

Family Devotionals

The following lessons are brief, but can serve as a foundation for Bible studies and devotionals with friends, family, or classes. Feel free to use them. If you want to download all of them at once, the pdf link on the lower left side of the page is available.

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Genesis: In the Beginning

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The very first thing that was in the beginning was God (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). God is the Creator of all things. Genesis reveals that God created the heavens and the earth, which includes all things both visible and invisible. The universe, and life itself, did not happen by chance. Humans are not the products of natural evolution. Rather, God created. He spoke, and all things came into existence because of His power.

On the sixth day of creation, God made man in His own image (1:26–27). Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and told to care for the garden. He gave them much freedom, but did place on restriction on them: they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would die.

The devil appeared to them in the form of a serpent and deceived Eve. She was tricked into eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, and Adam ate with her. They knew better, and when they realized it, they tried to hide from God. Of course, they could not. As a result of their sin, curses were placed upon man, woman, the ground, and the serpent. Sin had entered the world, and death, physically and spiritually, came as a result. However, God did leave one ray of hope by saying that the seed of woman, would crush the head of the serpent (3:15).

Discussion

1. What does the fact of creation tell us about God? What kind of God is He? (read also Romans 1:18–20.)
2. If God is our Creator, then what does that teach us about His right to tell us what to do?
3. What does it mean to be made in God's image?
4. What is marriage? What kind of relationship should the man and woman have with each other?
5. Discuss sin. What is it? Why is it so bad? What are the consequences?
6. Discuss death, both physically and spiritually. Are there any benefits to physical death? Why do people die spiritually?

Cain and Abel: Genesis 4

Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4). Abel was a shepherd,

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while Cain was a tiller of the ground. One time, they both brought a sacrifice to the Lord. Abel brought the the best of his flock, and Cain brought an offering from the fruit of the ground. God respected Abel's offering, but did not accept Cain's. Cain was angry because of this, and eventually he rose up and killed Abel. He was cursed for this and had to become a wanderer on the earth.

The reason God respected Abel's sacrifice is because Abel did it by faith (Hebrews 11:4). This implies that Cain did not offer his by faith. Whether he offered an improper sacrifice, or simply did not give his best, we are not told. Whatever it was, it was not by faith; so he displeased God. The only way we can please God is to do what He says by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Cain was driven by his anger to commit even more sin (cf. 1 John 3:11–12). He did not control his anger as God warned him about (Gen. 4:6–7). This should serve as warning to us today also. After this, Adam and Eve had another son, named Seth, who would preserve a lineage through which God would work. Chapter 5 follows this line of people.

Discussion

1. Why was Abel pleasing to God in his offering? Why was Cain's offering rejected? How does this help us today in thinking about serving and worshipping God?
2. How can we do things by faith today? What is faith? Why is it so necessary in pleasing God?
3. Why did Cain kill Abel? What could Cain have done to control his anger? What did God mean when He told Cain that sin's "desire" was for him? How does one master sin?
4. Who is Seth? What role does he play in God's plan?
5. Discuss the phrase "and he died" in chapter 5. Why does death play such an important role in the Bible?
6. Who is the only person not to have died in this chapter? Why didn't he die? Discuss what that means.

Noah and the Flood: Genesis 6–9

People were becoming so evil and corrupt that God decided it was time to put an end to it. Even the "sons of God" were marrying the "daughters of men," causing them to be corrupt. (The "sons of God" were probably the descendants of Seth.) So God determined that He would destroy the wicked and start all over through Noah, who had found favor with God. God's method of destruction was a massive

God told Noah about His plans. He then commanded Noah to build a huge ark (like a big box) in order to save his family and preserve animal kinds on the earth. Noah followed God's instructions exactly; and while building the ark, he preached to others for 120 years. No one listened.

Only Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives, along with various animal-kinds, were saved through the flood. Through them, God would populate the earth once again. He also promised never to destroy the world by flood again. The account of Noah is a wonderful example of how God's grace works with man's faith and obedience. Noah is an example to us of one who, through faith, persevered in doing what was right, even though so many around him continued to do wrong.

