It seems as though that phrase could describe the world in which we live today. One can hardly turn on the television without being bombarded with foul language (even from newscasters), degrees of nudity (advertisements as well as shows), sexual innuendos, immoral behavior, children showing disrespect to parents, etc. Radio broadcasts blast the same foul language and innuendos. Rarely, can one walk down the street or the aisle of a store without hearing foul language and seeing immodestly dressed individuals and pictures. Keeping pure thoughts in the current world can be a challenge for the young and the old alike. The Noah family remained righteous during those challenging times in which they lived, and we must remain righteous in the challenging times we face, too.

Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves with aprons when they realized they were naked (Genesis 3:7). The garment Adam and Eve made covered the waist and resembled a loincloth or girdle. Adam acknowledged to God that they were naked (Genesis 3:10) even though they were wearing the aprons. God made coats of skin to cloth Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). The clothing God provided covered more than the loincloth of leaves that Adam and Eve made. God properly dressed Adam and Eve

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and that “dress code” would have been passed down through the generations to come.

We do not know whether the people changed to inappropriate dress during the time preceding the flood. We do know that every thought and imagination of the people was evil continually (Genesis 6:5). It is possible, that Mrs. Noah was faced with some of the similar dilemmas Christians face today with regard to proper, modest dress. If the world in which Mrs. Noah lived and raised her family dressed immodestly and improperly, she would have followed God’s design for proper attire. Short skirts, short shorts, low-cut tops, midriff tops that allow exposure of the stomach and tight fitting clothes on men and women do not fit the covering God provided for Adam and Eve. Because Mrs. Noah was righteous in her dress, she was welcomed into the ark of safety, and we must be righteous in our dress in order to have the hope of salvation one day.

Mrs. Noah refrained from using the foul language that would have been prevalent around her. Likewise, we must carefully guard the words we speak so as not to repeat the foul language surrounding us. “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8). Filthy communication is vile, shameful speech (Biblesoft’s). Unfortunately, many have lost all sense of shamefulness. We are blasted from all sides with filthy language to the extent that it has become common and not shameful to our ears. Filthy language and evil speaking cannot coexist with kind words and a forgiving heart (Ephesians 4:29-32). The use of crude, vulgar words are linked in Scripture with other sins such as fornication, idolatry and covetousness, and such words will keep one from heaven (Ephesians 5:1-5).

It has been said, “What goes in the ear, comes out the mouth.” We must guard our ears from the filthy language about us. That may require turning off the television set, turning off the radio and carefully choosing where and when we do our shopping to avoid the evil speaking.

Are you a Mrs. Noah? Do you carefully choose your clothing

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to be dressed modestly and appropriately in public? Do you avoid the use of foul language? Do you lovingly remind your coworkers and friends that you do not want to hear that type of joke or those disrespectful words?

Mrs. Noah Taught her Sons to Love God and to Choose Godly Wives

Shem, Ham and Jepheth were righteous individuals, and they married women who were obedient to God. These young men were taught by their parents the importance of following God. Mrs. Noah understood the principle behind Deuteronomy 6:6-7 long before God told Moses, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” We must be like Mrs. Noah. We must use every moment of the day to teach our children about God and His commands.

Sitting in a chair with an open Bible is not the only way to teach. Daily activities and interaction with others creates opportunities to talk about God and His will. The marvelous, natural world around us offers many occasions to discuss God’s power in creation and the impossibility of evolution. We can teach about kindness, sharing and caring as our children interact with others. Remember, our actions speak louder than words. Our behavior toward others will teach our children how to treat others. We may be teaching good qualities or we may be teaching an ungodly behavior. If you want your children to be kind, loving children you must be a kind, loving adult. It is equally important to teach our children to choose godly spouses. We must stress to our children from the earliest age to seek good, Christian mates with whom to spend the rest of their lives. Our children should marry persons who will help them attain the heavenly reward, not pull them away from the one, true God of the Bible.

Are you a Mrs. Noah? Do you teach your children about God

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throughout the day, or is their only knowledge of God received in the two to three hours of Bible class and worship each week? Do you help your children choose godly playmates and future spouses?

Be a Mrs. Noah! Believe in the one, true God, have faith that God will keep his promises, teach that faith to your children (in part by being an example of faith) and be a godly helpmeet to your husband.

Questions

1. Why was Noah chosen to build the ark?
2. How do we know that Mrs. Noah was righteous?
3. How many people entered the ark?
4. Give two Bible verses showing there is only one God.
5. What is faith?
6. Give the book and chapter of the Bible often called the Bible's Hall of Fame.
7. What does it mean to be a helpmeet to your husband?
8. What is the biblical definition of a wife being submissive to her husband?
9. List some of the difficulties Mrs. Noah faced as she lived a righteous life before God.
10. What are some of the difficulties we face today as we live a righteous life before God?
11. How can we teach our children to choose godly spouses?
12. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 2 Mrs. Job – A Tool of Satan

Character Study

A study of Mrs. Job must involve a look at those close to her life and the complete context of the verses surrounding references to her in the Bible. Thus, even though Mrs. Job is not mentioned until Chapter Two of the Book of Job, we will gather some background information from Chapter One.

We find in the opening verses of the book that Job "...was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:1). Job was blessed with seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). Furthermore, Job was a rich man, owning seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys and a very great household (Job 1:3). He was considered the greatest of all the men of the East.

Satan challenged God stating, "...Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!' So the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD" (Job 1:9-11). Knowing Job would withstand the test, God accepted the challenge, telling Satan to do as he wished with Job with one exception. Satan was not allowed to touch or harm the physical body of Job (Job 1:12).

A messenger rushed to Job, telling him that thieves stole all his oxen and donkeys, and the servants tending the animals were killed. Before this messenger finished speaking, another man rushed in explaining that fire from heaven consumed all the sheep and the servants watching over them. While this man was speaking, another messenger came proclaiming robbers stole all the camels, and those

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servants were killed. Then, the most heart-wrenching message of all was delivered. Job's children were killed when a great wind blew the house down, killing all of them (Job 1:14-19).

Job did not react as Satan planned. "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped" (Job 1:20). Job showed his grief by tearing his coat and shaving his head. Then, he worshipped his God stating, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Through all that Job lost, he did not blame God.

However, Satan was not finished. He again challenged God. "So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!'" (Job 2:4-5). God replied to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life" (Job 2:6).

Satan afflicted Job with severe boils from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet. Job's response was to sit in ashes and scrape the sores with broken pottery (Job 2:7-8). Once again, Job did not blame God for his afflictions. However, Satan had one more trick up his sleeve.

Job 2:9-10

"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Satan chose not to take Job's wife from him for a reason. He had plans for her. She was used to tempt Job further to renounce God.

According to New Unger's Bible Dictionary, several kinds of boils are mentioned in the Bible. Job was probably inflicted with "[s]imple boils, which may be single or come out in large numbers and successive crops (Job 2:7; NIV, 'sores'), causing much suffering

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and some danger to the patient. They consist of a core, which is a gangrenous bit of skin and subcutaneous tissue, surrounded by an angry, inflamed and suppurating nodule, which finally bursts and lets out the core, after which the seat of the boil heals, leaving a permanent scar.” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains the full extent of this disease inflicted upon Job. “Job’s body is said to have been covered with itchy, irritating sores which made his face unrecognizable (Job 2:12), caused continual burning pain (3:24; 6:4), and which were infested with maggots (7:5) and exhaled a nauseous feter (19:17). His sleep was destroyed and his nervous system enfeebled (3:26) so that he required assistance to move, as he sat in the ashes (2:8).”

Mrs. Job lost all her wealth in the course of a few hours. The same day, she lost all ten of her children in a sudden catastrophic windstorm. Then, she was subjected to watch her husband physically suffer extreme pain and agony, and she experienced as well as the emotional pain of losing their great wealth. In essence, she lost her husband, too, and Satan seized this moment to tempt her and use her against her husband. Mrs. Job admonished her husband to “curse God and die.” Fortunately, Job’s faith in God was strong. He lovingly rebuked his wife for her foolish words. He explained that if they accept the blessings from God, then, they must be willing to receive the afflictions, also. Job did not curse God!

Job 19:17

“My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body.”

The exact length of time that elapsed after Mrs. Job encouraged Job to renounce God is unknown. In the previous chapters, we find a lengthy discussion with Job and his three friends who supposedly came to comfort him. Eventually, their conversations turned to accusations rather than words of comfort. Chapter Nineteen begins with Job offering complaints toward his friends and others with whom he had recent contact. Among those individuals was his wife.

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Job's breath had become so offensive due to his physical condition that even his wife turned away when he spoke to her. Albert Barnes made the following observation about the relationship of Mrs. Job and her husband.

I appealed to her by all that was tender in the domestic relation, but in vain. From this it would seem that even his wife had regarded him as an object of divine displeasure and had also left him to suffer alone . . . the appeal to his wife was founded on the relation which they had sustained to them [their children]. Though they were now dead, he referred to their former united attachment to them, to the common affliction which they had experienced in their loss; and in view of all their former love to them, and all the sorrow which they had experienced in their death, he made an appeal to his wife to show him kindness, but in vain.

Apparently, Job pleaded with her to come to him, reminding her of the love they shared in the birth of their children and the pain they jointly suffered in the death of those children. Since there is no other mention of her attention toward him, his pleading must have fallen on deaf ears. Satan was still using Mrs. Job. She progressed from a tempter in Chapter Two to a tormentor in Chapter 19.

Job 31:10

“Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her.”

In Chapter 29, Job listed the great blessings bestowed upon him by God. Chapter 30 lists the great afflictions Job suffered. Job used Chapter 31 to demonstrate emphatically his conviction of his innocence and that sin was not the cause of those afflictions. Barnes made this observation.

Let her be subjected to the deepest humiliation and degradation. Probably Job could not have found language which would have more emphatically expressed his sense of

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the enormity of this crime, or his perfect consciousness of innocence. The last thing which a man would imprecate on himself, would be that which is specified in this verse. The word “grind” . . . means to crush, to beat small; then to grind, as in a handmill; Judg 16:21; Num 11:8. This was usually the work of females and slaves. . . . The meaning here is, “Let my wife be the mill-wench to another; be his abject slave, and be treated by him with the deepest indignity.”

Job was not suggesting that his wife be harshly punished; rather, he was referring to the severe humiliation both he and his wife would endure after such an honorable position in life as outlined in Chapter 29. Mrs. Job tempted her husband to sin by encouraging him to “curse God and die.” She became his tormentor when she failed to comfort him and did not allow him to comfort her in the loss of their children, possessions and place of honor in society. Through all of this, Job still showed love and kindness toward his wife.

Applicable Principles

Mrs. Job Was a Tempter

Satan is the most cunning tempter since the days of creation, and he uses others to assist him in pulling God’s children into sin. After Satan lured Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he used her to tempt Adam to sin also (Genesis 3). Abraham encouraged Sarah to sin in stating that she was his sister rather than his wife (Genesis 12:13; 20:13). Ananias tempted Sapphira to sin when they lied about the purchase price for the land they sold (Acts 5:1-10). Sin and temptation have existed almost from the beginning of time. Mrs. Job was one of many individuals Satan used to lure others to him.

Mrs. Job lost everything — her children, her possessions, her position in the community, and in a sense, she lost her husband as he sat in ashes, riddled with pain. Satan saw her vulnerability and used it to his advantage. He caused her to doubt God, and in turn,

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she encouraged Job to “curse God and die.” Why would Mrs. Job’s suggest such a thing to her husband? Perhaps, watching him suffer brought her great pain, and she wanted to ease his suffering as well as her own suffering. Possibly, like Job’s three friends, she thought Job had sinned, and by cursing God, he would end the charade of being a righteous servant of God. In reality, we do not know why a loving wife would suggest that her husband “curse God and die.” The reason is not important. What we must learn from this biblical example is that Satan will use any opportunity available to persuade us to sin.

Just as Satan enticed Mrs. Job at her weakest moment, he is watching to pounce on us at our weakest moments. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:9). We must guard our thoughts and our reactions to the difficult situations that affect us.

The trials of this life can pull us closer to God or they can turn us away from God. The choice is ours. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12-13). Remember the words of Paul, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Peter penned, “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9).

Most Christians can resist the stranger that tempts them to sin. However, when our close friends and family members become Satan’s tempters, our guard is down, and we fall into the devil’s snare.

Are you a Mrs. Job? Are you a tempter to your loved ones, a tool in Satan’s arsenal, seeking to draw God’s children away?

Mrs. Job Was a Tormentor

A tormentor is one who inflicts pain and agony on another. This infliction may be physical or mental, and in modern times is called bullying. Not only was Mrs. Job a tempter to her husband, she was also his tormentor. Her lack of compassion toward him brought great mental anguish (Job 19:17). At a time when comfort was needed, she turned away, ignoring his pleas for compassion.

As one endures the afflictions of this world, our family members may be our source of comfort or they may react like Mrs. Job and become our tormentors. This may be because they, too, are suffering and are unable to offer compassion to us.

A Christ-like attitude offers compassion, kindness and comfort to those who are suffering. We are to show kindness to one another (Ephesians 5:32). We are to “[p]ut on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12). A compassionate person will help those in need (1 John 3:17).

Are you a Mrs. Job? Do you add insult to injury when a loved one is suffering? Jesus said, “...Get thee behind me, Satan...” when He was tempted by the devil (Luke 4:8). Let us become Christ-like as we resist the devil and offer comfort and compassion on those in need.

Mrs. Job Turned her Back on her Husband When in a Time of Need

At some time in our lives, each one of us will face difficult, heartbreaking situations. The cause may be sin in our lives, or it may be caused by sin in another person’s life. These situations will try us — they will test our faith in God. As husband and wife, we need to lean on one another (together drawing strength from God) to endure. Mrs. Job failed this test. Instead of gaining strength from each other as they suffered the loss of their children, possessions and Job’s health, she turned her back on Job.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all

Chapter 2 Mrs. Job — A Tool of Satan

our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). God is our strength and comfort, and we use this strength to comfort our loved ones.

Among the greatest tolls on a marriage are the tragedies that may come. If husband and wife do not confront these with a united effort, comforting each other, hurt and despair often will drive a wedge between the two. When this happens, it is difficult to repair the marriage into a loving home once again. When tragedies come, turn to God and one another for strength.

Are you a Mrs. Job? Do you turn away from those hurting and in need?

Job never condemned his wife for her behavior. When he spoke of her, he lovingly encouraged her to change her attitude. The last chapter of Job ends with God restoring to Job all that he lost. His possessions were doubled, and he was blessed with seven more sons and three more daughters (Job 42:10-17). Some commentators suggest that the second set of children is to a second wife since the last mention of Mrs. Job interacting with her husband is 19:17 when she encouraged him to “curse God and die.” This is an example of God choosing to leave out the details that are unnecessary to our understanding of these passages (Deuteronomy 29:29; 2 Peter 1:3).

I like to think that Job’s kindness and encouragement to his wife helped her change her attitude, and she returned to a loving relationship with God and her husband. Job’s reference to his wife in 31:10 certainly shows a love and concern for her. What better example of a kind word turning away wrath (Proverbs 15:1) than that exhibited by Job toward his wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Job suffered great calamities in their lives. One turned to God for strength, and the other allowed Satan to overtake her and use her against Job. While we may sympathize with Mrs. Job, we cannot condone her behavior. Mrs. Job is a character that we should not emulate, but from whom we can learn what not to do in a similar situation.

Questions

1. What man was considered the “greatest of all the men of the east”?
2. What happened to Mrs. Job’s children?
3. What was the first restriction God placed on Satan toward Job?
4. What was the second restriction God placed on Satan toward Job?
5. What is the one statement recorded in the Bible that is attributed to Mrs. Job?
6. How did Satan use Mrs. Job to his advantage?
7. Why is it easier to resist the temptations of a stranger than the temptations of close friends and family members?
8. What can we do to resist the temptations of Satan?
9. Why do Christians sometimes become tormentors instead of compassionate helpers?
10. Where should we derive our greatest strength in times of trouble?
11. Where is the second place we should look for strength in difficult times?
12. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 3 Mrs. Potiphar – Persistent in Unrighteousness

Character Study

Genesis 39:1-20

Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh of Egypt, purchased Joseph. This young, teenage boy was a good worker and conscientiously fulfilled his duties as a slave. God watched over Joseph and caused him and Potiphar's house to prosper. Eventually, Potiphar raised Joseph to a position of authority to the extent that Potiphar turned complete control of maintaining the house, fields and finances to Joseph. Potiphar's complete trust in Joseph allowed Potiphar to say that "he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate" (Genesis 39:6).

This young Hebrew was a handsome man, taking after his mother, Rachel (Genesis 29:17; 39:6). Mrs. Potiphar noticed this Hebrew slave and was impressed with his goodly appearance. She invited Joseph to "lie with her." Joseph refused her offer, explaining he had been given authority over everything but her and to accept her offer would be an insult to Potiphar and a sin against God. Mrs. Potiphar was not dissuaded from her evil desire; she daily begged Joseph to sleep with her. One day when no other men were in the house, Mrs. Potiphar grabbed Joseph's coat and demanded that he sleep with her. Joseph refused and ran from the house, leaving his coat in her hand. To hide her shame and humiliation, Mrs. Potiphar screamed out to the others, with Joseph's coat in her hand as evidence, and accused Joseph of attacking her. Mrs. Potiphar then laid the coat on the bed beside her and awaited her husband's return. She told Mr. Potiphar the same story. Naturally, he became angry and cast Joseph

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into prison for the alleged attack on Mrs. Potiphar. One may wonder if Potiphar wholly believed the accusation against Joseph since he imprisoned his slave instead of executing him for such a crime.

The life of Joseph does not end with him in prison. God continued to watch over Joseph. Eventually, Joseph was released from prison and was once again placed in a position of authority. However, our study is not on Joseph and God's providential care. Our emphasis in this lesson is to glean lessons from Mrs. Potiphar.

Applicable Principles

Mrs. Potiphar Had the “I Syndrome”

Mrs. Potiphar concerned herself with her wants. She did not contemplate the desires and needs of others. She was only thinking about “me, myself and I.” Her desires outweighed everyone and everything else. Mrs. Potiphar wanted Joseph. She gave no thought to how her desires would affect Joseph, Mr. Potiphar or anyone else. She knew what she wanted and demanded to have **her** wishes fulfilled.

Many today are like Mrs. Potiphar. They have the “I syndrome,” thinking only of “me, myself and I.” The Scriptures have much to say about this ungodly trait. Matthew 7:12 states, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This verse is often referred to as the “golden rule.” We are to treat others as we want to be treated. Jesus further explained that this behavior was first implemented in the Old Law. Moses told the children of Israel to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). If we love ourselves, we will want only good for ourselves; thus, when we love others as we love ourselves, we will want good for others. We will treat others as we want to be treated. When a lawyer asked Jesus, “which is the great commandment,” Jesus replied, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your

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neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). Our interaction with others hinges on loving God first and foremost, and loving others as we love ourselves. Jesus made these two commands equal. We cannot do one without fulfilling the other.

Paul explained this principle in the Galatians epistle. “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). The Roman brethren needed a lesson on this subject as well. “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Romans 13:9). Paul listed specific sins — lying, adultery, stealing, murder, covetousness and all other sins that are included in failing to love others as we love ourselves.

These few verses show the sin of the “I syndrome.” This attitude will prohibit one from entering heaven. Do not be a Mrs. Potiphar; remove the “I syndrome” from your life before it is eternally too late.

Mrs. Potiphar Was a Liar

Lying was another sinful character flaw in Mrs. Potiphar. When she did not get what she wanted, she lied. Joseph was righteous in all his dealings with Potiphar and his wife, and her accusations were without merit.

Nelson’s Bible Dictionary defines a lie as, “Any statement or act designed to deceive another person. The motivation for most lying is a desire either to hurt the one against whom the lie is directed or to protect oneself, usually out of fear or pride.” A lie is a falsehood, an untruth or an attempt to deceive another with words or actions. A liar is one who will “utter an untruth or attempt to deceive by falsehood” (New Unger’s). God’s attitude toward liars is evident throughout the Scriptures; consider the following quote from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia.

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God's attitude toward this sin is strongly marked throughout both the Old Testament and New Testament. The righteous are called upon to hate lying (Prov 13:5), to avoid it (Zeph 3:13), to respect not those who lie, and utterly reject their company (Ps 40:4; 101:7), to pray to be delivered from it (Ps 119:29). The wicked are said to love lying (Ps 52:3), to delight in it (Ps 62:4), to seek after it (Ps 4:2), and to give heed to it (Prov 17:4). Lying leads to worse crimes (Hos 4:1-2).

The subject of lying and examples of liars appear from cover to cover in the Bible. The art of lying was first employed by Satan in the Garden of Eden. The devil, in the form of a serpent, used lies to entice Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Jesus affirmed that the devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). The closing verses of the Bible state, "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and **all liars** shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8 emphasis added). Those who love and practice lies will not enter heaven (Revelation 22:14).

Throughout biblical history, mankind has been plagued with this sin. Many notable Bible characters were guilty of lying at some point in their lives. Sometimes, those lies were half-truths used under the guise of protecting someone or something. Nevertheless, they were words or actions used in an attempt to deceive another.

If we tell a lie to make someone feel better, it may soothe one's feelings, but it is still a falsehood in God's eyes, and it will keep one from entering heaven. It would be better to say nothing than to use false words or actions to appease someone's feelings.

Do not be a Mrs. Potiphar, telling lies to harm another or to protect yourself. Always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Mrs. Potiphar Was Immoral

Immoral is the opposite of moral. Synonyms for moral include ethical, right, honest, decent, proper, honorable, just and principled. An immoral person is one who is unethical, dishonest or improper

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in behavior and attitude. Mrs. Potiphar met each of these latter characteristics.

God expects His children to act morally.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

The apostle Paul was speaking to the Christians at Corinth. These individuals practiced these unrighteous behaviors. Now that they have obeyed the Gospel, they have put off their worldly behaviors.

Paul contrasted immorality with morality in Galatians 5:19-21.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Do not be a Mrs. Potiphar. Fortify yourself with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), living a moral life.

Mrs. Potiphar Was Persistent

As we study the life of Mrs. Potiphar, one should observe that this was a woman that we must not emulate. However, she had one quality that each of us should incorporate into our lives. Mrs. Potiphar was persistent in trying to fulfill her desires. While she

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used this good quality in a negative way, we should be persistent in righteousness.

We need persistence in:

- † Prayer “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).
- † Bible Study “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).
- † Moral behavior “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12).
- † Evangelism “So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing” (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).
- † Parenting “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

These are just a few areas where we need persistence in our lives.

I am sure you can think of other areas in which we ought to be persistent as well.

Are you a Mrs. Potiphar? Do you have the “I syndrome”? Are you considered a liar by those who know you? Have you allowed the immorality of the world to seep into your thoughts and behavior? Are you persistent in unrighteousness? If so, please repent and turn to God so that we may rejoice in heaven together.

Questions

1. How did Joseph, an Israelite, become a slave in Potiphar’s house?

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2. Define the “I Syndrome.”
3. How can we overcome the “I Syndrome”?
4. What is a “lie?”
5. Who is the father of lies?
6. What specific sin is depicted in both the opening and closing verses of God’s Word?
7. What passage of Scripture in this chapter contrasts immorality with righteousness?
8. What is the one quality displayed by Mrs. Potiphar that all Christians should develop in their lives?
9. Name some areas in our lives in which we should be persistent.
10. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 4 Mrs. Jeroboam – Deliverer of a Message of Doom

Character Study

1 Kings 14:1-18

Like many of the characters in the Bible, the life of Mrs. Jeroboam ended in tragedy. The only mention of her is in 1 Kings 14, and those verses reveal heart-wrenching events that will not be overcome.

As with the study of any individual, especially a married person, one must look at the overall context and family relationships. First, we will give an overview of the life of King Jeroboam and the events leading up to Chapter Fourteen of First Kings.

Upon the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam became King. When Jeroboam heard of the death of Solomon, he returned from hiding in Egypt (1 Kings 11:40). Jeroboam and the assembly of Israel approached the new king with a request to make their burdens lighter than King Solomon had. These men promised King Rehoboam, if the king fulfilled their request, they would faithfully follow him as their king. Rehoboam not only refused to lighten the load upon the people, but he created heavier burdens for them (1 Kings 12:12-14).

The ten northern tribes of Israel chose to appoint Jeroboam as king over them. The tribe of Judah chose to follow King Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:34-36). (For treatment of the use of biblical numbers relating to this passage, and the technical treatment of the actual tribes ruled by Jeroboam versus those ruled by Rehoboam, see Keil & Delitzsch.) This was fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahijah that God would take ten tribes from Solomon's son and give them to Jeroboam because of the sins of King Solomon (1 Kings 11:29-39). In order to keep the children of Israel from returning to Jerusalem to worship at

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the Temple on the God-appointed days, Jeroboam made two golden calves. He placed one calf in Dan, the northern most city in the land of Israel, and one calf at Bethel, at the southern edge of the land of Israel. Then, King Jeroboam appointed priests, who were not from the tribe of Levi, to preside over the burnt offerings to these false gods.

Sometime after these events, one of King Jeroboam's sons, Abijah became ill. Perhaps, Jeroboam remembered the promise Ahijah made to Jeroboam before he was made king – the promise of God's blessings if Jeroboam remained faithful to God. Now, with the illness of his son (the one whom the people loved and the son probably in line to take the throne upon his father's death), Jeroboam wanted confirmation from the prophet as to the severity of this illness. Thus, Jeroboam decided to send his wife to the prophet Ahijah to inquire about the sickness. Since Ahijah was old and nearly blind, Jeroboam instructed his wife to disguise herself and take gifts to the prophet that a commoner would take. "Strange infatuation! To suppose that the God who could reveal futurity could not penetrate a flimsy disguise" (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary). Mrs. Jeroboam did as her husband told her. She dressed in the clothing of a peasant woman, took ten loaves, some cracknel (a sweet biscuit or cake that crumbled easily) and a jar of honey. "It was customary to give presents to all great personages; and no person consulted a prophet without bringing something in his hand" (Adam Clarke's Commentary). These items were the gifts a commoner would take to a prophet.

Before Mrs. Jeroboam arrived at the home of Ahijah, God spoke to him telling of the upcoming arrival and hope of deception. Furthermore, God gave Ahijah a message of doom for Mrs. Jeroboam. Her son would die as she returned to her home city. Ahijah instructed Mrs. Jeroboam to tell her husband that because of his wickedness and failure to follow God's commands and rule as King David had ruled, each of his male descendants would be eaten by wild animals upon their death. Only Abijah would be buried in a tomb, "...for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in

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him there is found something good toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 14:13).

Jeroboam’s evil was greater than any Israelite ruler before him was.

“...above all previous rulers of the people, whether Judges or kings. Hereto none of the rulers of Israel had set up the idolatrous worship of ephod, teraphim, and the like (Judges 18:17), as a substitute for the true religion, or sought to impose an idolatrous system on the nation. Gideon’s ephod ‘became a snare’ contrary to his intention (Judges 8:27). Solomon’s high places were private-built for the use of his wives, and not designed to attract the people. Jeroboam was the first ruler who set himself to turn the Israelites away from the true worship, and established a poor counterfeit of it, which he strove to make, and succeeded in making, the religion of the great mass of his subjects.” (Barnes’ Notes)

This great wickedness caused Abijah’s early death, the prophecy that the children of Israel would be destroyed and the lack of proper burial for all male members of Jeroboam’s family.

I can only imagine the heavy heart and dejected footsteps of Mrs. Jeroboam as she traveled home. She knew that when she entered the city that her young son would die. Her last glimpse of him was as a sick child, and when she saw him again, life would have left his body. Furthermore, she needed to tell her husband that his wickedness caused the death of this son and the shameful death of him and all his descendants.

Applicable Principles

Mrs. Jeroboam Was Obedient to her Husband.

We do not know the full context of the discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Jeroboam. The only information given to us is that King Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and go to Ahijah the prophet to seek information about their sick son. God chose not to reveal

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Mrs. Jeroboam's attitude toward this deception. The record says, "... And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh" (1 Kings 14:4). She obediently followed the instructions of her husband.

God's laws for the twenty-first century woman are the same as that given in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:16). God's command for women to obey their husbands has not changed. The apostle Paul makes a comparison of the husband/wife relationship with the church/Christ relationship in Ephesians 5:22-33.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

The apostle states that just as Christ is the Head of the church, the husband is the head of the wife. With this relationship, the church must obey Christ and the wife must obey her husband. Paul continues this analogy while correlating the love Christ has for the church with the love a husband should have for his wife. Typically, men care for and nourish their own bodies and Paul states that a man who

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properly loves his wife will treat her as he treats himself. He will nourish and cherish her as he would himself. When a man treats his wife as he should, she will lovingly and willingly follow God's command to be obedient to her husband.

Unfortunately, some men forget to apply these verses to themselves and mistreat their wives, making it difficult for the wife to have the reverence for her husband that she should have. Nevertheless, a wife is still obligated to obey her husband even if he does not treat her as God has commanded. The only exception to this God-given rule is when the husband demands the wife to do something that is contrary to the laws of God (Deuteronomy 13:6-8; Matthew 19:29; Matthew 10:37; Acts 5:29). Even though we do not live under the Old Law, the principle has not changed. God will not accept the excuse, "I had to obey my husband" on the Judgment Day, nor will he accept the excuse, "My husband was unreasonable, harsh and cruel (or any other negative characteristic)."

Are you like Mrs. Jeroboam? Are you obedient to your husband? Do you love and reverence your husband as Paul outlined in Ephesians?

Mrs. Jeroboam Had a Heavy Heart.

Mrs. Jeroboam's heavy heart could have been avoided if Jeroboam had gone to Ahijah seeking repentance for his sinful actions instead of trying to deceive the prophet. God had promised Jeroboam an enduring kingdom, one that would see his descendants rule for many years if Jeroboam followed God as David had followed God. "Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you" (1 Kings 11:38-39). However, like many today, Jeroboam chose to follow Satan instead of following God. Just as God forgave David when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba and the subsequent sins to hide the adultery, God would have forgiven

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Jeroboam, and possibly his son would not have died an early death if Jeroboam had repented.

Instead of living a lifetime of serving God as the queen of a God-fearing nation, Mrs. Jeroboam was given the heart-wrenching task of telling her husband of the impending doom that lay ahead for them and the nation of Israel. She also knew that upon her arrival home her son would die.

Every individual faces difficult situations at some time in his or her life on this earth (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). All who strive to follow God and obey His commands will be tested and tried. Some difficulties are caused by others, and some are the result of sin in one’s life. We can use the trials of life to bring us closer to God (Romans 8:17-18; 1 Peter 4:13), or we can use them as an excuse to pull away from God. As Christians, we have the wonderful relationship with our Father in heaven who will comfort us in times of trial, if we are obedient to Him (2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Peter 5:5-7).

The Bible gives no other details about Mrs. Jeroboam. First Kings 14:17 simply states, “And Jeroboam’s wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died.” She returned home with a heavy heart and no indication of any comfort. Do not be a Mrs. Jeroboam. Turn to God in repentance, and He will comfort you in times of trials.

Mrs. Jeroboam Tried to Deceive God

Mr. and Mrs. Jeroboam were foolish when they thought they could trick a prophet of God into believing Mrs. Jeroboam was a peasant woman rather than the wife of a king. To think that an all-knowing God would fail to inform His prophet of the coming deception is remarkable.

The Bible clearly teaches that God is omniscient. New Unger’s Bible Dictionary gives the following definition for omniscience.

The divine attribute of perfect knowledge. This is declared in

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Ps 33:13-15; 139:11-12; 147:5; Prov 15:3; Isa 40:14; 46:10; Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20; Heb 4:13, and in many other places. The perfect knowledge of God is exclusively His attribute. It relates to Himself and to all beyond Himself. It includes all things that are actual and all things that are possible. Its possession is incomprehensible to us, and yet it is necessary to our faith in the perfection of God's sovereignty. The revelation of this divine property like that of others is well calculated to fill us with profound reverence. It should alarm sinners and beget confidence in the hearts of God's children and deepen their consolation (see Job 23:10; Ps 34:15-16; 90:8; Jer 17:10; Hos 7:2; 1 Peter 3:12-14). The Scriptures unequivocally declare the divine prescience and at the same time make their appeal to man as a free and consequently responsible being.

David made this clear in Psalms 139:1-4, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether." God knows our thoughts and our movements. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

God knows every detail of our lives whether they are small or great, our physical bodies or our innermost thoughts. "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:29-31). Consider Proverbs 5:21, "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths." God knows where we are headed and what we are going to do when we get there.

This does not mean that God makes us do something. God has given us freewill (Revelation 22:17). We make our own choices as to what we do, where we go and what we say. However, God knows how we will react to any given situation before the situation occurs.

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Mankind can deceive other individuals for a time, but we cannot deceive God. Usually, our deceptive practices are eventually discovered by those that we attempt to trick into believing we are something we are not. We may pretend to be faithful servants of God when in reality we are simply going through the motions of Christianity while our hearts are on the things of this world (James 2:10; 4:4).

Are you like Mrs. Jeroboam? Do you try to deceive God and others into believing you are not who you really are?

Mrs. Jeroboam was a deliverer of a message of doom. She had the God-given responsibility of telling her husband of the coming destruction of his descendants and the overthrow of the Israelite nation – all because they tried to deceive a prophet of God.

Questions

1. Explain the events surrounding Jeroboam becoming king of the northern tribes.
2. What caused God to remove His blessings from Jeroboam?
3. What did Jeroboam ask his wife to do?
4. Describe how Mrs. Jeroboam disguised herself.
5. How did Ahijah know that Mrs. Jeroboam came to visit him?
6. What was the fateful message Mrs. Jeroboam had to carry back to her husband?
7. Why was God's punishment to Jeroboam harsher than the punishment administered to some of the Judges or Solomon who also provided places for idolatrous worship?
8. What New Testament passage in this chapter explains the proper husband/wife relationship?
9. What can Christians do to ease the heartaches they face from time to time in their lives?
10. What are some ways that Christians try to deceive God?
11. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 5 Mrs. Peter – A Faithful Companion

Note: I was privileged to attend the 2008 Polishing the Pulpit lectureship; one of the topics presented by Kathy Pollard was about “Mrs. Peter.” My first thought was, “What can we learn from her since she is not mentioned in the Bible.” Sister Pollard presented a thought provoking and insightful lesson that challenged me to take a closer look at many Scriptures. I thank her for her in-depth study and willingness to share that knowledge with others. Some of the points listed in this lesson may have come from her lesson.

Character Study

Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38

Three of the Gospel records document the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law. This fact proves that even though Peter’s wife is not mentioned in the Scriptures, he was married, and we can glean useful knowledge about her from the context surrounding Peter and his mother-in-law.

Let us begin with the backdrop of Matthew 8:14, Mark 1:30 and Luke 4:38. According to the Book of Matthew, at the conclusion of the “Sermon on the Mount” Jesus left the mountain and entered into the city of Capernaum. This city was located on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was the home of four of the original twelve apostles (Peter, Andrew, James and John), and it appears that Capernaum became the home city of Jesus as well (Matthew 4:13; 9:1; 17:24). The Book of Mark adds that Jesus was in the synagogue teaching prior to entering the family home of Peter and Andrew. It was not uncommon during biblical times for multiple family members to live in the same house. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states, “The father (אב, ’ābh; πατήρ, patér) was the head of the family (mishpāḥāh) or household (bayith), which

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was a religious (1 Samuel 20:6, 29; Exodus 12:3; Job 1:5) as well as a social and political unit, consisting usually of a combination of families in the modern sense.” Those individual families may have consisted of parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. (It was not much unlike the fictional Walton family on television a few decades ago and the current practice in other countries.)

James and John accompanied Jesus, Peter and Andrew to the residence (Mark 1:30). This shows the household was accustomed to having guests in its home. Mrs. Peter and the other female family members must have made a habit of showing hospitality to others.

Family members told Jesus that Peter’s mother-in-law lay sick with a great fever. As the Great Physician who can heal spiritual and physical ailments, Jesus went to her, lovingly touched her hand and healed her. She immediately rose and served the guests in the home. Usually, the miracles performed by Jesus, and the apostles, were immediate, without the need for repeated attempts or rehabilitation. The miracles were genuine, not mirages or fakes.

1 Corinthians 9:5

The only other reference to Peter having a wife is found in 1 Corinthians 9:5. This passage appears in the context of the apostle Paul defending his apostleship and his rights as an apostle. One of the privileges that Paul was defending was that a preacher can be paid for his services. Furthermore, a married preacher should be paid enough to maintain his family. Paul used the example of Peter and the other apostles who were married and whose families traveled with their husbands as the final proof for his right to be paid and to marry should he choose to wed. However, Paul chose to remain single and to “make tents” in Corinth to alleviate the financial burden from the congregation meeting in that city (1 Corinthians 9:18).