Discussion

1. Why is it significant that the "sons of God" married the "daughters of men"? What does this say about the choice of marriage partners?
2. Why did God bring such a severe judgment? What does this say about how God views sin?
3. Compare the flood with other judgments of God. How will it compare with the final judgment? (2 Peter 3)
4. What did God give for food after the flood? What did God forbid? Why is this important?
5. What did God say would be required of those who kill other humans? What reason is given for this, and why is it so important?
6. Discuss the significance of the rainbow. What does it represent? Why did God give it?

Abraham: Genesis 12-21

Abraham was chosen by God to be the one through whom He would carry out His plan for mankind's salvation. God called Abram to leave his home and go to a land that God would show him. By faith, Abraham did just that (Heb. 11:8). Then God made three great promises to him (Gen. 12:1-7). These promises are the foundation for following the rest of the Bible story. First, God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation. This nation would become known as Israel. Second, God promised that these descendants would be given the land that Abraham had traveled to (vs. 7). Most importantly, it would be through Abraham that "all the families of the earth" would be blessed. This

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promise is given again in Genesis 22:18. "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." This seed would be Jesus Christ, and the blessing is the removal of sins through Him (Acts 3:25–26; Gal. 3:16).

Abraham was a man of great faith. By faith he obeyed God, even when he was asked to do very difficult tasks such as sacrificing his son Isaac. Because of his faith and obedience, he was justified before God: "and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to Him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." This is the kind of faith that is held up for all of us to imitate.

Discussion

1. Be able to name and discuss the three great promises given to Abraham. Why are they so important? When were they fulfilled? How do they factor into the rest of the Bible?
2. Read Romans 4 along with James 2:14–26. How does "faith" reconcile with "works"? What type of "works" is Paul speaking of? What does James mean by "works"?
3. Discuss the kind of faith Abraham had. What did he believe? How did he act? Did he believe in a reward?
4. How can we today imitate the faith of Abraham?
5. Discuss the "blessing" promise in more detail. What is it? Why is it important to us? How do we share in it?

Isaac: Genesis 22–24

God had promised Abraham that through his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Because of some impatience on the part of Abraham and Sarah, Abraham did have a son named Ishmael. However, Ishmael was not the child God had promised. Instead, Abraham had to wait until God was ready. Then Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. He was the child through whom God would continue His plan for salvation. Even when Abraham was tested in being told to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham knew that God would keep His promises (Heb. 11:17–19).

When Isaac was of age, Abraham sent a servant to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24). A woman named Rebekah was chosen, and she became Isaac's wife. To them would be born Jacob and Esau. Jacob would be the one through whom the plan would be carried out.

God reaffirmed His promise to Isaac by telling him, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, for the sake of My servant Abraham" (Gen. 26:24). Though Isaac was deceived by his son Jacob, in his later years, he still blessed his sons: "by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come" (Heb. 11:20). So Isaac, too, was a man of faith. In the years to come, his name would be among Abraham's and Jacob's (cf. Matt. 22:31–32).

Discussion

1. Why is Isaac called the "only begotten"? Discuss the importance of Isaac in God's plan.
2. Why was Isaac used in the test of Abraham's faith, when God told Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice? What was the point of that?
3. Why did Abraham was Isaac to take a wife from his relatives, and not from among the Canaanites? (Gen. 24:3–4).
4. Who was Rebekah? What kind of woman was she?
5. Why were Isaac and Rebekah grieved over Esau's choice in marriage? (Gen. 26:34–35)
6. How and why was Isaac deceived in his old age?

Jacob and Esau: Genesis 25

To Isaac and Rebekah were born twins (Genesis 25). Esau was the first, and Jacob the second, entering the world holding onto Esau's heel. As the boys grew, Esau became a hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was more peaceful, preferring to live in tents. Because of this, Isaac's favorite was Esau; whereas Rebekah's favorite was Jacob.

Though Esau was older, Jacob would be the one through whom God would carry out His plan. Jacob did show some problems in his life, though. On one occasion, he talked Esau into swapping Esau's birthright for some stew. On another occasion, Jacob took part in his mother's deceit, to trick Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing as if he were the firstborn. Because of this, Jacob fled.