The reference to the word “sister” in verse five implies that the wives were Christians as all in Christ are brothers and sisters (1 Corinthians 7:15; James 2:15). Albert Barnes made the following observation in his commentary:

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And if THEY were married, it is right and proper for ministers to marry now, whatever the papist may say to the contrary. It is safer to follow the example of the apostles than the opinions of the papal church. The REASONS why the apostles had wives with them on their journeys may have been various. They may have been either to give instruction and counsel to those of their own sex to whom the apostles could not have access, or to minister to the needs of their husbands as they traveled. It is to be remembered that they traveled among pagans; they had no acquaintance and no friends there; they therefore took... wives to minister to them, and sustain them in sickness, trial, etc.

Adam Clarke suggests that:

And secondly, we find that their wives were persons of the same faith; for less can never be implied in the word sister. This is a decisive proof against the papistical celibacy of the clergy: and as to their attempts to evade the force of this text by saying that the apostles had holy women who attended them, and ministered to them in their peregrinations, there is no proof of it; nor could they have suffered either young women or other men's wives to have accompanied them in this way without giving the most palpable occasion of scandal.

For the apostles to encourage single or married women (without their respective husbands) to travel with them would have left the appearance of indecency. This behavior would have had a negative effect on the lost souls they were trying to reach with the Gospel of Christ. Certainly, the apostles and we today need to ensure that our actions and behaviors are upright and holy, and that those observing us can conclude the same.

Applicable Principles

Mrs. Peter was an Elder's Wife

The apostle Peter was also an elder (1 Peter 5:1); therefore,

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Mrs. Peter was an elder's wife. First Timothy 3:1-11 outlines the qualifications of an elder. Any man desiring to serve God in the capacity of an elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of money; patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that rules his own house having his children in subjection and he must have a good report of those without the body of Christ. Many of these characteristics could not be fulfilled without a wife who equally strives to pattern her life accordingly. Could a man serve effectively as an elder if his wife did not have a good reputation within the community?

Mrs. Peter Was Hospitable.

Although the Bible records Peter's mother-in-law as the one who served the guests, we can assume that Mrs. Peter and any other women living in that home assisted with the meal and the other necessities of making their visitors comfortable. Mrs. Peter would have learned from her mother the art of hospitality. The Bible is full of examples of hospitality. The list would include Sarah, Martha, Lydia, the widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite woman, Zacchaeus, Phoebe and the Good Samaritan.

One of the qualifications of elders is that they be "given to hospitality" (1 Timothy 3:2) or a "lover of hospitality" (Titus 1:8). This means that elders must enjoy entertaining strangers and friends alike. When Paul wrote to Timothy about the care of the widows, a true widow to be cared for by the church was to have "...lodged strangers, and... washed the saints' feet" (1 Timothy 5:10). A true widow was one who cared for non-Christians and Christians. First Peter 4:9 reads, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Hospitality means love of strangers and is a command for all Christians.

It seems that the art of hospitality is losing the battle in this modern day. Women working outside the home, extra-curricular school activities with our children, an abundance of restaurants and

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motels, a mad rush to recreation and a society that seems to put “me first” above everything else places hospitality on the back burner of our lives. We have freezers with meat ready to be cooked, or meals already prepared waiting to be heated. Bread is already baked and waiting to be purchased. Some stores have entire meals cooked ready to take home and eat. Entertaining today is much easier than it was during Bible times. Let us learn the art of hospitality once again. Let us teach it to our daughters. Let us open our homes to our friends and to those with whom we worship each Lord’s Day. The best way to really know our brothers and sisters in Christ is to put our feet under the same table as we share a meal together. Let us open our homes to those we would like to reach with the Gospel of Christ. It is easy to open our homes to those with whom we have a close relationship, but what about those we do not know very well? Do you use the blessings God has given you to show hospitality to others? Do you quickly act on opportunities to serve others?

We should entertain not because we are commanded to show hospitality, but with a desire of love and concern. Be a Mrs. Peter. Show hospitality toward your brethren and the lost souls around you.

Mrs. Peter Was a Missionary

As a traveling companion with her husband, Mrs. Peter had many opportunities to be an encourager to her husband. An encourager is one who gives confidence, cheers, supports, promotes or heartens another. With the cares of the church upon his shoulders as an elder and as a missionary, Peter would need words of encouragement from time to time. Mrs. Peter would be the one to best offer those words. Just as Mrs. Peter encouraged her husband, today Christian wives need to be an encouragement to their husbands. We need to listen to their frustrations as they deal with ungodly men, immature Christians and try to reach a world that does not know it is lost without Christ. Our husbands need to know that what is discussed will not be repeated. We need to offer encouraging words and make suggestions that may help. We all become discouraged from time to

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time. We all need words of encouragement.

We can use the example of Barnabas to learn how to be an encourager. Barnabas took Paul to Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9:26-27). When other Christians were fearful (and rightly so), Barnabas stood by Paul and proclaimed him as a righteous preacher. Barnabas gave John Mark a second chance when he took him on another missionary journey even though John Mark prematurely left the first journey (Acts 12:25; 13:13; 15:37).

Mrs. Peter may have had opportunities to teach lost souls the way to heaven. As she traveled with Peter, we can assume Mrs. Peter assisted her husband in teaching the lost. In a time period and culture that limited the male/female associations, she would have had opportunities to talk with other women that Peter probably did not have. Mrs. Peter had to have an understanding of God's Word to have the ability to teach others.

Today, Christian women need knowledge of the Scriptures so that we can teach others. We need to "study the Scriptures daily" as the Bereans in Acts 17:11 did. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Many preachers are hindered in their work by wives who discourage their husbands from preaching God's Word in the local arena or on the foreign field. They may refuse to move away from family and friends, or when they move, they become sullen and depressed about all they left behind. Do you remember what happened to Lot's wife when she looked back? She left children, friends and possessions behind. God turned her into a pillar of salt when she looked back (Genesis 19:1-26). Jesus taught that those who love family more than Christ are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37-38).

In addition, some wives are jealous of the time their husbands spend preparing lessons, studying the Bible with others, visiting the sick, etc. As husbands and fathers, preachers need to fulfill their family responsibilities. They need to balance those responsibilities with Paul's words in Ephesians 5:16, "Redeeming the time, because

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the days are evil.” As Christians, we need to seize every opportunity to bring others to Christ.

Many godly men, not just preachers, are discouraged by their wives from fully serving God. These women make unreasonable demands on the time and resources that could be used to glorify God.

Are you like these wives? Do you hinder your husband from serving God to his fullest potential? Are you envious of the time he spends serving God? If so, please change. If you desire more time with your husband, go visiting with him, study the Bible with him and accompany him as he teaches others the way to Christ. You will become a stronger servant of God, and together you will lead lost souls to heaven.

Are you a Mrs. Peter? Are you encouraging your husband or others as they serve God? Do you show hospitality to the stranger as well as to your close friends? Are you a missionary reaching out to the lost? If so, I commend you for your good works.

Questions

1. Name Peter’s wife.
2. How do we know Peter was married?
3. What three Gospels record Jesus healing Peter’s mother-in-law?
4. How do we know that Peter’s household was accustomed to showing hospitality?
5. If a man is being considered to serve as an elder, what characteristics should his wife possess?
6. What does it mean to be “hospitable”?
7. Is hospitality a trait all Christians should develop in their lives today or is it something of the past?
8. How can we encourage our husbands to be all that God expects them to be in their service to Him?
9. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Section Two: The Well Known

The following Bible characters are women with whom you are probably already familiar. Most of these ladies appear in the various books written about Bible people. The design of this study is to evaluate the biblical context, learn some of the appropriate characteristics of these individuals and apply the lessons learned to our lives.

Chapter 6 Sarah – Mother of Nations

Character Study

Genesis Chapter 12

Abraham and Sarah lived in Ur of Chaldees around 2000 B.C. Ur of Chaldees was not a primitive tent-dweller's camp, but an advanced city-state with fine buildings, canals, one of the oldest law systems known, a school system, advanced mathematical calculations, an elaborate system of writing, dictionaries, encyclopedias, religious records and refined art. Their homes had many rooms for the family and their servants — complete with running water. The city of Ur had many modern conveniences.

God, knowing Abraham was a faithful servant in spite of the idol worship all around him, chose Abraham to be the father of many nations and called him out of Ur to a land that God would show him. After God told Abraham to leave family and friends behind to journey to a strange new land, Abraham went to tell Sarah about God's plan for them. I picture this scenario in my mind. Abraham comes home one day and says, "Sarah, God told me we are to leave all this behind and travel to a new land." Sarah asks, "Where are we going?" To which Abraham replies, "I do not know." "When will we get there?" asks Sarah. "God did not tell me," is the reply. How would you react if your husband were to tell you this? Many women today would reply something like this. "Abraham, I am not going anywhere. I have this nice house, all my friends are here, my family is here. I cannot leave all this behind. You do not even know where we are going and you expect me to live in a tent. You can pack your things and go by yourself, because I am not leaving all this behind!!!" Fortunately, this was not Sarah's reaction.

Sarah knew God would take care of them. She willingly left family and friends behind to travel, as a nomad with no place to call

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her own the rest of her life (Genesis 12). That takes great faith. She knew that God would keep his promise and protect them. Hebrews 11:11 records Sarah's great faith as the reason for her ability to conceive when she was past the age of childbearing.

Genesis 16

About ten years passed since Abraham and Sarah left Ur of Chaldees and God's promise to Abraham. They wandered throughout Canaan, but did not possess it as God promised. Furthermore, Sarah had yet to give birth, so that the promise of a great nation could be fulfilled. God told Abraham he would have a son of his own flesh (Genesis 15:4). However, that child had not come. Perhaps Sarah was growing impatient, or perhaps her faith in God was slipping. Maybe, Sarah reasoned that God's promise to Abraham did not include her. For some reason unknown to us, Sarah chose to help God fulfill His promises.

Sarah gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham as a second wife in order to bear a child in Sarah's name. This was a common practice among the surrounding nations. It was important and honorable to have children. When a wife was unable to have children, a second wife was taken to act as a surrogate mother for the first wife. Unfortunately, Abraham accepted Sarah's offer, and Hagar conceived. Adam Clark made the following observation.

The slave being the absolute property of the mistress, not only her person, but the fruits of her labour, with all her children, were her owner's property also. The children, therefore, which were born of the slave, were considered as the children of the mistress. It was on this ground that Sarai gave her slave to Abram; and we find, what must necessarily be the consequence in all cases of polygamy, that strifes and contentions took place.

When Hagar conceived, she forgot that she was a servant and despised Sarah. Sarah then blamed Abraham for Hagar's behavior and told him to choose between the two of them. Some commentators

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believe that Sarah was feeling inferior and felt that she had lost Abraham's love to the servant, Hagar, because of her inability to have children. Abraham told Sarah to do whatever she wanted with Hagar. When Sarah treated Hagar harshly, Hagar ran away. God spoke to Hagar by a fountain of water in the wilderness. He told her to return to Sarah and submit to her. God promised Hagar that her son would become a great nation, constantly fighting with those around him. Hagar returned to Sarah as God instructed. Years later, after the birth of Isaac the difficulties and jealousies surfaced once again. This time Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away (Genesis 21:9-13).

This one act of trying to hurry God's promise caused more harm than good. Today, the world is still suffering the effects of Sarah and Abraham's actions. The Arab nations are descendants of Ishmael, the son of Hagar and Abraham. We must remember God works within His timeframe, not ours.

Genesis 18

Abraham saw three men coming toward them. He ran to greet them, bid them rest in the shade of trees while water was brought to wash the dust from their feet and food was prepared for them to eat. Once they accepted his offer, Abraham ran to the tent, requested Sarah make bread and brought a calf to be dressed and cooked for the strangers. Abraham and Sarah had unexpected company. They quickly and diligently prepared a meal for their guests. These men came to remind Abraham and Sarah of God's promise of a son. Within the year, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 20

Because the land of Canaan was struggling with a famine, Abraham decided to travel to Egypt where food was available. At the age of 65, Sarah was still very beautiful and Abraham knew the Egyptians would want to take Sarah to Pharaoh to be his wife. If the Egyptians knew that Abraham and Sarah were husband and wife, Abraham was afraid that they would kill him so that they could take

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Sarah. For this reason, as they approached Egypt, Abraham asked Sarah to tell everyone that they were brother and sister. In fact, Abraham and Sarah were half-brother and sister. They had the same father but different mothers. Sarah did as Abraham asked.

Just as Abraham feared, the Egyptians saw beautiful Sarah and took her to Pharaoh. Pharaoh paid a large dowry to Abraham for Sarah. Before Pharaoh married Sarah, God caused many plagues to fall upon Pharaoh and his house. Pharaoh realized that Sarah was indeed the wife of Abraham, chastised Abraham for his deceit and sent them both away.

About 24 years later, the Scriptures record that once again Abraham and Sarah attempted to deceive a king to protect Abraham's life. Instead of sending plagues, God spoke to Abimelech in a dream telling him not to touch Sarah for she was a married woman. Consequently, Abimelech rebuked Abraham for his deception. On this occasion, Abraham attempted to make excuses for his actions. He expressed to Abimelech that he was concerned for his safety since he surmised Abimelech was not a God-fearing man. Abraham further explained that Sarah was his sister as well as his wife and that they decided to portray Sarah as his sister from the time that God called them out of Ur (Genesis 11:13).

Abimelech returned Sarah to Abraham and gave him servants, animals and one thousand pieces of silver. Abimelech also invited Abraham to dwell wherever he pleased in Abimelech's territory.

Applicable Principles

Sarah Had Great Faith

Sarah's faith led her away from family and friends to a strange land. Sarah's faith enabled her to give birth to Isaac when she was physically past the age to give birth. Sarah's faith made her a mother of nations (Genesis 17:16). Let us take a closer look at the word faith.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words gives this definition for faith: "primarily, firm persuasion, a

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conviction based upon hearing. New Testament usage of this word is always of faith in God, or Christ or things spiritual. Synonyms for faith as used in the Bible would be trust or trustworthiness.”

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:1-3)

The American Standard Version of the Bible uses the word “assurance” for substance and the word “conviction” for evidence. Our faith allows us to believe something to be fact even when we cannot see that fact. We cannot see the wind, but we say the wind is blowing when we see tree limbs moving. We believe the wind is blowing because we see the results of the wind. We believe that God created the world although we did not see Him create the world. We see the results of creation.

Consider these passages:

- † “(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We believe in God not because we see him, but through faith, we believe the Bible is the written Word of God.
- † “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). A diligent study of the Bible deepens our faith in God.
- † “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith precedes salvation and maintains our devotion to God.
- † “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

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And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:1-5). Faith overcomes worldliness (sin) and is victorious.

Sarah’s faith was tested many times throughout her life on earth. Sometimes her faith prevailed, and sometimes her faith faltered. Christians today are just like Sarah. Sometimes our faith prevails, and at other times, our faith falters. We need to remember that when we fall, God will forgive if we ask.

Do you have the faith Sarah had? Are you willing to forsake all to serve God?

Sarah Was Impatient

Sarah became impatient while waiting on God to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Or, perhaps she thought the promise to Abraham did not include her. Sarah took matters into her own hands and gave Hagar to be Abraham’s wife. Hagar conceived and Ishmael was born. Approximately 15 years later, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, and Isaac was born to Sarah. Sarah’s impatience has left a long lasting hardship on the world today.

Are you like Sarah? Are you sometimes impatient with God? Do you question God’s ability to answer prayer because you have not received the answer you want within your timeframe? Let us remember God does not measure time as we measure time. God answers prayers. Maybe not the way we want them answered, but He answers the prayers of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29; 28:9; John 9:31). Do you become impatient with family or friends because they do not respond as quickly as you think they should?

Sarah Showed Hospitality toward Others

Abraham and Sarah showed hospitality. Take a closer look at Genesis Chapter 18. The Scriptures record that twice Abraham ran

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to accomplish his task. He saw a need and was quick to act upon an opportunity to serve. Hebrews 13:2 states, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The word “strangers” in this verse means guests. This verse refers to Abraham and Sarah’s willingness to provide food for the three men in Genesis 18. Paul commanded the brethren at Rome to be hospitable. “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Romans 12:13). “Given to hospitality” literally means be not forgetful of strangers.

One of the many qualifications of elders is that they be “given to hospitality” (1 Timothy 3:2). Titus 1:8 uses the words “lover of hospitality.” When Paul wrote to Timothy about the care of the widows, a true widow to be cared for by the church was to have “lodged strangers” (1 Timothy 5:10). First Peter 4:9 reads, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” We should entertain not because we are commanded to, but with a desire of love and concern not only for our brethren but for lost souls as well. Hospitality means love of strangers. Are you hospitable? Can your husband count on you to prepare a meal willingly at a moment’s notice as Abraham did with Sarah?

It is easy to open our homes to those with whom we have a close relationship because of the time saving conveniences available. Many restaurants provide complete family-style meals “to go” and some grocery stores provide complete dinners ready to heat and serve. With freezers in most homes, shopping and cooking can be prepared in advance ready for the table in short order. However, our hospitality should be shown to those with whom we do not have a close relationship as well as our dear friends.

Do you use the blessings God has given you to show hospitality to others? Do you quickly act on opportunities to serve others?

Sarah Showed Love and Respect toward her Husband

The New Testament mentions Sarah three times. Paul refers to Sarah and Rebecca as he discusses in Romans 9:9 the promise to

Chapter 6 Sarah — Mother of Nations

Abraham. The writer of the Book of Hebrews lists Sarah among those outlined in the Bible hall of fame (Hebrews 11). Peter uses the example of Sarah as he discusses the husband/wife relationship in 1 Peter 3:5-6.

The word “lord” was not used as slave to a master or merely as we would use “sir” to a superior. Lord is used to show she recognized her place in the home, that of a helpmeet (helper to her husband). Please consider these points with reference to the phrase “calling him lord.”

- † She acknowledged Abraham as head of the home and first in her heart.
- † She showed she recognized her place in the home and in the life of Abraham. She found completeness in it.
- † She was glad to be a woman, the wife of Abraham and found joy and happiness in her love for him.
- † She showed great love for Abraham.
- † She showed gentleness in her heart for Abraham.
- † She showed how proud she was of him, and she was happy to be his wife.
- † She showed respect and admiration for Abraham.

What do you call your husband? The way you speak to and about your husband shows others your feelings toward him. Can others see the love and respect your husband deserves by your words and actions, or do they see apathy, indifference, disdain or hatred? This would apply not only to husbands, but to all with whom we have a close association (children, parents, close friends, etc.). Can a woman say she loves and respects God whom she has not seen when she does not show love and respect for her husband whom she does see?

Sarah Obeyed her Husband

Did Sarah lie when she told others that she was Abraham's sister? The second definition in Webster's Dictionary for the word lie is "something intended or serving to convey a false impression; imposture." Genesis chapters 12 and 20 indicate that Abraham and Sarah intentionally withheld information from Pharaoh and Abimelech in order to portray Sarah as a sister, not a wife. With the above definition, one would conclude that Sarah did indeed tell a lie. However, before we condemn Sarah, we must remember that nowhere in the Scriptures is it recorded that God condemned Sarah or Abraham for their deception.

There is no indication in the various biblical accounts of Sarah that she was disobedient to her husband, Abraham. Peter states that "Sarah obeyed Abraham," using her as an example for us today. Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:5-6 are just a few of the Scriptures outlining the husband/wife relationship. The Bible clearly outlines God's plan that women are to be in subjection to their husbands. Do you obey your husband in all that you do? Should you obey your husband at all times, or are there occasions in which Christian women should with loving-kindness disobey their husbands?

Luke recorded in Acts 5:29 that the apostles proclaimed the need to obey God rather than man. Paul recorded in Galatians 1:10 that we cannot be servants to Christ if we strive to serve men. These verses apply to mankind today as much as they did when written to the original recipients. There are times when men and women must refuse to obey some commands.

If your boss required you to do something illegal according to the laws of the land, God and our civil government would expect you to refuse to obey the command of the boss. Furthermore, if a husband would request a wife to do something illegal according to the laws of the land, God and the civil government would expect one to refuse her husband's command. God will not condemn a woman who refuses to obey her husband when his commands go against

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the commands of God. When a wife is told that she is not allowed to attend worship services, that she should lie on tax returns, to purchase alcoholic beverages or if she is told to participate in any sinful activity, she will be praised by God when she with loving-kindness, refuses to obey such commands by her husband. Do you obey your husband? Do you allow your husband to use the excuse, “God says you are to obey me,” when encouraging you to participate in sinful activity?

Sarah is remembered for many things. She is the only woman whose age is recorded at her death, 127 years. She was very beautiful even in her old age. She is called the mother of nations. Like all of us, she had her weak moments as well as her strengths. How do you compare to Sarah? Is your faith as strong as hers is? Do you show hospitality as she did? Do you willingly open your home to others? Do you show your husband the love and respect that Sarah showed Abraham? Are you a true helpmeet to your husband? Are you a complement or a hindrance to him?

Questions

1. Where was Sarah living when God called Abraham and Sarah to leave?
2. What kind of city did Sarah leave?
3. True or False. Ur had many modern conveniences.
4. Why did Sarah give her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham?
5. What happened between Hagar and Sarah after Hagar was given to Abraham?
6. What was Abraham’s reaction when he saw the three strangers coming toward him?
7. What was the purpose for the visit of three strangers to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18?
8. What was the relationship between Abraham and Sarah?
9. What was the purpose Abraham gave for deceiving Pharaoh and Abimelech?
10. What is the Bible definition for faith?

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11. What can we do to make our faith stronger?
12. What relationship does hospitality have to Christians today?
13. Sarah called Abraham lord. Is this a phrase today's Christian woman should be using in reference to her husband? Explain your answer.
14. Are there occasions in life in which a Christian woman should disobey her husband? If yes, list some of those occasions.
15. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 7 Rebekah – A Match Made in Heaven

Character Study

Genesis 24:12-54

Abraham, in his old age, sent his servant Eliezer to Nahor to obtain a wife for Isaac. Abraham was very concerned that Isaac marry someone from his homeland rather than a Canaanite woman from the land in which they dwelt. The servant asked God to guide him to the maiden that would be the wife of Isaac. His request was that the young woman who volunteered to water the camels when Eliezer asked for a drink would be the chosen one. Abraham's servant saw a beautiful young woman approach the well. When he asked her for a drink of water from her pitcher, she willingly gave him a drink and hurriedly filled the trough for the camels. Eliezer discovered that the young maiden was from Abraham's family and asked if there was a place for him to stay. As was custom for that time, Laban showed great hospitality to Eliezer. Laban received Eliezer into his home, fed the camels and ordered a meal to be prepared for the stranger. Before Abraham's servant would eat, he took care of the reason for his visit. He explained who he was and why he was in Nahor. Then, he asked to take Rebekah to Canaan to marry Isaac. Once the marriage contract was agreed upon, Eliezer distributed the gifts of gold, silver and clothing. Then, he ate the evening meal and spent the night.

Genesis 24:55-67

Upon arising the next morning, Eliezer requested permission to take Rebekah and leave for home. Naturally, the family wanted to delay the departure for as long as possible, knowing that in all probability they would never see Rebekah again. They asked for at least ten days before sending Rebekah to Canaan. Eliezer did not

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want to wait several days, thus he repeated his request to return home. It was agreed that the departure date would be left up to Rebekah. When asked, “Wilt thou go with this man?” she answered, “I will go.” Laban was not asking Rebekah if she would marry Isaac; that decision had already been made. Rebekah was asked if she would go now or later. Rebekah packed her belongings, instructed her nurse and other female attendants to pack theirs as well, and left with Eliezer. Rebekah left her home, family and all that was familiar to go to a land she knew nothing about and to marry a man she had never met.

The long procession made its way southwest from Mesopotamia to Canaan. As they journeyed into Canaan, Isaac saw them coming and went out to meet them. When Rebekah saw Isaac, she quickly jumped off the camel she was riding.

When she arrived in Canaan, Rebekah married Isaac. Genesis 24:67 states that Isaac loved Rebekah, and she comforted him after his mother’s death.

Genesis 25:20-28

The next mention of Rebekah is approximately 20 years later when Isaac prayed to God (on Rebekah’s behalf) for a son. God heard Isaac’s prayer, and Rebekah conceived with not one son, but twins. The children struggled within the womb causing great concern for Rebekah. She prayed to God for understanding. God advised her that she would have twin sons. Each would be the head of a nation. One nation would be stronger than the other would, and the older would serve the younger. Rebekah gave birth first to Esau, who was covered with red hair; next Jacob was born holding onto Esau’s foot. Esau, much like his father, was a hunter and a man of the field, while Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents. He was content to stay close to home and became a shepherd. Esau and Jacob were very different, thus it was easy for Isaac to show favoritism to Esau and for Rebekah to show favoritism to Jacob.

Genesis 27:1-28:5

Isaac became old and blind. Rebekah overheard Isaac give instructions to Esau to hunt and make him venison stew. Anticipating his own death, Isaac planned to eat and then bless Esau. Rebekah told Jacob to bring her two young kid goats and she would make stew for Jacob to take to his father so that he would receive the blessing belonging to his brother Esau. Jacob reminded Rebekah that he was not hairy like Esau so Isaac would know that he was Jacob. Rebekah made the stew then covered Jacob's hands and neck with goat hair and had him put on his brother's clothes so that he would feel and smell like Esau. Isaac gave Jacob the blessing that belonged to Esau by birthright (being first born). When Esau discovered that Jacob received his blessing, he plotted to kill Jacob after his father's death. To save Jacob, Rebekah encouraged Isaac to send Jacob to Haran to find a wife among her brother Laban's daughters. As a possible punishment for deceiving Isaac, Rebekah would never see Jacob again. The next reference to Rebekah mentions that she was buried in the cave of Machpelah with Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 49:31).

Applicable Principles

Rebekah Was Courteous and Kind

Rebekah offered to water Eliezer's camels when he asked for a drink. She obtained lodging for him at her brother's home. She went the extra mile and did more than was asked (Genesis 24:18-20).

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Kindness, compassion and forgiveness are qualities God exhibits toward us. To be pleasing in God's eyes, we must express the same attitude toward those with whom we come in contact. One characteristic for which all Christians should be noted is kind and courteous treatment to others. However, these two traits, at times, can be difficult to portray. It is easy to become impatient with our children, reacting

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to their behavior with unkind words or actions. When the driver of an automobile cuts us off on the highway, our natural reaction is to become irritated and often, unkind words and gestures show our annoyance. It seems as though we live in a busy world, always running from one appointment to another. With our hectic schedules, waiting in line at the store can become a frustrating inconvenience. Unfortunately, we display our bad attitude with rude comments to the cashier. We all experience these situations from time to time. As Christians, we need to guard our tongue and our actions to ensure that we display a Christ-like behavior at all times. This includes treating others with kindness. Remember the words of Jesus, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:2). Treat others as you want to be treated. Are you like Rebekah? Do you go the extra mile when serving others? Do you show kindness and courtesy, even when you think the other person does not deserve it?

Rebekah Was Industrious

She diligently and hurriedly filled the trough for the camels until they had all the water they wanted (Genesis 24:20). She ran to her home to inform those in her mother’s house the things she saw and heard from Eliezer. Rebekah was not lazy. She completed her tasks with enthusiasm.

We need to be industrious in our labors for God and in our life on this earth. Consider the ant (Proverbs 6:6-11). The ant works when no one is watching. The ant works at the appropriate time to ensure that there is food when the harvest season is over. The ant is not lazy, and does not need to have someone instruct it what to do and when to do it. As Christians, we need to take the initiative to fulfill our tasks without someone watching over us, making sure we do our jobs properly and in a timely fashion.

Are you like Rebekah? Can you work without being watched? Do you work with enthusiasm?

Rebekah Exhibited Faith and Courage

She willingly left home, family and all that was familiar for a strange land and strange people. Rebekah was not afraid of the future and the unknown (Genesis 24:57-58). She was an optimist, not a pessimist.

Hebrews 11:1 states, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” A deep abiding faith in God allows one to enter into the unknown without fear and anxiety. Our faith in God helps us overcome life’s insecurities.

People today need to learn the importance of trusting in God. God will take care of us if we put Him first in our lives (Matthew 6:25-34). This does not mean that nothing bad will happen, but in the end, we will have a home in heaven. Thus, God takes care of us.

Are you like Rebekah? Do you have the faith to leave all that is familiar?

Rebekah Was Prayerful

She asked Isaac to pray to God for her so that she might conceive (Genesis 25:21). She sought God when she did not understand the struggle within her womb (Genesis 25:22).

“Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). Prayer is part of the armor Christians need to protect themselves while on this earth (Ephesians 6:17). Our prayers to God should include thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6), praise to our God (Hebrews 13:15), request for assistance (Philippians 1:4) and words of repentance for the sins in our lives (Acts 8:22).

Rebekah Showed Favoritism

Rebekah showed favoritism to Jacob while Isaac showed favoritism to Esau. It was because of this favoritism that she plotted and helped Jacob deceive his father. Rebekah knew before the twins were born that Esau (the older) would serve Jacob (the younger). Like her mother-in-law, Sarah, Rebekah chose to assist God in His

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plan for the Israelite nation. Thus, she fooled Isaac into blessing Jacob through deceit. Even though Jacob was a grown man, he did what his mother told him, and it caused him to deceive his father, caused his brother to hate him and separated the family, all because of favoritism for one child over another.

Unfortunately, many today have not learned from Rebekah and Jacob. Parents show favoritism to one child over another, creating jealousy and animosity among siblings. Christians often show favoritism within the church as well. When we treat individuals differently according to our preferences and their abilities or actions, we are showing favoritism. This behavior discourages Christians and has a negative effect on the lost community around us, making it difficult to reach the lost with the Gospel of Christ. God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11), and neither should we show favoritism to others.

Are you like Rebekah? Do you show favoritism within your family or the church?

Rebekah was a wonderful woman who had great faith in the God of the Bible. Like all of us, she stumbled and fell on occasion. Let us remember her, realizing that it was her influence that caused the family rift. With these thoughts I encourage you to guard your actions and the influence you have on others, especially on your children who do as you do and not what you say (1 Corinthians 15:33). Do you have any of these characteristics of Rebekah in your life? Do you need to improve some of these qualities? Do you need to remove some of these characteristics?

Questions

1. Who chose Rebekah to be the wife of Jacob?
2. How did Rebekah show that she was the chosen one?
3. Name the twin sons of Rebekah and Jacob.
4. Why did Rebekah go to God in prayer as recorded in Genesis 25?
5. What impact did showing favoritism have on the family?
6. List the good qualities found in the life of Rebekah.

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7. List the less than ideal qualities in the life of Rebekah.
8. How can showing favoritism affect the family?
9. How can showing favoritism affect the church?
10. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 8 Rachel – A Beloved Wife

Character Study

Genesis 29:1-31:35

A look at Genesis chapters 27 and 28 give a backdrop for the study of Rachel, the niece of Rebekah, the daughter of Laban. Esau and Jacob, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah, struggled with each other from the time they were in the womb (Genesis 25:22-26). These two were opposites in appearance and demeanor. When Isaac was nearly blind and growing old, he decided to give the customary blessing to his oldest son, Esau. At the encouragement and help of Rebekah, Jacob deceived his father and received the blessing intended for Esau. Naturally, this enraged Esau who planned to kill Jacob after their father's death. Wishing to protect Jacob, Rebekah suggested to Isaac that he send Jacob to her home country to find a suitable wife. Isaac sent Jacob to Padan-aram to marry one of Laban's daughters. This began a beautiful love story between a man and his wife.

Finally, having traveled about 450 miles, Jacob arrived at his destination. He stopped at a well where shepherds were watering their flocks to inquire about Laban. Jacob learned that Rachel, the daughter of Laban, was coming to water her father's sheep. Jacob helped Rachel water the sheep and introduced himself. Immediately, Rachel ran home to tell her father about Jacob. Laban ran to meet Jacob and welcomed him to his home.

For the next month, Jacob lived and worked for Laban. During this time, he fell in love with beautiful Rachel. Since Jacob did not bring gifts to exchange for a wife, he agreed to work seven years for Rachel. Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that the seven years seemed but a few days (Genesis 29:20). At the end of the seven years, Jacob went to Laban and asked to take Rachel as his wife.

Laban gathered his friends together, prepared a feast and at the

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appointed time took Jacob's bride to him. In the morning, Jacob discovered he had married tender-eyed Leah instead of his beloved Rachel. Jacob demanded an explanation. Laban explained that in his country the older daughter must be married before the younger daughter. He then agreed to let Jacob marry Rachel, at the end the weeklong fulfillment of Leah's marriage, for another seven years of labor. Since Jacob loved Rachel, he agreed to Laban's conditions.

It is important to understand the customs of Bible times when studying the Scriptures. Modern customs vary from one locality to another and from ancient times to modern times. Applying our customs to biblical times causes confusion and an inadequate understanding of the Scriptures. Smith's Bible Dictionary gives the following description for a typical Jewish marriage ceremony.

The essence of the marriage ceremony consisted in the removal of the bride from her father's house to that of the bridegroom or his father. The bridegroom prepared himself for the occasion by putting on a festive dress, and especially by placing on his head a handsome nuptial turban. Psal 45:8; Song 4:10, 11 The bride was veiled. Her robes were white, Reve 19:8 and sometimes embroidered with gold thread, Psal 45:13, 14 and covered with perfumes! Psal 45:8 She was further decked out with jewels. Isai 49:18; 61:10; Reve 21:2 When the fixed hour arrived, which was, generally late in the evening, the bridegroom set forth from his house, attended by his groomsmen.

With the bride covered from head to toe in her bridal gown and the dark evening, Jacob was easily deceived into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. It was not until the morning light that Jacob discovered the deception. Just as Jacob deceived his father to receive the blessing entitled to the oldest male child, Laban deceived Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter.

A week later, Jacob had two wives, one whom he loved dearly and the other he was tricked into marrying. When God saw that Jacob loved Leah less than Rachel, God closed Rachel's womb so that she

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could not conceive and made Leah fruitful (Genesis 29:31). After the birth of Leah's fourth son, Rachel demanded that Jacob father a child by her. Jacob angrily told Rachel that God was the reason for her barrenness. Subsequently, Rachel gave her handmaid, Bilhah, to Jacob that she might have children through her. Likewise, Leah gave her handmaid, Zilpah, to Jacob that she might have additional children.

One day, Leah's oldest son, Reuben, brought some mandrakes to his mother. The mandrake is a yellow fruit believed to cause fertility. Rachel, desperate to give birth to children, bargained with Leah, "If you give me the mandrakes, Jacob will sleep with you tonight." Leah agreed to the arrangement, told Jacob as he came from the field that night she had hired him, and she conceived. Leah gave birth to son number five, then conceived two more times, giving birth to a sixth son and to a daughter. Rachel remained barren. After the birth of all Leah's children, God remembered Rachel, and she conceived and gave birth to a son, Joseph.

At the end of the seven years of service for Rachel, Jacob asked Laban to allow him to take his wives and children and return to his country (Genesis 30:25-26). Laban asked Jacob to stay since God abundantly blessed Laban after Jacob's arrival. Further, Laban agreed to pay Jacob whatever wage he requested if Jacob would continue working for him. Jacob and Laban agreed that according to their markings certain sheep and goats would belong to Jacob and the others would belong to Laban. Over the course of six years, Jacob's herds flourished while Laban's herds diminished. Laban's sons began to complain that Jacob was taking that which belonged to their father. Also, Jacob observed that Laban had harsh feelings for him as well.

Finally, God told Jacob to return to Canaan. Jacob called Rachel and Leah to the field where he was tending the sheep. Jacob reminded his wives that he had served their father to the best of his ability. He explained that during the past 20 years Laban had deceived him, changed his wages many times and was displeased and possibly hostile toward him. Jacob acknowledged that God had taken care of

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him by providentially increasing his herds. Jacob then told them of God's instructions. Rachel and Leah readily agreed to follow God's command. Furthermore, they acknowledged the unjust treatment they received from Laban in that he treated them as strangers, not as daughters. With the consent of his wives, Jacob prepared his family and possessions for a swift, secret escape to Canaan while Laban was away shearing sheep.

Three days later, Laban learned of Jacob's departure, chased after him and demanding the return of his idol gods. Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the idols before their departure. Jacob instructed Laban to search all their belongings and kill whoever had the idols. Laban searched Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, the two maidservants' tents and finally came to Rachel's tent. While Laban searched the other tents, Rachel hid the idols in the recesses of the saddle for her camel. When Laban came to search Rachel's tent, she was sitting on the camel saddle. She apologized for not getting up with the excuse that she was experiencing her menstrual cycle. Laban searched the rest of the tent, but refrained from making her move so that he could search the saddle. After failing to find the idols, Laban and Jacob made a peace treaty; Laban blessed his daughters and grandchildren, and Laban went back to Haran.