As Jacob went from Beersheba toward Haran, the Lord spoke to him in a dream, reaffirming the very promises that God had given to Abraham. At this point, Jacob decided that the Lord would be his God. Jacob went east, finding some of his mother's relatives. From among them, he found Rachel, whom he loved and desired to marry. He was deceived by her father, who first had him marry Leah, Rachel's sister.

After Jacob married Leah and Rachel, and working many years for their father, they left and traveled back to Canaan. To Jacob was born twelve sons, and his own name was changed, by God, to Israel (read Gen. 35). Thus, his descendants would be called the “children of Israel,” and his sons would be the father’s of the “tribes” of Israel.

Discussion

1. What prophecy was made about the children in Rebekah’s womb? Why is it important to the Bible story?
2. Why was he named Jacob? Why was his name later changed to Israel by God?
3. What was the vision Jacob had when God reaffirmed the promises to him?
4. Why was Jacob so afraid of Esau before they met again? How did they respond to each other?
5. What other event happened in Jacob’s life to cause him to say, “I have seen God face to face.” Why was this event significant?

Joseph: Genesis 37–50

Of his twelve sons, Jacob’s favorite was Joseph, the first one born to Rachel, the wife he loved. Joseph was a remarkable young man, and a fine example to all who desire to live godly. He demonstrated great faithfulness to God in very difficult circumstances (Genesis 37–50).

Because he was his father’s favorite, Joseph was not liked by his brothers. To make matters worse, Joseph told his brothers of dreams he had, indicating that they would bow down to him. One day when Joseph came out to the field to check on his brothers, they plotted to destroy him. At first, they wanted to kill him, but decided rather to throw him in a pit. When some traders came through, his brothers sold him to them, and they took him down to Egypt where he would become a servant.

God was with Joseph, and everything he did prospered. He rose to a high position in the household of Potiphar, a captain in the Egyptian army. When he was thrown in jail under false accusations, he became a supervisor under the chief jailer. After a time, the cupbearer and baker for the Pharaoh were thrown in jail, and Joseph was able to interpret dreams that they had. Because of this, after a couple more years, he was given an opportunity to interpret a dream for Pharaoh himself. In this, he foretold of a famine that would come. So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of storing up enough food to take care of the period of famine.

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These events led to Joseph's brothers coming down to Egypt, and even bowing down to him. Eventually, Joseph's family was all moved down to Egypt where they would grow into a great nation of people over many years. All of this was made possible because of the work of Joseph.

Discussion

1. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him so much?
2. Why did Joseph prosper so much even under hard circumstances? Give examples of how he prospered.
3. How did Joseph respond to temptation?
4. How did Joseph feel toward his brothers after seeing them again? What did he say to them?
5. In what ways is Joseph an example for young and old?

Moses is Born: Exodus 1-2

After Joseph died, the children of Israel continued to grow into a large nation while in Egypt. Many years went by. The Pharaohs of Egypt began to dislike the Israelites, and they turned the children of Israel into slaves. Because the Egyptians feared the Israelites so much, they afflicted the Israelites with hard labor and made them build cities. Then one of Pharaohs issued a command to have all of the male children born to the Israelites put to death when they were born (Exodus 1).

One woman had a son and hid him for three months. Then she made a basket, put the boy in it, and set it among reeds on the banks of the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter found him and took pity on him. The child's sister had been watching, and offered to get a nurse for the baby. Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and the child's own mother became his nurse.

As the child grew, he became as a son to the daughter of the Pharaoh. Because of this, he would become learned in the ways of the Egyptians, but because his own mother nursed him, he would also be aware of the fact that he was a Hebrew.

Because Pharaoh's daughter had taken the baby from the water, she named him Moses. Little did she know that Moses would grow up to be the leader of the Israelites when they left Egypt. All of this was made possible because of the faith of his parents (Heb. 11:23).

Discussion

1. Why was Pharaoh so afraid of the children of Israel?

2. What two things did Pharaoh do to try to retain control of the children of Israel? Did they work?
3. How did the midwives respond to the command of Pharaoh to put to death the male babies.
4. How did Moses' parents react to the Pharaoh's command? What lessons does this teach about following the commands of men when they conflict with God's?
5. What circumstances allowed for Moses' own mother to become his nurse? Why is this significant?

God Calls Moses: Exodus 3-4

Moses grew up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but he was also aware of the fact that he was Hebrew. One day as Moses was out checking on the Hebrews, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so he struck down the Egyptian. The next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting, and he tried to make peace between them. Their answer indicated to Moses that his killing of the Egyptian was known, so he fled to Midian, where he would stay for several years, marry, and have children.

While Moses was pasturing flocks, the angel of the Lord appeared to him from a burning bush (Exodus 3). God revealed that Moses had been chosen to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Though Moses was reluctant, God assured Moses that He would be with him. Moses was still unsure, and even offered some "reasons" as to why he was not the one to do it. God showed Moses how He would be with him, and even gave Moses his brother Aaron to help him speak to Pharaoh and the people. Finally, Moses did what the Lord wanted him to do, and went back down to Egypt.

They came to the Hebrews and convinced them that God was concerned about them, and they worshiped God. Then they went to Pharaoh to tell him that God wanted him to let the children of Israel go.

Discussion

1. Why did Moses flee to Midian? What was he afraid of?
2. What did the Hebrew say to Moses to make him afraid?
3. In what way did God appear to Moses?
4. How did Moses respond to God when told that he was chosen to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt? Did this make God very happy?

5. Who was Moses to tell the children that God was? What was His name? What is the significance of this?

6. Who was to help Moses lead the children of Israel? What was the first sign given to show that God was with Moses?

Moses and Pharaoh: Exodus 5–12

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh to tell him to let God's people go. Pharaoh responded, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go" (Exod. 5:2). Because Pharaoh had a hard heart, a series of ten plagues were unleashed on Egypt to show God's power and superiority over the false gods of the Egyptians (see Exod. 12:12).

After Moses initially came to Pharaoh, Pharaoh increased the labor of the Hebrews. God reassured Moses that Israel would be delivered "with an outstretched arm and with great judgments" (Exod. 6:6). At first, Pharaoh appeared unconcerned, but the plagues began to wear on him. Pharaoh would agree to let the people go if the plague was removed, but then he would change his mind and make them stay after the plague was gone. His heart was getting harder.

The last plague brought Pharaoh down. He had hardened his heart against the Lord, but this time, his own firstborn son would be taken from him, and he would drive the people out of the land.

With each of the plagues, the children of Israel were unaffected. They did not suffer with the Egyptians. In the case of the death of the firstborn, God made provision for them, and instituted the feast of the Passover to remember the occasion. They were to take blood and put it on their doorposts so that their houses would be passed over during the plague. Then they were to hurriedly eat and be prepared to leave the land.

Discussion

1. Why was Pharaoh unwilling to listen to Moses and Aaron?
2. What effect did the plagues have on Pharaoh?
3. What does it mean when it says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened? God said that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. What does this mean? How did He do this?
4. How was God's power shown in the plagues as related to the gods of Egypt?
5. Discuss the significance of the Passover feast. What is it? Why was it important? How does it foreshadow Christ?

The Exodus: Exodus 14–15

When the last plague was brought on Egypt, the children of Israel had put blood on their doorposts, and the feast of the Passover was inaugurated. Then the children of Israel were led out to the Red sea, which they would cross and eventually they would go to the Sinai peninsula. God indicated His presence among them by going before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 14–15).

However, Pharaoh had a change of heart once again. He had driven them out, but then decided that he wanted Israel back to be Egypt's slaves again. So he gathered his army and chased after the Israelites.

This frightened the Israelites, whose back was now to the Red Sea. They began complaining about this, indicating a desire to go back to Egypt so that they would not die in the wilderness. Moses told the people not to fear, for God would save them. Moses was told to lift up his staff and stretch it out over the sea, and the sea would divide so that they could walk through on dry ground. The waters became like a wall on each side, and the people walked through unharmed.

The Egyptians decided to pursue Israel through the sea. As they went between the waters, the walls collapsed on them and destroyed the army. Israel saw God's great power that day and feared Him.

From there, they traveled down to the Sinai Peninsula, where they would receive the Law. God continued His care for them, though they often complained. However, God's mighty works were sufficient to show them, and all generations since, how powerful God is, and how much He loves His people.