The idols Rachel stole were called teraphim. Whoever had possession of the teraphim had rightful ownership of the family possessions. "When Rachel took Laban's teraphim, she in effect, took the deeds to her father's lands thereby guaranteeing that ownership would pass legally to her children" (Wayne Jackson qtd. in Rutherford 95).

As Jacob continued his journey, he sent messengers to Esau in hopes of making peace with him. The messengers returned and informed Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men in his company. Jacob became fearful; he prayed to God to protect him and his family. The next morning he sent several servants with gifts of sheep, goats and camels to meet Esau. Jacob assigned his family members the order in which they were to travel. The maidservants

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and their children were first; Leah and her children were second; Rachel and Joseph were last in the procession. Jacob hoped that if Esau attacked, the family members at the end of the procession could escape. Here again Jacob showed his great love for Rachel over Leah. However, Jacob's fears were unnecessary, as Esau was not coming to kill Jacob, but to welcome him home.

Many years later, God told Jacob to go to Bethel, live there and build an altar to worship God. Before traveling to Bethel, Jacob commanded his servants and family members to bring him their idol gods and prepare to worship the true God. Jacob buried the idols under an oak tree before continuing the journey to Bethel. Included in these idols were the ones Rachel stole from her father.

Sometime later, Jacob and his family traveled toward Bethlehem. Rachel was now expecting her second son. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob set a pillar (headstone) marking her grave.

Jeremiah 31:15; Ruth 4:11; Matthew 2:18

The prophet Jeremiah mentioned Rachel in Jeremiah 31:15. He refers to her crying from the grave at the captivity of the children of Israel as they were led away into bondage. Several hundred years later, Matthew quoted this verse (2:18). Matthew referred to the slaughter of innocent children when Herod decreed the killing of all boys two-years-old and younger. Matthew 2:17 states that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15. When Boaz made a marriage contract with Ruth at the city gate, the elders, gathered there, mentioned Rachel and Leah in the blessing they bestowed on the upcoming marriage (Ruth 4:11). These men prayed Ruth would have many children as Rachel and Leah had with their offspring, beginning the Israelite nation. Since Christ came from the lineage of Ruth, this may be a prophecy of the coming Messiah and the church to which he is the Head.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary makes the following observation about Rachel's life.

Although Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife, the line of David

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and ultimately the messianic line passed through Leah and her son Judah, not Rachel. “Rachel weeping for her children” (Jer 31:15; Rachel, KJV; Matt 2:18) became symbolic of the sorrow and tragedy suffered by the Israelites. Matthew points out that the murder of all the male children in Bethlehem, from two years old and under, by Herod the Great, was the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Matt 2:16-18).

Applicable Principles

Rachel Was Industrious and Responsible

The first mention of Rachel shows her working as a shepherd for her father. Jacob found her at the well watering sheep. We do not know the age of Rachel at this time, but we can assume she was young since the common practice was for girls to marry shortly after they were able to bear children. As a shepherd, Rachel was responsible for the care and safety of the sheep. If one was lazy and inattentive, the sheep would wander off, become lost and possibly be attacked by wild animals. In addition, shepherds were often out by themselves with only the sheep as companions. Shepherds did not have someone watching over them as they worked.

Both testaments of the Bible commend a good work ethic and condemn slothfulness or laziness. “As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed” (Proverbs 26:14). “Because of laziness the building decays, And through idleness of hands the house leaks” (Ecclesiastes 10:18). “...not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:12).

What is your work ethic? Do you do your work even when the boss is not around? Can you be counted on to complete the necessary task in the proper time? Can your work ethic be compared to Rachel’s work ethic?

Rachel Was Envious

Envy is that green-eyed monster that makes us miserable because we want what another has. Rachel was not content with the love of Jacob. She was not happy with her sister in the birth of her children. Rachel demanded children from Jacob. She was so desperate for children after the birth of Leah's fourth son, she was convinced she would die without children of her own.

Matthew Henry stated that, "Envy is grieving at the good of another, . . . which no sin is more offensive to God, nor more injurious to our neighbour and ourselves." Envy of others' abilities and possessions brings heartache and harm to families and the church. Many church problems can be traced to envy and its companion, jealousy, among the members of a congregation. Many families are torn apart, with parents having to choose sides, because siblings are envious and jealous of one another.

The apostle Paul stated in Philippians 4:11 that he had learned to be content regardless of the circumstances in which he found himself. Paul knew what it meant to be hungry, beaten, to have much and to be treated well. Through Christ, Paul could overcome suffering and rejoice in abundance (Philippians 4:11-13). Hebrews 13:5 reminds us to be content with what we have, for Christ said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." True contentment comes when we put envy and jealousy behind us and strive to show love and good will toward all.

Rachel Was Affected by Sinful Family Influences

Laban was cunning, deceptive and cruel in his interactions with others. Unfortunately, Rachel carried some of these traits with her. Rachel was cruel when she demanded Jacob give her children. Her cruel treatment did not result in children. Since Leah had given birth to four sons, the lack of conception was not due to a deficiency of Jacob, but God closed Rachel's womb.

Rachel was cruel and cunning when she demanded Leah give her the mandrakes. Rachel had the love of Jacob, but now she wanted to

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take the gift Leah's son, Reuben, brought to her. In order to get what she wanted (children), Rachel sold Jacob for the night, so that she could conceive on another night with the help of the medicinal use of the mandrakes. Her cruel and cunning treatment of Leah did not give her the children she so desperately desired.

Rachel was deceptive when she stole the teraphim and hid them in the camel's saddle. The teraphim served two purposes. One was idol worship, while the other was a deed to the property. The Scriptures do not indicate that Rachel worshipped these idols. She gave the idols up when Jacob commanded that his family and servants rid themselves of idols as they prepared to travel to Bethel to worship God. Her deception did not accomplish the intended purpose.

Cunning, deception and lying are ungodly traits that go hand in hand (Proverbs 24:8; Mark 7:22). As children of God, we must put these evils behind us, ever striving to treat others fairly, honestly and lovingly (1 Peter 3:10).

Rachel allowed the ungodly influence of her father to mold her character early in life. Later, she allowed the love of Jacob and his devotion to God to remold her character into a godly life. As Christians, we need to use all available resources to mold our lives into pleasing servants of God. Some of those resources include a diligent study of the Bible, regular attendance of worship services, association with godly people and limiting associations with ungodly individuals.

Are you like Rachel? Are your actions and behavior a direct result of the ungodly influence of family and friends? Have you allowed the influence of faithful Christians to remold you into a loving, dependable servant of God?

Questions

1. Why was Jacob in Padan-aram?
2. What was Rachel doing when Jacob first met her?
3. How long was Jacob in Padan-aram when he asked to marry Rachel?

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4. How long did Jacob agree to work for Laban so that he could marry Rachel?
5. Why did Jacob agree to work for Rachel?
6. Why did Jacob marry Leah?
7. How do we know that Jacob loved Rachel?
8. What does the phrase “Leah was hated” mean?
9. Why was Rachel unable to conceive?
10. What did Rachel steal from her father?
11. What does envy mean?
12. What is contentment?
13. How can we overcome envy in our lives?
14. What kind of work ethic does God want his children to maintain?
15. Is it possible to overcome the ungodly influences to which we may be exposed as children? Explain your answer.
16. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 9 Miriam – A Faltering, Faithful Servant

Character Study

Exodus 2

A few hundred years passed since Jacob and his family joined Joseph in Egypt. The extended family of seventy individuals multiplied greatly (Exodus 1:5). Joseph and Jacob died and a new Pharaoh who knew not Joseph reigned over Egypt (Exodus 1:8). Out of fear that the Israelites would continue to multiply and side with his enemies during battle, Pharaoh forced the Israelites into slavery. God continued to bless the Israelites, and they continued to multiply. So Pharaoh commanded all male children to be killed upon birth (Exodus 1:22). Exodus Chapter Two begins with the life of Moses, the great lawgiver of the Old Testament.

Moses' mother hid him for the first three months of his life. Fearing she could no longer hide him, she placed him in a basket sealed with tar and placed the basket among the reeds along the edge of the river. Though not named in Exodus Chapter Two, big sister Miriam kept watch over the baby as he lay in the basket. When Pharaoh's daughter found the baby, Miriam volunteered to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. Pharaoh's daughter hired Moses' mother to care for the child until she weaned him.

Fausset's Bible Dictionary states that Miriam was the "Sister of Aaron and Moses, oldest child of Amram and Jochebed. At least 12 or 13 at Moses' birth, for she is called (Ex 2:8) 'the maid,' ha'almah, implying one of marriageable age." Other sources list her age between nine and fourteen. Miriam bore a mighty responsibility as she watched nearby to see what would happen to her baby brother, who later became the great lawgiver of the Old Testament. It is evident that she dutifully fulfilled this responsibility as she immediately stepped forward and volunteered to find a nurse when

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Pharaoh's daughter found baby Moses.

Exodus 15:20-21

The next biblical reference to Miriam has her on the banks of the Red Sea. Years later, God miraculously parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelite nation to cross on dry land. As Pharaoh's army tried to follow, the walls of water crashed upon them. Pharaoh's mighty army drowned in the Red Sea. The once fearful Israelites then rejoiced in their newfound freedom, singing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. Moses led the men in the chorus of the song as Miriam led the women in the refrain. Men and women blended their voices together in praise to God.

Verse 20 calls Miriam a prophetess. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines a prophetess as "a female prophet." A prophet is "[a] person who spoke for God and who communicated God's message courageously to God's Chosen People – the nation of Israel." Primarily, prophetesses "possessed a poetical inspiration; and inspired (especially sacred) poetry was always deemed of supernatural and divine origin" (McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia). Numbers 12:2 further acknowledges that God spoke to Miriam, thus confirming she was a prophetess. Micah reminded the Israelites that Moses, Aaron and Miriam led the Israelites out of Egypt (Micah 6:4). These three biblical references prove that Miriam was one of God's chosen leaders for his people.

Numbers 12

The previous biblical references to Miriam portray her to be a godly servant. Unfortunately, like many of us today, Miriam had her faults as well as her good qualities. Numbers chapter 12 shows the ungodly side of Miriam.

Although chapter 12 begins with Miriam and Aaron complaining about Moses' choice for a wife, the true meaning for their complaint was jealousy and a desire for greater authority and power. The placement of Miriam's name before Aaron's, the use of the feminine form

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of the verb “spake” and the harsh punishment God inflicted upon Miriam indicate that she was the instigator in the rebellion against Moses.

God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam to come out to the Tabernacle. God then appeared in a pillar of cloud in the door of the Tabernacle. God called Aaron and Miriam to come closer. God explained to Aaron and Miriam that He chooses to whom and how He will speak to His servants. He speaks to prophets by dreams and visions, but to Moses He chose to speak directly, not through visions. God was angry with Miriam and Aaron for their rebellion against Him and His chosen leader, Moses. After rebuking Miriam and Aaron, the cloud departed from the tabernacle. As soon as the cloud departed, God’s punishment was evident. Miriam’s skin was white as snow with leprosy. Aaron acknowledged their sin and asked Moses to forgive them. Moses immediately begged God to heal Miriam. God accepted the repentance of Aaron and Miriam. However, Miriam suffered the consequences of her actions. As with all cases of leprosy, she was removed from the camp and isolated from other individuals. This punishment lasted for seven days.

Numbers 20:1

Miriam’s rebellion against Moses was prior to the Israelites’ first approach to the Promised Land. After 38 years of wandering in the wilderness for their unbelief, the Bible records the death of Miriam. “Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there” (Numbers 20:1). The fact that the Bible records Miriam’s death and place of burial attributes to her an important place in the history of the Israelite nation.

Applicable Principles

Miriam Was Responsible

At a young age (between the ages of nine and fourteen), Miriam’s

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mother asked her to watch over her baby brother. She willingly accepted her task and diligently fulfilled her responsibility. Miriam's quick thinking allowed Moses' mother to raise him until he was weaned.

Christians need to be responsible. We need to diligently complete our tasks (Ecclesiastes 9:10) whether at the work place (Romans 12:11), in the home (Titus 2:5) or as part of the church (Titus 2:14). Paul instructed servants to obey their masters "...as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6). That rule applies today as workers to bosses, as members to elders and as Christians to Christ. The elders need to know we are dependable, that we will do what we are asked to do within the given timeframe. Furthermore, Jesus taught the importance of accepting our responsibilities when he said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Just as Jochebed taught Miriam to be responsible, we need to teach our children to be responsible. This teaching needs to begin at a very young age. Our children need to be held accountable for their misdeeds. We need to teach them to follow through with their promises. We need to teach them by words from our mouths and by our actions. They need to see us being dependable and responsible.

Are you a Miriam? Are you responsible? Can your boss count on you to complete your task even if he is not watching? Can the elders depend on you to teach a class, prepare communion, clean the building, etc. or do they need to have a backup plan because you frequently fail to follow through?

Miriam Was a Leader

Miriam was one of God's chosen leaders as the Israelites left Egypt and journeyed toward Canaan. She used her ability to lead the women in song after they crossed the Red Sea. She was a prophetess to whom God spoke on occasion.

The church today needs leaders functioning within their God-

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given roles. There is much work women can, and should do, that does not usurp the authority of men. There is much work men can, and should do, that does not usurp the authority of the elders. God created each individual different, thus making each Christian unique with different abilities. Each woman needs to evaluate her abilities, improve upon those abilities and use those abilities to further the cause of Christ.

Are you a Miriam? Are you using your God-given talents to lead young children to Christ by teaching Bible Classes? Are you using your God-given talents to lead other women to a stronger faith and service to God? Are you using your abilities to lead singing or prayers during Ladies' Classes or Ladies' Inspiration Days? Are you using your artistic abilities to teach through visual aids or bulletin boards? Are you using your homemaking skills to show hospitality to those in need or to visiting preachers and missionaries?

The work and leadership opportunities for Christian women are unending. I encourage each of you to be a Miriam. Use your abilities to serve God to the fullest.

Miriam Was Jealous

Miriam was jealous and envious of the leadership and power of Moses. Since Miriam and Aaron also had revelation from God, she assumed they should be equal in leadership as well. She failed to realize God chose Moses as the leader of the Israelite nation.

Jealousy and envy go hand in hand and are condemned in the Old and New testaments (Psalm 37:1; Proverbs 6:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:1, etc.). James said:

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

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(James 3:14-17)

Envy and jealousy point to an “I” problem. When we are consumed with the “I syndrome,” we want what we think is best for us and fail to consider others. This mentality is normal for infants, but as one matures, we should outgrow the “I syndrome.” Jesus said to the Father, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). We should put God first, family second, mankind third and ourselves last (1 Peter 5:5). Only when we learn to put the thoughts and feelings of others first will we be able to overcome the sin of envy and jealousy.

Are you a Miriam? Do you want what others have? Do you have an “I” problem?

Miriam Was Rebellious

Miriam’s jealousy of Moses’ authority allowed her to rebel against God. God chose Moses as the leader of His people, the Israelites. When Miriam spoke against Moses, she was speaking against God who gave Moses that authority.

Frequently, rebellion and jealousy link together. When one is jealous of the authority of an individual and feels that he or she can do a better job, it becomes easy to question and criticize those in authority. God condemned Miriam for criticizing Moses, and He condemns us when we criticize and rebel against those in authority (Proverbs 17:11; Hebrews 13:17).

Are you like Miriam? Are you rebellious of those in authority? Do you criticize the elders who watch for your soul?

Miriam Was Repentant

When God struck Miriam with leprosy, “So Aaron said to Moses, ‘Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned’” (Numbers 12:11). Although the Scriptures do not record Miriam saying, “I have sinned” or “Please forgive me,” we know that she repented because God healed her.

Likewise, God will forgive us when we turn away from sin

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and turn back to God. Jesus taught, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

God will forgive those who repent. However, repentance does not remove the consequences of our actions. Just as Miriam suffered with leprosy for seven days, sometimes we must suffer because of our sins. When a thief repents to God for stealing, he still faces the legal system of our nation and may be sentenced to jail time for his ungodly actions.

Are you a Miriam? Do you repent of your sins when someone teaches you that an action is sinful? Or, do you become angry with the teacher and accuse the individual of being unkind, unloving and a meddler?

Questions

1. Name Miriam’s parents.
2. Name Miriam’s brothers.
3. How old was Miriam as she watched over baby Moses in the river?
4. What did Miriam do when Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses?
5. Define prophetess.
6. What was the excuse Miriam used for criticizing Moses?
7. What was the true motive behind Miriam’s criticism of Moses?
8. How did God speak to His prophets?
9. How did God speak to Moses?
10. How did God punish Miriam for her sin?
11. How do we know Miriam repented of her sin?
12. Why is it important to teach our children to be responsible?
13. How can we teach our children to be responsible?
14. What is the root problem behind jealousy and envy?
15. Against whom did Miriam rebel?
16. What does it mean to repent?

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17. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 10 Hannah – A Prayerful Woman

Character Study

1 Samuel 1:1-28

Elkanah had two wives. Since 1 Samuel 1:5 states that Elkanah loved Hannah, some commentators assume that she was his first wife. Children were extremely important to Jews since Christ would come through the lineage of the Jewish race. Moses instructed the children of Israel that upon the death of a married man who does not have children, the man's brother would take the wife, marry her and fulfill the duties of a husband. The firstborn child would carry the brother's name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Since Hannah was barren, Elkanah probably took a second wife, Peninnah, so that he could have children to carry on his name. Although many worthy and honorable men of the Bible are recorded as having more than one wife, we must remember that while God once over looked multiple wives, he never intended for man to practice polygamy (Matthew 19:3-9). As with the many instances of polygamy outlined in the Bible, Elkanah's two wives did not live in harmony.

Each year Elkanah traveled about 25 miles from his home in Ramah to Shiloh to worship God. This was one of the three feasts all male Jews were required to attend (Deuteronomy 16:16). Since only the male Jews were required to attend this feast, Elkanah could have taken his older sons and left the women and children behind. Instead, he chose to include all his family members in this period of worship.

A part of this feast was to offer a thanksgiving offering to the Lord. In Leviticus 7:11-15, we read the details of this sacrifice. A portion of the sacrificed animal was offered to God and the remainder was to be eaten in its entirety that day "in a simple communion service" (Wycliffe). According to 1 Samuel 1:4-5, Elkanah gave Peninnah and her children their portions, but to Hannah he gave a

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“worthy portion; for he loved her.” The worthy portion may have been a double helping as is translated in the New King James and the American Standard versions. However, Matthew Henry suggests that “yet to Hannah he gave a worthy portion, the choicest piece that came to the table, the piece (whatever it was) that used to be given on such occasions to those that were most valued; this he did in token of his love to her, and to give all possible assurances of it.” Whatever Elkanah gave to Hannah was noticeably different from what he gave Peninnah and was intended to show to Hannah how much he loved her.