Discussion

1. Whose bones did Israel take out of Egypt? Why?
2. Why did the people complain at the Red Sea? What lessons can be learned from this?
3. What did the Egyptians realize as they went into the sea?
4. How did the people think about God and Moses after they saw these events?
5. What can we learn about the power and care of God from these events? What parallels are there to our own salvation?

Mt. Sinai: Exodus 19–20

After crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel made their way to the Sinai

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peninsula, and finally to Mt. Sinai. This is where God would make His covenant with the children of Israel. “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The people responded by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:4–6).

The people stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and it was in smoke, and the it quaked violently. God answered with thunder, and the people were very frightened. Moses went up on top of the mountain in order to receive the commandments. These ten commandments were engraved in stone, written by the finger of God. These would serve as the foundation for the covenant that God had with the children of Israel.

Moses was on the mountain for forty days. The people started to become impatient, and demanded that an idol be made as a representation of God. Even Aaron aided the people in their sin. When Moses came down the mountain and saw what was happening, he broke the tablets with the commandments, took the golden calf they had made, burned it, ground it to powder, scattered over water and made the children of Israel drink it.

Moses pled with God not to destroy the people. God would not do so, but said they would be punished. The tablets of the ten commandments were replaced, and Moses continued to speak for the Lord to the people.

Discussion

1. Discuss the importance of Exodus 19:4–6. How does this compare to the New Covenant?
2. Discuss the ten commandments themselves. How do they fit into the greatest commands to love God and to love neighbor? (read Matt. 22:35–40)
3. Which of the ten commandments is not repeated in the New Testament?
4. What value is there in studying the ten commandments?
5. Why did God determine to punish the people?

The Tabernacle: Exodus 35–40

As part of the covenant that God made with the children of Israel, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle (literally “dwelling place”) was to be God’s “dwelling place” among the people as they wandered in the wilderness (Exodus 35–40). It was essentially a portable “tent,” made out of materials gathered from the people.

The significance of the tabernacle was that it indicated God's presence on earth among the children of Israel. It was to be erected in the middle of the camp, so all the people be aware of it. "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." When the cloud was taken up from over it, the people were to pick up camp and move on. The cloud was seen during the day, and fire was seen in it at night.

The tabernacle was to be built according to an exact pattern that God had revealed. They were not to deviate in any way. "See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain" (Exod. 25:40). This is quoted in Hebrews, and shows the importance of doing God's work in God's own way. It also serves as a shadow, along with the priesthood, to the heavenly things revealed in the New Testament (Heb. 8:5)

Further, the tabernacle was built entirely out of materials that the people willingly contributed. The workers who made it did so because of their own skill and understanding. It is a testimony to the kind of work that can be accomplished when people work together, do it willingly, and do it to the best of their abilities. Surely this is a lesson for us to learn today.

Discussion

1. How did the tabernacle show God's presence among the people? Discuss the importance of this.
2. Why was it important that it be built according to an exact pattern? What relevance might this have today for disciples?
3. Why is it significant that it was built entirely out of contributed materials from willing people? Discuss lessons that might be learned from that.
4. How is the tabernacle a shadow of heavenly things? Read Hebrews 8:1-6 and discuss.

The Priesthood: Leviticus 8-10

In establishing the Israelites as His people, God ordered that there be a priesthood established from the house of Aaron. Though one must have been a Levite to be a priest, not all Levites were priests. However, the Levites were given special duties relating to the work of God, particularly in the tabernacle.

The idea of the "priesthood" was that these special servants could "draw near" to God for the people (Exod. 19:22; 30:20). They were to tend to the work of God, offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people, and direct the people's attention to the Law. Thus, the priesthood was given by God to maintain a fellowship between

the Holy God and the sinful nation. They brought the gifts and sacrifices of the people to God, and they conveyed God's gifts and blessings to the nation (Leviticus 8–10).

Moses gives a good overview of the idea of the priesthood in Numbers 16:5, when dealing with the rebellion of Korah. First, they were chosen by God to be His servants. Second, the primary qualification was that they were to be holy; and third, their essential function was that they would draw near to God for the people. The High Priest was the the culminating point of the priesthood. Aaron was the first. Their requirements were very stringent.