The worthy portion was not a one-time act, but each year when Elkanah and his family went to Shiloh to worship God, Hannah received a worthy portion. Peninnah used this opportunity to torment and taunt Hannah about her barrenness. Oh, how cruel and unkind to provoke one to such distress while worshipping God. The place where one should have peace and tranquility was turned into despair and remorse. Although not recorded, I am sure Hannah prayed regularly for a child, and each year as they traveled to Shiloh to worship, in Hannah’s eyes, that prayer remained unanswered. Elkanah was aware of the actions of Peninnah, and he tried to comfort Hannah with added attention and consoling words.

The words of Elkanah as recorded in 1 Samuel 1:8 were intended to console and gently rebuke. Elkanah reminded Hannah that while she may not be a mother to children, she had the love and devotion of her husband. Hannah accepted Elkanah’s rebuke and ate. Burton Coffman suggests that the phrase, “‘After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh’...might mean ‘after their meal had started,’ and that Hannah interrupted her meal to make her appeal to God.” Hannah left the family meal to pray to God.

The term “temple” used in verse nine is referring to the Tabernacle. The Temple and Tabernacle were places of worship during the Mosaic Age. God gave Moses the instructions for the Tabernacle while he was on Mount Sinai following the Israelites’ escape from Egypt (Exodus 25). The Tabernacle was to be a sanctuary

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and dwelling place for God in the midst of the people (Exodus 25:8). This structure was a tent that was taken apart and reassembled each time the children of God moved from one location to another during the 40 years of wilderness wandering. After the conquest of Canaan, the Tabernacle was assembled and left in Shiloh. Later, when David became king, he desired to build a permanent place of worship. However, because David was a man of war and had shed much blood, God chose David's son, Solomon, to build the Temple (1 Chronicles 22:8-10).

Hannah came to the Tabernacle to plead with God. Hannah was very upset and prayed a reverent, silent prayer. As she prayed, she moved her lips to form the words to God, but she did not audibly speak the words for others to hear. Her prayer was intended for God. Only God can answer our prayers, and God was the only one who needed to hear her request. In the prayer, Hannah begged God for a son. Then, she promised God that if He would grant her request, she would return him to the Lord.

Eli, the high priest, was sitting in a chair by the doorpost of the Tabernacle when Hannah came to pray. Eli observed Hannah as she prayed. He saw her lips moving and heard no sound coming from her mouth. Since these were immoral times, Eli assumed Hannah came to the Tabernacle to pray while intoxicated with alcoholic beverages. Drinking alcoholic beverages was strictly prohibited in the Old Testament (Proverbs 23:31). Eli rebuked Hannah for what he assumed was her drunken state. Hannah quickly denied the accusation and explained she was brokenhearted.

Hannah's demeanor must have conveyed to Eli the truthfulness of her words. Eli told Hannah to go in peace. He further suggested that God would grant her request. The Scriptures do not indicate that Eli knew what Hannah asked from God. Her behavior must have portrayed a godly woman worthy of answered prayers. Hannah accepted Eli's words and left the Tabernacle. Upon returning to her family, she ate her meal with a renewed spirit.

The next morning, Elkanah and his family rose early to worship

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God before their journey home to Ramah. Sometime later, God remembered Hannah and she conceived. God granted Hannah's prayer for a son and Samuel was born. When time for the yearly trip arrived, Hannah asked Elkanah to excuse her from this trip. She had not forgotten her promise to God, but wished to wait until Samuel was weaned before attending another feast in Shiloh. She knew that when Samuel was weaned, she would fulfill her promise by leaving Samuel at the Tabernacle to serve God. Elkanah granted her request.

From the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 6:33-34, we learn that Samuel was from the family of Kohath, a son of Levi. God chose the sons of Levi to serve Him as priests (Numbers 3:6-8). Further, the sons of Kohath were to be in charge of the items within the Tabernacle (Numbers 3:29-31). "Samuel, as a descendant of the house of Levi, was the Lord's property from twenty-five years of age till fifty" (Adam Clarke).

When Samuel was about three years old, Hannah and Samuel traveled with the rest of the family for the yearly feast. Upon their arrival in Shiloh, sacrifice was made at the Tabernacle. Hannah reminded Eli of her petition to God at her last visit, acknowledged that the young boy was the answer to that prayer, and Hannah presented Samuel to Eli for lifelong service to God in accordance with the vow Hannah made about four years previously.

Since Samuel was a Levite, he already belonged to God. Hannah's vow to "give him unto the LORD all the days of his life" was extending the duration of his service. Hannah promised Samuel from the time he was able to be useful until his death. First Samuel Chapter One concludes with, "And he worshipped the Lord there." Jamieson, Fausset and Brown makes the following observation about this phrase, "And he worshipped... there — namely, the child Samuel, who was at an age capable of some external service; otherwise he must have been an incumbrance and a burden." At a young age (verse 24), Samuel was capable of serving and worshipping God. The young age was about three years old.

The first ten verses of Chapter Two record the prayer Hannah

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sang with rejoicing. This prayer was one of thanksgiving to God for fulfilling her petition for a son. It was also a prophecy of the coming Messiah and His church. At the conclusion of the feast, Elkanah and his family, minus Samuel, returned to Ramah. Hannah left her son in Shiloh to serve God. However, she did not forget about him. Each year when Elkanah and his family traveled to Shiloh to worship, Hannah brought a new coat for Samuel.

Eli was aware of the devotion Hannah exhibited toward the son she saw once a year. Because Hannah kept her promise to God, Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah and requested that God give them more children. God heard Eli's prayer and blessed Hannah with three more sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 2:19-21). This is the last reference to Hannah in the Bible. However, her legacy lives on throughout all times. The simple prayer of a godly woman gave rise to Samuel, the last judge of Israel, one of the great prophets of the Old Testament and a priest to God.

Applicable Principles

Hannah Was a Worshipper of God

Only the male Jews were required to attend the annual feasts. Hannah accompanied her husband on the long journey to Shiloh each year to worship God. This trip was not an easy task. They traveled by foot or rode donkeys a minimum of 25 miles one way. This would necessitate a multiple day journey, probably sleeping in tents or in the open air. Restaurants were not available so that meat food and cooking utensils had to be packed for the journey. Besides the difficult physical journey, Hannah had to endure the emotional pain inflicted by Peninnah. Oh, how much easier it would have been to stay home and worship God by herself in peace and solitude. Despite the obstacles, Hannah worshipped God at the appointed place and at the appointed time.

Many times Christians must travel great distances to worship God at the appointed place and at the appointed times. It is not

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always easy. Advance preparation must be made to arrive on time. It would be easy to say, “It’s just too far. God will understand if we do not return for evening services. It is just too far. God will understand if we miss Wednesday evening Bible Study. After all, the children are in school all day; they have homework, and they have to be in bed early or they are tired for school the next day.” Does God understand? God commands that we worship him on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The writer of the Hebrews letter rebuked those Christians for missing the assembly of the saints (Hebrews 10:25). This verse still applies to all Christians everywhere. Advance preparation and planning will allow Christians to assemble at the appointed times and place.

Hannah did not let the unpleasant behavior of Peninnah keep her from worshipping God. Difficulties with other Christians can create a less than peaceful gathering of the Lord’s church. We cannot allow the attitudes and behavior of others to keep us from worshipping God at the appointed times. We must assemble with the saints for worship regardless of the emotional discomfort that may prevail.

Are you like Hannah? Will you travel to worship God? Will you ignore the unpleasantness of the others to gather with the saints to worship God?

Hannah Turned the Other Cheek

Peninnah was unkind, unjust and hostile toward Hannah. Instead of comforting Hannah in her barrenness, Peninnah flaunted her many children. Perhaps if Peninnah had treated Hannah better, Elkanah would not have openly shown his favoritism for Hannah at the yearly feast in Shiloh. Hannah did not respond to Peninnah’s taunts in an unfavorable manner. The insults from Peninnah caused Hannah to grow sullen, but she did not retaliate with unkind and harsh words or actions. She could have responded with her own insults and the fact that Elkanah loved her more than he loved Peninnah. Instead, she responded to Peninnah with prayer. Jesus taught in Matthew 5:39 to turn the other cheek. We should make a greater effort to ignore

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unjust treatment from others. Hannah turned the other cheek.

Are you like Hannah? Do you walk away from those who are unkind or do you retaliate with unkind words?

Hannah Accepted and Applied Criticism When Received

Elkanah gently rebuked Hannah for her sullen disposition. He reminded her that while she may not have a child of her own she had his love. His love should be enough to make her happy. Hannah accepted this gentle rebuke. She made herself eat at least a portion of the meal, and then she went to the Tabernacle to pray.

As Christians, we sometimes receive just and unjust criticism. Some criticism is given with good intentions. Some criticism is given with malicious intentions. Some criticism is based on a misunderstanding of what was said or observed. We should graciously accept all criticism, evaluate the comments and make appropriate application as necessary.

Are you like Hannah? Do you evaluate the criticism you receive and make appropriate application? Do you become insulted and upset when someone suggests that something you said or did was inappropriate?

Hannah Was a Prayerful Woman

Hannah turned to God in times of distress and in times of rejoicing. When Hannah so desperately wanted a child, she prayed to God. Her prayer was specific and in a sense bargaining. She prayed for a son who she could give back to God. The moral fiber of the Israelites was evil. The time period of the Judges, with Samuel being the last judge, was a pendulum swing of good and evil. Lengthy periods of knowing and obeying God then forgetting and disobedience lasted for about 350 years. The sons of Eli, the high priest, were corrupting the Tabernacle with their evil ways. Perhaps one of the reasons Hannah so desperately wanted a son was to train a child in God's Word in hope of bringing some morals back to Israel.

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Hannah prayed to God when she left Samuel with Eli at the Tabernacle. This prayer was one of rejoicing. She happily fulfilled her vow and realized the long-range impact her selfless act would have on times eternal.

First Thessalonians 5:17 reminds all Christians to “Pray without ceasing.” Always have an attitude acceptable to prayer. Remember to pray morning, noon, night and at times in between (Psalm 55:17). Pray in times of distress and in times of rejoicing. Thank God for the good times and ask Him for guidance in times of distress. As we pray, we must be willing to accept the answer God gives. Sometimes we ask for things that are not in our best interest. We should always pray that God’s will, not ours, be done. God hears the prayers of the righteous (James 5:16).

Hannah prayed a specific prayer. She asked God for a son, not a baby. She outlined what she would do if God granted her a son. We should be specific in our prayers to God and acknowledge to God our need for our request. If we would like a larger home, we could pray that God help us secure that home so that it would be easier to show hospitality. If we desire another car, we could pray that God help us secure a vehicle that will better serve providing transportation to others for worship services. If God grants the requests, we had better follow through with using the items as we outlined. Our prayers can be general in nature. When we pray that God will use us in His service, our prayer is general in that we have not been specific as to where or how God is to use us. When we pray this prayer, we need to accept the guidance He gives and follow wherever He leads.

Do you pray as Hannah prayed? Do you only pray when you have a need? Do you remember God in prayer during the good times? Do you pray specific and general prayers? Are you prepared to accept God’s answer to your prayers? Do you accuse God of not answering your prayer when it is not answered according to your timeframe? Will you leave God and the church when God has not answered your prayer according to your desires?

Hannah Kept her Promises

Hannah prayed for a son and promised God that she would give him back to God. As soon as Samuel was old enough to be of service to God, she kept that promise. She left Samuel with Eli to serve in the Tabernacle.

As Christians, we should keep our promises. Solomon taught in Ecclesiastes 5:4 that when one fails to fulfill a vow or promise to God, one is as a fool. Ecclesiastes 5:5 advises that it would be better not to make a vow than to make a vow and be unable to keep it. When we obeyed the Gospel, we were telling God that we would serve Him. When we fail to serve God, we are failing to keep our promise to God. In addition, we should keep the promises we make to others. When we agree to something, we should make every effort to complete the agreed upon task.

Are you like Hannah? Do you keep the promises you make to others? If you have promised God something, have you kept that promise? Are you like those, who in times of distress, bargain with God, then fail to fulfill your end of the bargain when God grants the request?

Hannah Taught Samuel How to Worship God

“...And he worshipped the LORD there” (1 Samuel 1:28). Hannah must have taught Samuel about God and how to worship, since he worshipped God on his first trip to Shiloh. At the young age of three, Samuel knew about worshipping God. Samuel “ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest” (1 Samuel 2:11). Samuel knew about serving God.

Just as Hannah taught Samuel from a very young age, we need to teach our children from a very young age. Most congregations have Bible classes for infants and toddlers where they are taught about God. Unfortunately, many times we fail at teaching our toddlers how to worship God. Most children learn from what they observe. Toddlers can begin to learn the importance of worship by observing those around them. When they see adults and older

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children fidgeting, talking, looking around, sending text messages, checking email, answering cell phones and making frequent trips out of the auditorium, they learn that worship is not important. When they see older children and adults singing, turning in the Bible to the Scriptures being read, bowing their heads in prayer and sitting attentively, they learn that worship is important. We need to train our children from infancy to worship God.

Are you like Hannah? Do you teach your children the importance of worshipping God? Is your behavior during worship helpful or hindering to the young mothers trying to train their children to worship God?

Questions

1. Why did Elkanah and his family travel to Shiloh?
2. Why was Hannah distraught?
3. What was the importance of the worthy portion that Elkanah gave to Hannah?
4. Why did Peninnah torment Hannah?
5. What was the difference between the Tabernacle and the Temple?
6. What bargain did Hannah make with God?
7. Why did Eli assume Hannah was drunk?
8. Why did Eli ask God to grant Hannah's request?
9. When did Hannah fulfill her vow to God?
10. Why did Eli ask God to bless Hannah and Elkanah with more children?
11. What are some excuses people use for failing to worship God at the appointed times and the appointed place?
12. How will God respond to these excuses?
13. How should you respond to criticism, and how should you not respond to criticism?
14. Does God always answer our prayers?
15. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 11

Sapphira – Seeker of Glory

Character Study

Some women in the Bible are naturally associated with their spouses. When we think of Eve, we naturally think of Adam. When Sarah is mentioned, one naturally thinks of Abraham; mention Priscilla and Aquila comes to mind. Ananias and Sapphira are another couple naturally associated together in Scripture. Our study of Sapphira cannot be separated from Ananias and his actions.

The name Ananias means, “Jehovah is gracious.” Sapphira means, “beautiful.” As we will see, this couple did not live up to the names they were given. Before we look at the verses about Ananias and Sapphira, we need to back up to Acts Chapter Two for a brief history lesson.

On the day of Pentecost, many Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate this Jewish feast day. It was on this day that Peter preached the first recorded Gospel sermon. Many Jews were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41). Several of these individuals were not residents of Jerusalem; they were visiting for a predetermined amount of time for the purpose of celebrating Pentecost. After obeying the Gospel, they chose to remain in Jerusalem for the purpose of learning more about Christ and His church from the apostles. Quite possibly, the length of their stay exceeded the monetary provisions they brought with them. The love and concern these early Christians had for one another prompted those living in Jerusalem to sell some of their possessions to provide for the needs of fellow Christians (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35).

This brings us to Acts 4:36-37. Barnabas, a faithful Christian, saw his brothers and sisters in Christ were in need of daily provisions. He then sold a piece of property and gave the money to the apostles who distributed it to those in need.

Chapter Five begins with Ananias and Sapphira, also Christians, deciding to sell property and purposing to give money to the apostles,

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as Barnabas did, for those in need. Unfortunately, they chose to portray themselves as greater givers than they were. Together, they decided to tell that they sold the land for a certain price and gave the entire amount to the church. In reality, they sold the land for one price, kept part of the money for themselves and gave the remainder to the church, stating that they gave the full sale price.

Ananias arrived where some of the Jerusalem church had gathered (possibly in Solomon's Porch, Acts 5:12) and laid a bag of money at the feet of the apostles. Peter asked Ananias why he lied to the Holy Spirit and emphasized that the land and the money was his to do with as he chose. Upon hearing the words of Peter, Ananias dropped dead. Young men, who were present, immediately carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later, Sapphira, not knowing the fate of her husband, arrived. Peter questioned her about the sale of property, and she readily agreed with what her husband had stated. Peter rebuked her for conspiring with Ananias to lie to God, and Sapphira dropped dead and was buried beside her husband.

When reading this biblical account, several questions come to mind. Some of the questions are answered in Scripture while others are for curiosity only, and the answers are not necessary to comprehend the lesson outlined in these verses.

Let us take a brief look at these questions:

1. Why did Ananias and Sapphira arrive at the assembly at different times? If you were to ask some of the men of the congregation that question, some would say, "Because Sapphira was not ready to leave on time." While that may be true of some women, and men, today, the Scriptures do not answer this question. We do know that the early church met daily in the temple (Acts 2:46; 5:12). This, probably, was not a Lord's Day assembly, but one of the daily assemblies those who could, and wanted to, attended.

2. How could Sapphira not hear about her husband's death during the three-hour interval? The Scriptures do not answer this question. However, Gareth Reese, in his commentary on the Book

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of Acts, gives two possible answers.

One of the first things done in the case of death is to notify the next of kin. That she has not been notified leads us to suppose that some command from Peter or one of the other apostles had been given to the people to keep the miraculous event quiet. Especially is this true if Ananias had been stricken dead in a public assembly. The only other explanation why someone present had not gone to inform Sapphira might be that those present were wholly given to some silent self-examination. The power of God to reveal the intents and thoughts of the heart struck home with such force that every person just might concern himself with his own secret thoughts and be fervently seeking the favor of divine mercy. (206)

Both of these explanations seem plausible.

3. Why was God so swift and harsh in punishing these two? First, we must remember God knows the hearts of men (Mark 2:1-12). Second, the church was in its early stages. God was still working miracles to confirm His Word. Third, if this type of sin had continued, the credibility of the apostles and the Lord's church would have been hindered. Besides these observations, this question is answered in Acts 5:11, "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." Verse thirteen further explains only those who were sincere assembled with the saints.

4. Why were Ananias and Sapphira not told of their sin and given an opportunity to repent? Peter questioned Ananias and explained the circumstances surrounding his actions before God struck him dead. In addition, God knows the hardness of a man's heart (Mark 3:1-6). Ananias was fully aware of his sin. Sapphira had three hours to think about the lie she had agreed with her husband to tell. Peter gave her an opportunity to recant the lie when he asked, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" (Acts 5:8). She chose at that moment not to repent, but to promote the sin that she and her husband plotted and fulfilled. She had her opportunity to repent and chose not to repent.

Applicable Principles

Sapphira Was Deceitful and a Liar

Deceit and lying go hand in hand, and basically are different words describing the same activity. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia gives the following definition for deceit: “DECEIT (de-set’) (mirmah; (dolos): The intentional misleading or beguiling of another; in Scripture represented as a companion of many other forms of wickedness, as cursing (Ps 10:7), hatred (Prov 26:24), theft, covetousness, adultery, murder (Mark 7:22; Rom 1:29).”

Lies are told for one of two basic reasons — to protect oneself or to deceive another. In order to deceive someone, a lie must be told or implied. Abraham and Sarah told a half-truth to protect Abraham from imagined harm by intentionally deceiving Abimelech. Ananias and Sapphira told a lie to present themselves as great servants of God and as concerned for the needs of other Christians.

The Bible is full of admonitions against lying and deceit. Consider the following passages that link lying and deceit together with the use of the tongue.

- † “The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good” (Psalm 36:3).
- † “Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully” (Psalm 52:2).
- † “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips” (Romans 3:13).
- † “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak” (Psalm 12:2).

Furthermore, the Scriptures teach the heart is the birthplace for deceitfulness. “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride,

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foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23 emphasis added). Jeremiah wrote by inspiration: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). What originates in the heart manifests itself with the tongue whether the words are good or evil.

Sapphira Was a Hypocrite

A hypocrite “is the name for the successful or unsuccessful endeavor of a person to impart to others, by the expression of his features or, gestures, by his outward actions, and, in fine, by his whole appearance, a favorable opinion of his principles, his good intentions, love, unselfishness, truthfulness, and conscientiousness while in reality these qualities are wanting in him” (McClintock and Strong). Thomas Nelson further explains this term: “Pretending to be what one is not. The New Testament meaning of hypocrisy and hypocrite reflects its use in Greek drama. In the Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask and played a part on the stage, imitating the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character portrayed.” Thus, a hypocrite is one who plays or acts the part of another. Jesus called the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites on many occasions (Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16; Luke 20:19; etc.). Christ further described the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as leaven or yeast (Luke 12:3) — growing and growing in evil.

Ananias and Sapphira decided to sell a piece of their property, using the funds to assist those in need; then, they plotted to lie about the true selling price of the land. Peter instructed them that they could have given any or all of the funds to the church; it was their property to do with as they chose. Their hearts were not tuned to helping the needy; they were looking for praise and glory.

Many Christians profess Christianity, but act Christ-like only when in the company of other Christians. They are pretending to be something they are not. Other Christians may attend all the worship services, but they are there only to be seen of others or because they are expected to be there. They also are pretending to be something

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they are not. Some Christians are more like Sapphire in their giving of monetary gifts to the Lord. They pretend to give through great sacrifice when in reality they are only contributing from their surplus. Other Christians only give when they can give large sums, and when their contributions will be acknowledged before the congregation. All these individuals fall into the category of hypocrites. If Jesus were to speak verbally to them, He would call them hypocrites as He did the Scribes and Pharisees.

Hypocrisy and good works cannot be joined together. No matter how hard we try to pretend that we are something we are not, the truth of our actions will eventually be discovered — if not while in this earth, on Judgment Day! Peter taught that once we obey the Gospel we should love one another with a pure heart, putting away hypocrisy desiring the milk of the Word (1 Peter 1:22; 2:1). Hypocrisy is a trait of a follower of Satan, not one of a Christian.

Are you like Sapphira? Do you pretend to be someone you are not? Do you have the evil trait of hypocrisy in your life?

Sapphira Was Obedient to her Husband to a Fault

Could Sapphira have refused to participate and promote the sin Ananias proposed? Ananias and Sapphira were members of the Lord's church; the new law was now in effect. It was never God's intention for women to be inferior to men. God created males and females to be equal. However, God chose different roles for men and women. Men were and are to have authority in the church and in the home. Women do not have leadership roles in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:34), and wives must submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21-31). This does not mean that husbands are to be harsh and unkind. Every group of people, whether it is the home or an organization of some kind, must have someone who has the final say in a matter. God has outlined that this individual is the husband in the home; men have the final say in the church. That is God's plan. We must not and cannot change it in anyway. Therefore, we ask the question, again. Could Sapphira have refused

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to participate with her husband in this sin?

We must conclude, “Yes!” The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not a spur of the moment action. It was planned and discussed. Sapphira could have pointed out the errors of trying to deceive God. If unable to dissuade Ananias from following through with his evil plan, Sapphira should have refused to participate. Deuteronomy 13:6-8 states:

If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him.

Under the Old Law, family individuals were warned not to support or participate in sin with a loved one. Sapphira should have been aware of this biblical passage. Jesus further taught in Matthew 19:29 that those who forsake family members in order to serve Christ will be rewarded. In addition, Matthew 10:37 records Jesus’ teaching that we must love Him more than our family members. God must come first at all cost. We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). We cannot excuse Sapphira’s actions by saying, “She had to obey her husband.” From all indications in the Scriptures, Sapphira was a willing, active participant in the sin recorded in Acts 5:1-11.

Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to God and man. They were also guilty of the sin of hypocrisy in that they were trying to portray themselves as faithful Christians when in reality they were the servants of the devil.

Are you like Sapphira? Are you submissive to your husband even when he requests sinful practices of you?

Adam and Eve, Sarah and Abraham, Ananias and Sapphira, and Priscilla and Aquila are couples mentioned in the Bible. Eve

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succumbed to the temptation of the devil, ate of the forbidden fruit and encouraged her husband to do likewise (Genesis 3:1-8).

At the age of 65, Sarah was “beautiful to look upon” (Genesis 12:11-13). When Abraham and Sarah traveled to Egypt, Abraham asked Sarah to lie stating that she was his sister in order to protect his own life. They told this same lie again when Sarah was close to 90 (Genesis 12:20).

Priscilla and Aquila worked together, making tents and teaching God’s Word. On one occasion, they taught Apollos more perfectly about baptism (Acts 18).

Ananias and Sapphira plotted together to deceive God. Sapphira, whose name means beautiful, died an early death as a withered flower.

Each of these women was equal in God’s eyes. Each had the ability to know right from wrong. Three of them chose to “go along” or outright encourage a sinful act. One stood by her husband in the good deeds he did.

Where are you in your relationship with your husband? Are you a help or a hindrance in his service to God? Are you encouraging him to sin as Eve did with Adam? Are you going along with sinful acts as Sarah and Sapphira did, afraid to take a stand for the truth or using the excuse, “I must be submissive to my husband?” Remember Moses’ teaching in Deuteronomy 13:6-8. We can neither allow our husbands to encourage us to sin, nor can we allow them to keep us from serving God (Matthew 10:37; 19:29).

Questions

1. Name four couples who are naturally associated together in the Scriptures.
2. What does the name Sapphira mean?
3. What major event happened in Acts 2?
4. What did Ananias and Sapphira do with a piece of their property?
5. What question did Peter ask Ananias?
6. To whom did Peter say Ananias and Sapphira lied?
7. Did Peter give Sapphira an opportunity to correct the evil plan

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she and her husband devised?

8. Why were Sapphira and Ananias struck dead?
9. What is the biblical definition for deceit?
10. What is the biblical definition for hypocrisy?
11. What are the two basic reasons for lying?
12. What is the biblical definition of a woman being in submission to her husband?
13. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 12 Dorcas – Sewing Good Works

Character Study

Acts 9:36-42

Joppa is located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea about 45 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was a chief seaport for the land of Palestine. Solomon had the cedar trees of Lebanon floated in the Mediterranean Sea along the coastline to Joppa when he built the Temple in Jerusalem. When Herod rebuilt the Temple, he also used the seaport of Joppa to receive the Cedar trees. Jonah tried to run and hide from God by fleeing to Joppa and boarding a ship to Tarshish. Joppa's residents were both Jews and Gentiles at the time of Luke's writing.

The biblical account of Dorcas occurred in the early stages of the church with the church comprised of both Jews (Hebrews) and proselyted Jews (Gentiles). This may be the reason Luke chose to refer to both the Hebrew name and the Greek name of Dorcas for the readers of the Book of Acts. The Hebrew name, Tabitha, and the Greek name, Dorcas, mean gazelle or roe. "The Greeks used Dorcas, i.e., 'female gazelle,' as a term of endearment for their women" (New Unger's). It was not a common practice to define names in the Bible. By Luke recording the Hebrew name Tabitha, then giving the Greek interpretation, Dorcas, seems to place significance on the definition of her name. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown makes the following observation that "the Greek name for an antelope or gazelle, which, from the grace of its motions and the beauty of its eyes, was frequently employed as a proper name for women. The interpretation of the name is given by the historian, to signify that it expressed the character which she bore among the Christians of the place."

Luke tells us that Dorcas was a disciple of Christ. A disciple is a learner or pupil. The use of the word disciple in the New Testament

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implies one is a learner or pupil of Christ. The Greek word used for disciple in this context is in feminine form and is only used in Acts 9:36 with reference to Dorcas (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia). The term disciple is used many times throughout the New Testament. Jesus told the Jews who believed on him, "... If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). Jesus chose twelve of His disciples to be apostles (Luke 6:13).

Luke further describes the actions of Dorcas. She was full of good works and "almsdeeds." The phrase "good works" literally means to toil, labor or act beneficially. The word "almsdeeds" literally means to have compassion towards the poor. Since Dorcas was a faithful Christian, she would make a contribution if she could during the first day of the week worship. However, the use of the word "almsdeeds" signifies that Dorcas went beyond the monetary giving by bestowing gifts to the poor and those in need. The Bible does not indicate the financial status of Dorcas. She may have been a wealthy woman who used her wealth to help others. She may have had a modest income and used what she could to help the poor. Her status in life may have been similar to that of the widow Jesus praised in Mark 12:42-44 when she gave all that she had. What we do know is that as a disciple of Christ, Dorcas put her faith in action by providing some of the necessities of life to those in need.

Dorcas became sick and died. Luke neither tells what illness caused Dorcas to die nor does he tell how long she was sick. He matter-of-factly states the obvious without any unnecessary added information. As was the custom of the day, upon Dorcas' death her body was washed. Unlike the death of Ananias and Sapphira whose bodies were buried immediately upon their deaths, Dorcas' body was laid in an upper room. The purpose for immediate burial was because of the quick decomposition of the flesh in the hot humid atmosphere of the region. So, why was Dorcas placed in an upper room rather than immediately buried is not revealed in Scripture.

With the passing of their dear friend and benefactor, the disciples sent two men to Lydda to request that Peter come to them quickly.

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Lydda was about 10 miles southeast of Joppa (Wycliffe). Ten miles was an easy distance for Peter to come to Joppa and bring Dorcas back to life before her body would begin to decompose. Some commentaries suggest that this was the reason for placing Dorcas' body in the upper room rather than an immediate burial.

Upon Peter's arrival in Joppa, he was taken directly to the upper room where the body of Dorcas rested. Many of the widows who Dorcas had helped while alive stood by weeping. They showed Peter the clothes Dorcas made for them. This scene is similar to that of our modern day viewing when a loved one dies. Years ago, the body was laid out in a room at the home of the one who died where friends and loved ones gathered for a period of mourning and reminiscing about the life of the loved one. Current practice utilizes the facilities of a funeral home or a church building to accomplish the same purpose.

Peter sent all those gathered around the body of Dorcas out of the room. He then kneeled and prayed to God. After his prayer, he turned to the body and told Dorcas to arise. He gave her his hand, lifted her up and called to those gathered in the home. Dorcas was now alive!

Luke states that Peter called the saints and the widows, indicating that all those gathered were not Christians. Apparently, some of the widows to whom Dorcas provided clothing were not members of the Lord's church. Dorcas provided for believers and non-believers. Her acts of kindness and good deeds were directed to those in need – not to believers only.

This quiet act of God, through the hand of Peter, of restoring life to Dorcas was soon known throughout the city of Joppa. Many people of Joppa soon believed in the Lord. Their belief was not a simple "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God." Their belief involved hearing (Romans 10:17), believing (Acts 8:37), repenting of sins (Acts 17:30), confessing Jesus (Romans 10:9-10) and being baptized (Acts 2:38). Many souls were saved from the fires of hell because one woman chose to do what she could with what she had to show kindness to those in need.

Applicable Principles

Dorcas Was a Christian Woman Who Put her Faith to Work

James 2:14-18 states:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Dorcas understood the correlation between saying we love God and showing we love God by our actions. She was not like the “Cretans” Paul rebuked in his letter to Titus. These individuals professed to know God, but their actions told a different story. Their actions told all that observed them that they actually denied God. Paul condemned the “Cretans” for their behavior and instructed Titus to rebuke them (Titus 1:12-16). Dorcas exemplified the words of Christ in Matthew 25:34-36. Christ taught that when we help those in need, we are serving Him. When we fail to help those in need, we deny Him and will be punished accordingly. Dorcas did not hide what God had given as did the one talent man in Matthew 25:14-30, but bountifully used her abilities to help others.

Dorcas was not a Sunday worship only Christian. She understood that being a Christian required action. Dorcas used her talents to show others her faith in God.

Are you using the talents and abilities God has given you to serve Him? When you die, will friends gather to mourn your death and talk about all the wonderful things you did for them? Will the church with which you worship miss the great works that you did?

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Will your funeral be like that of Dorcas?

Dorcas Saw a Need and Fulfilled that Need

Dorcas lived in the seaport town of Joppa. Shipwrecks and the death of the sailors were prevalent. I am sure there were many families devastated by the loss of a husband and a father. With this loss came the loss of an income and the ability to obtain the necessities of life. Dorcas saw the need to provide clothing to those less fortunate than she was. She did not sit back and wonder why no one was helping the poor. She did not go to the elders at church and say, “Someone ought to help these poor people.” She did not criticize the poor for their inability to care for themselves. Dorcas used the abilities God gave her, took needle and thread in hand, sewed garments, and gave them to those who were unable to provide for themselves.

Paul told the Corinthians, “but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:11-12). It takes more than a willing mind; it takes action on our part. God expects us to use what we have in service to others. We cannot wait until we are financially secure before we help others. We need to do what we can, with what we have each time an opportunity arises to serve others.

Are you like Dorcas? Do you see a need and fulfill that need? Are you proclaiming Christ by helping those in need?

Dorcas Made the Church her Family

Since the Scriptures lack any mention of family, we can assume either Dorcas was a widow with no children or she never married. With no physical family members for which to care, it was easier for Dorcas to make the church her family. It was Christians and those toward whom she had a good influence who were gathered at her bedside upon her death. On the other hand, Christian women who have spouses, children, parents and siblings who are not dedicated

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Christians have a harder time putting Christ first as is commanded in Mark 14:26. As difficult as it may be, we must place an emotional distance between ourselves and family members who will discourage and pull us away from our God. Amos asked the rhetorical question, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The implied answer is, “No”; two individuals cannot walk the same path when each wants to go a different direction. Spiritually, when some family members do not embrace Christ as their Savior, they are not walking the same path as those who have obeyed the Gospel. Faithful Christians have very little in common with non-Christians. Those who are faithful to God do not enjoy the entertainment enjoyed by most non-Christians. As faithful Christians, it is difficult to discuss the Bible with those who do not hold the same beliefs that we hold so dear. Typically, our non-Christian family members do not want to spend time with our Christian friends, thus making fellowship with Christians a difficult task. Paul told the Romans to prefer one another (Romans 12:10). Christians need to spend more time with those who will help them go to heaven than with those who pull them away from God. Yes, we do have a responsibility to our families, but we have a greater responsibility to God. We need to be sure we do not let our family responsibilities outweigh our spiritual responsibilities.

If you are single, please be careful whom you date. Any individual who you date is a possible spouse. Most Christians who date and marry non-Christians experience heartache and discouragement. Many Christians who marry non-Christians will fall away from the church or become weak members as they try to balance family responsibilities with spiritual responsibilities. Often, children brought into the family are lost to the church because of the conflicting life styles they observe in the home. If you are a Christian and your spouse is not, follow the instruction of Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-2 to convert your husband to Christ. Until that happens, be sure to be a submissive, loving wife while placing God first in your life and remain strong in the Lord.

Chapter 12 Dorcas — Sewing Good Works

Are you like Dorcas? Do you prefer to spend your time with faithful Christians? Are you spending more time with non-Christian family and friends than with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Like Dorcas, you can opt to more closely associate with your Christian family — the Lord's church.

Questions

1. What four biblical events took place at Joppa?
2. What does the name Dorcas mean?
3. What was the purpose of Luke giving the interpretation of Dorcas' name?
4. For what was Dorcas famous?
5. What does it mean to be a disciple?
6. For what was Dorcas remembered?
7. What was the purpose of Peter restoring life to Dorcas?
8. What is the proper relationship between faith and works?
9. In what ways can Christians act benevolently toward others?
10. Why is it important to distance oneself from non-Christian family and friends?
11. Dorcas used what she had to serve others. What can you do to serve others?
12. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Chapter 13

Lydia – Eager to Serve

Character Study

Acts 16:12-15

Lydia was a businesswoman whose vocation brought her to the town of Philippi. Her hometown of Thyatira was 250 miles away. “A seller of purple” is an indication that Lydia was a wealthy woman whose business was thriving. The color of purple was reserved for those who were in places of high authority or rich. Lydia must have been an outstanding woman who had daily dealings with the rich and famous.

Thyatira was located 42 miles from the Aegean Sea, 37 miles north of Sardis and 47 miles northwest of Pergamum along the Lycus River (“Thyatira”). These three cities are mentioned in the address to the seven churches in Asia by John in the Book of Revelation (1:11). Thyatira was known for its great trade guilds (unions) to which every crafter had to belong in order to be successful. These guilds included bakers, potters, tanners, weavers, robe makers, coppersmiths and dyers. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia makes the following observation about the city of Thyatira.

Thyatira was specially noted for the trade guilds which were probably more completely organized there than in any other ancient city. Every artisan belonged to a guild, and every guild, which was an incorporated organization, possessed property in its own name, made contracts for great constructions, and wielded a wide influence. Powerful among them was the guild of coppersmiths; another was the guild of the dyers...

The color purple is a bright, deep reddish-blue and is sometimes called Turkish Red. The dye was gleaned from one of two sources – the most common source was from shellfish; the other was from the

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madder root. The shellfish secretes a slimy substance from its gland, which when exposed to sunlight passes through shades of yellow and green before settling into the purple color (New Unger's). Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary makes this observation: "A total of 250,000 mollusks was required to make one ounce of the dye, which partly accounts for its great price." The second source for the purple dye is from the root of the madder plant. "Madder is a perennial herb with leaves in whorls of 4-5 or more at the nodes..." ("Thyatira").

Regardless of the source for the purple dye, Thyatira was famous for its outstanding purple cloth. "The waters of Thyatira are said to be so well adapted for dyeing that in no place can the scarlet cloth out of which fezes [cone shaped hats, BSR] are made be so brilliantly or so permanently dyed as here" (New Unger's).

The city of Philippi was one of the cities located along the main route between Asia and the west, nestled among the mountains ten miles from the Aegean Sea in the country of Macedonia (New Unger's). It was a Roman colony, and as such, it was "made up largely of Roman citizens and located at strategic points throughout the empire, which enjoyed special privileges, such as self-government, freedom from imperial taxation, and the same rights as citizens in Italy. Such a city was a little Rome far from the motherland" (Wycliffe).

Apparently, the city of Philippi had very few Jewish males living within its gates, since it did not have a synagogue, and only ten, adult Jewish males were necessary to form one. For this reason, the apostle Paul found women gathered at the riverside to pray. It was a common practice to have a designated place for Jews to gather, usually by the side of a river, when a synagogue was not available. A simple enclosure was built of stone, with seats and no roof, often built in a grove of trees in a suitable place for worship (Barnes').

Lydia was not a Jew by birth, but had at some time accepted the Jewish faith by becoming a proselyte. (Commentaries commonly ascribe Gentile ancestry to Lydia owing to the choice of words in Greek identifying her as a 'worshipper of God.')

Thus, on the Sabbath day Lydia was gathered with the other Jews of Philippi to

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worship God. She is the only individual named of those gathered on that Sabbath day to worship. There is no indication that any male Jews were present.

The majority of the citizens in Philippi were Gentiles, non-worshippers of the one true God. The Sabbath day was not a day of rest to the Gentile world. Work went on as normal; shops were open to sell their merchandise. Lydia chose to close her business to worship God on the Sabbath day, possibly losing sales for that day.

As was Paul's custom, on the Sabbath day he went to the place of worship in search of honest hearts willing to listen to the Gospel of Christ. Paul found such a woman in Lydia. The Scriptures state she "...heard us..." (Acts 16:14). The "hearing" was not simply listening to an audible noise. Lydia's hearing consisted of her listening to the words spoken, understanding what was taught and applying the teaching to her life.

Acts 16:14 goes on to say, "whose heart the Lord opened..." God did not miraculously open Lydia's heart to the words of Paul as some suppose. Rather, the preaching of the Gospel opened her heart to accept the Gospel just as the Jews on the day of Pentecost were pricked in the hearts when they heard Peter preach the first recorded Gospel sermon (Acts 2:37). As a proselyted Jew, Lydia knew the teachings of the Old Testament and was well aware of the prophecies concerning Christ and His church. Thus, with her knowledge of the Old Law, she readily accepted Paul's teachings on the church.

Luke further records in Acts 16:14 "that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." After hearing the words of Paul and understanding what he was teaching, Lydia took the next step by accepting the truths being taught. Lydia's actions on that Sabbath day followed the natural course of any honest and sincere heart. She heard the words, she understood the words and she acted accordingly.

Lydia's action is outlined in verse 15. "And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she

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persuaded us.” Although the words Paul spoke are not recorded for us, we know that a part of Paul’s teachings included baptism. The Scriptures record Lydia and her household were baptized. Thus, Lydia became the first Christian convert in Europe.

Lydia did not sit back and relax once she obeyed the Gospel. She put her newfound faith to work. Remember the last part of verse 15 says, “‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.” Lydia was so thankful for Paul and his companions that she offered them a place to stay while in Philippi. The hospitality offered by Lydia included a place to sleep, meals and the other necessities one would need when far from home. Notice this was not a mild offer, but a begging plea to be of service to God in her newfound religion. Not only did Lydia persuade Paul and his three companions to stay with her while in Philippi, she opened her home to those that were converted. Acts 16:40 states that when Paul and Silas “...went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.” Christians were gathered at Lydia’s home, probably praying for Paul and Silas’s safety.

Applicable Principles

Lydia Was a Worshipper of God

Lydia was a Gentile by birth. At some time in her life, she became acquainted with the one true God. With this knowledge, she became a proselyted Jew, serving and worshipping God under the Old Law. When she was taught the Gospel, she became a Christian and worshipped God according to the New Law.

Christians of the first century gathered daily for prayer, fellowship and teaching (Acts 2:42-47; 5:42). At Troas, Paul preached until midnight to Christians gathered there (Acts 20:7). The writer of Hebrews admonished Christians to not forsake the assembly of the saints (Hebrews 10:24-31). God commands that we worship Him on the first day of the week. To be like Lydia, a true worshipper of God

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(John 4:23-24), one should desire to worship God at every opportunity.

Are you like Lydia? Are you a worshipper of God? Do you seize every opportunity to worship God? Do you long to spend time with Christians or do you prefer to spend time with worldly individuals? Do you worship God with a desire to learn more or because it is a command? Let us follow the example of Lydia and strive to worship God with an honest and sincere heart at every opportunity.

Lydia Had an Honest Heart

Lydia readily listened to the words of Paul. Paul did not have to convince Lydia to believe in God. She was a worshipper of God. Lydia worshipped God under the Old Law. Now there was a better law, the Gospel of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-10). Lydia “attended unto the things which were spoken” (Acts 16:14). She reasoned within her heart to verify the truth. Once she realized the truthfulness of the words spoken, she acted accordingly.

Are you like Lydia? Do you have an honest heart? Do you readily listen to the Words of God, then “attend to them”? Do you concentrate on the lessons you hear? Do you apply those lessons to your life? Let us follow the example of Lydia by eagerly listening to lessons from God’s Word then apply those lessons to our lives.

Lydia Immediately Corrected her Life to Conform to God’s Will

From the Scriptures we learn of at least two occasions on which Lydia made course corrections to serve God better. The time of the first is unknown; however, we know that she became a proselyted Jew sometime before her encounter with the apostle Paul in Philippi. The second occasion is outlined for us in Acts 16:14-15. Here we learn that as soon as Lydia understood the words of Paul, she corrected her life to conform to God’s will. She was immersed (baptism is immersion, Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12) in water to wash away her sins. From all indication, Lydia was an honest person. She worshipped God, but being an honest person and worshipping God was not enough. Lydia

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had to submit her will to God's will in baptism. Lydia did this as soon as she understood the necessity to do so.

Are you like Lydia? Do you immediately make changes in your life when you understand that your actions are contrary to God's will? Have you washed your sins away through baptism? If yes, do you make changes in your life as soon as you understand the necessity to do so? Let us follow the example of Lydia by making course corrections in our lives without hesitation.

God Was More Important to Lydia than her Business.

The Sabbath day was a normal business day in Philippi. Lydia chose to close her business to worship God on the Sabbath. She probably lost sales on the Sabbath. Furthermore, once she obeyed the Gospel, she placed herself at odds with the guild for dyers. This would hinder her association with various individuals, possibly limiting her sales as well.

Are you like Lydia? Do you forgo the extra hours at work so that you can worship God at the appointed times? Do you “go along to get along” so that you can get that promotion or do you let others know that you do not appreciate their crude language, inappropriate jokes and immoral behavior? Can the people with whom you work know that you are a Christian by the way you talk and act at work? Let us follow the example of Lydia and put God before our jobs.

Lydia Was the Kind of Person that Could Influence Others for Good

Acts 16:15 states that Lydia and her household were baptized. One of the requirements for baptism is to understand why one is baptized. Lydia's household was baptized because each individual understood he or she was lost in sin and that baptism into Christ washed away that sin. Lydia's character was such that those who knew her understood she would not encourage them to do something inappropriate or unnecessary. She always had their best interest at heart.

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Are you like Lydia? Do you have a good influence on others? Can your actions lead others to Christ, or will it lead them into the ways of the world? We must remember we are being watched by our peers and by younger individuals looking for role models. What kind of role model are you? Let us follow the example of Lydia and be role models for Christ, leading lost souls to heaven (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Upon Obeying the Gospel, Lydia Immediately Began to Serve God

Lydia began to serve God immediately after her baptism. She offered Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy a place to live while in Philippi. This was not a polite offer, hoping they would decline. She begged them to lodge with her, which gave Paul and his companions a base of operation while preaching Christ in Philippi. This also afforded Lydia opportunities to learn more about Christ and His church. As more individuals were baptized, Lydia opened her home as a gathering place for Christians. The church at Philippi may have used Lydia's home as its place of worship.

Are you a Lydia? Do you offer hospitality? Do you open your home to others for Bible study and prayer? Let us follow the example of Lydia and use our homes to glorify God by reaching out with hospitality.

Questions

1. In what book of the New Testament do we read about Lydia?
2. What was Lydia's hometown?
3. Where was Lydia living when she met Paul?
4. What did Lydia do for a living?
5. What were the sources of purple dye?
6. Why was this dye so expensive?
7. For what is Thyatira famous?
8. Why was Lydia at the side of a river?
9. What was necessary to build a synagogue?
10. What is the biblical definition of hearing?

Chapter 13 Lydia — Eager to Serve

11. How did God open Lydia's heart?
12. What did Lydia do to attend to the things spoken by Paul?
13. What was Lydia's first act of serving God after her baptism?
14. Who were Paul's traveling companions?
15. Where did the first converts in Philippi meet?
16. Choose one characteristic displayed by this Bible character that you need to pursue or that you need to dismiss in your life and concentrate on that characteristic this week.

Characters Summarized

Positive Qualities	Negative Qualities
Mrs. Noah	
Believed in the One God of the Universe	
Great Faith	
Helpmeet to her Husband	
Refrained from Participating in the Evil around Her	
Taught her Sons to Love God	
Taught her Sons to Choose Godly Wives	
Mrs. Job	
	Tempter
	Tormentor
	Turned her Back on her Husband When he needed her
Mrs. Potiphar	
Persistent (but used in an ungodly manner)	"I Syndrome"
	Liar
	Immoral
Mrs. Jeroboam	
Obedient to her Husband	Heavy Heart
	Tried to Deceive God

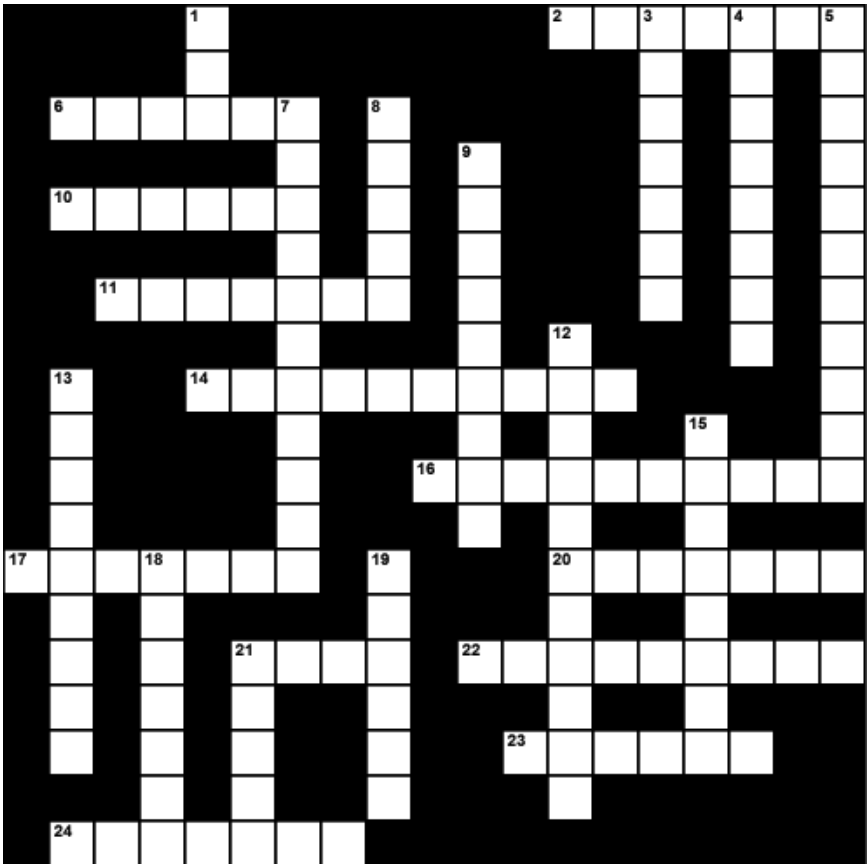
Characters Summarized

Positive Qualities	Negative Qualities
Mrs. Peter	
Elder's Wife	
Hospitable	
Missionary	
Sarah	
Great Faith	Impatient
Showed Hospitality	
Showed Love and Respect toward her Husband	
Obedyed her Husband	
Rebekah	
Courteous and Kind	Favoritism
Industrious	
Faith	
Courage	
Prayerful	
Rachel	
Industrious	Envious
Responsible	Affected by Sinful Family Influences
Miriam	
Responsible	Jealous
Leader	Rebellious
Repentant	

Characters Summarized

Positive Qualities	Negative Qualities
Hannah	
Worshipper of God	
Turned the Other Cheek	
Accepted and Applied Criticism	
Prayerful	
Kept her Promises	
Taught Samuel How to Worship God	
Sapphira	
Obedient to her Husband (to a fault)	Deceitful
	Liar
	Hypocrite
Dorcas	
Put her Faith to Work	
Saw a Need and Fulfilled It	
Made the Church her Family	
Lydia	
Worshipper of God	
Honest Heart	
Corrected her Life to Conform to God's Will	
Put God First	
Influenced Others for Good	
Served God Immediately after her Baptism	

Just For Fun



Characters Summarized

Across

2. Hannah taught Samuel to _____ God.
6. Miriam was a _____.
10. Name a Bible character who put her faith into action.
11. Name the Bible character that exhibited great faith.
14. Mrs. Peter was a _____.
16. Mrs. Peter was _____.
17. What did Mrs. Jeroboam try to do to God?
20. Mrs. Job was a _____ to her husband.
21. Sapphira was a _____.
22. Name a negative quality found in the life of Sarah.
23. Name a Bible character who kept her promises.
24. Whom did Mrs. Jeroboam obey?

Down

1. In whom did Mrs. Noah believe?
3. Name a Bible character noted for her good work ethic.
4. Mrs. Noah was a _____ to her husband.
5. Name the one good quality demonstrated by Mrs. Potiphar.
7. Name a good quality practiced in the life of Rachel.
8. Name the Bible character that displayed great faith.
9. Mrs. Job was a _____ to her husband.
12. Name the Bible character that exhibited the “I Syndrome” characteristic.
13. Rebekah was _____.
15. Name a Bible character who was a hypocrite.
18. Name a negative quality possessed by Rachel.
19. Name a Bible character who repented of her sins.
21. Name a Bible character who put God first in her life.

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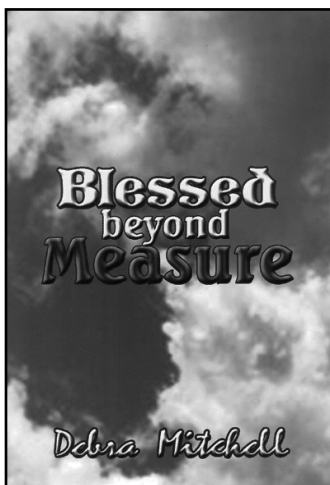
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**Other Books for Ladies
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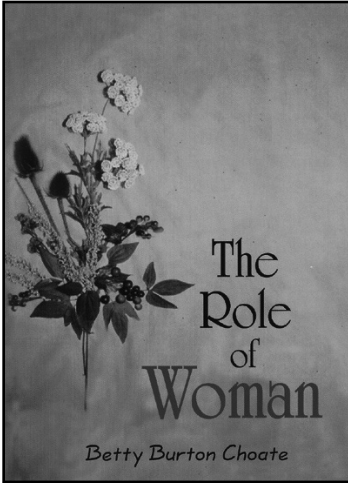
First Sisters by Debra Mitchell: Sister Mitchell has done a masterful job of writing about each of the “first sisters” in the Book of Acts, and then making useful applications to our own time and lives. There are thirteen lessons with discussion questions for each chapter: Before and After Jesus and His Church; Beauty for Ashes; Among the First Christians: Sister Mary and Other Women of Faith; What Not to Do: Sister Sapphira; A full-Time Christian: Sister Dorcas; Almost Persecuted: Anonymous Women and Prominent Women;



A Prayer Meeting: John Mark’s Mother and Rhoda; A Missionary Mom: Sister Eunice; The First European Contacts: Sister Lydia and a Slave Girl; Grecian Converts and Jewish Friends; etc.



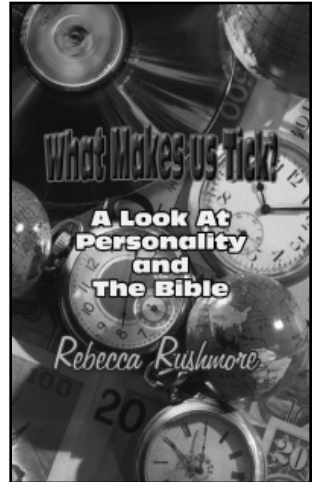
Blessed Beyond Measure by Debra Mitchell: Debra and her husband, Loy, were missionaries in Zimbabwe for many years. As citizens of America and Christians, we are truly blessed beyond measure, but we seldom stop to count the many things that God does for us on a day-to-day basis. This book is, to a large extent, a compilation of 55 completed surveys regarding how we as Christians look upon our blessings from God. It is an excellent study for a ladies Bible class.



The Role of Woman by **Betty Burton Choate**: In response to frequently asked questions concerning the Biblical role of women in this modern and ever-changing world, the author has developed these studies. Are the restrictions placed on women in the Scriptures based on culture? Is it permissible for a woman to lead public prayer, to teach a mixed adult class, to provide public leadership in worship if an elder has authorized her to do so? Is a woman required to cover her head

in worship? These and many other questions are considered in the light of the Scriptures.

What Makes Us Tick? by **Rebecca Rushmore**: Sister Rushmore has written a wonderfully useful study book that helps the user to better understand herself as well as others, providing better opportunity to interact with them profitably. The rewards will improve interpersonal relationships between spouses, siblings, friends, coworkers, brothers and sisters in Christ, etc. Throughout, Rebecca maintains a biblical perspective and assesses biblical characters who seemed to exhibit these personality types.



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