The significance of the priesthood today is that it foreshadowed Jesus as the great High Priest, and all Christians as those who could draw near to God through Jesus (Hebrews 8:1–6; 10:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).

Discussion

1. What is the idea of a “priesthood”? How were they to carry out their function?
2. What were the primary qualifications of one who would be a priest?
3. Who was the first High Priest?
4. What was the work of the Levites?
5. What did the priesthood foreshadow? Why is this significant to us today?
6. Describe the New Testament priesthood.

Leviticus and Holiness

The giving of the Law began at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19–20). However, this was just the beginning. The specifics of God's requirements, both for priests and all the people, were revealed also. Leviticus contains many of these specifics regarding God's Law.

Perhaps the most significant passage of Leviticus is found in chapter 11, verses 44–45. It captures the essence of God's purposes in giving the Law: “For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy” (NASB).

God's intent for the people was that they be a holy nation. To be what God wanted, they had to keep the Law as He instructed them. However, it was not just a list of commandments God wanted them to keep. He wanted their hearts. He

wanted them to love Him as He loved them.

This point is expressed in the fact that they were to love God with all their hearts (Deut. 6:4–6). Jesus said that this was the greatest of the commandments, since everything else hinged on it (Matt. 22:34–40).

Today, God wants us to be holy, also (1 Pet. 1:13–16). We are a special people given spiritual blessings through Christ. By following the will of God, we, too, can be holy because of what the Lord has done on our behalf.

Discussion

1. What was God's purpose in giving the Law to the children of Israel?
2. What does it mean to be "holy"? Why is this such an important feature of the Law?
3. What did Jesus say was the greatest of the commandments? Why is this commandment greater than all the others?
4. How can we be holy today? On what basis can sinners become holy people?

Israel Complaining in the Wilderness: Numbers 2–14

God had brought the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery to bless them as His own special people. He spared them during the plagues, then He demonstrated His power time and again after bringing them out. He provided for them and protected them. One would think that people under God's provision and protection would be happy and satisfied; but the children of Israel were not.

From the time they left Egypt they began complaining about their conditions (Numbers 2–14). Even after witnessing first-hand the mighty works of God, such as the parting of the Sea and the wonders at Mt. Sinai, they still murmured about their situation, sometimes even expressing a desire to go back to the labor in Egypt. When they complained like that, they were really showing that they did not appreciate all that God was doing for them. They were not thankful for God's provision and protection (e.g., water, manna, quail).

Their complaining also showed that they did not have faith in God. All of this murmuring and fussing would not go unpunished. Ultimately, it would keep that generation from entering into the promised land. God was not pleased with their behavior.

In the New Testament, Christians are warned not to be like the children of Israel in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1–12; Hebrews 3–4). "Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer." We are to show gratitude to

God for what He has done for us. Murmuring shows just the opposite.

Discussion

1. What were some of the complaints that the people had after they left Egypt?
2. How did God feel about the grumbling? How about Moses?
3. In what ways did God protect and provide for His people? Give examples.
4. Why is it so important that we don't complain about things today? What does complaining indicate about a person?
5. How can we avoid acting like the Israelites when they murmured?

The Twelve Spies: Numbers 13–14

The children of Israel had now come out of Egypt and received the Law. They continued their journey north toward Canaan and came to Kadesh–Barnea. From here twelve men were sent up to Canaan to spy out the land, one from each of the tribes (Numbers 13–14). The two most notable of these men were Caleb (from Judah) and Joshua (from Ephraim).

The men went to the land and saw how beautiful it was. When they returned, they reported that it was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. However, ten of these men continued with a bad report. They reported that the people in the land were strong, the cities large and fortified, and the descendants of Anak (men of great size) were there. They argued that they were not able to go up against the people, and that they were like grasshoppers compared to those in the land.

Caleb and Joshua disagreed. They argued that they could go up and take the land. They believed they would overcome the people because God was with them. The people would not listen.

This event was the final straw for this generation. Because they failed in their faith toward God, they would have to wander in the wilderness for the 40 years, waiting for that generation to die. Of this generation (over 20 years old), only Joshua and Caleb would go into the promised land. This shows how devastating it can be to disbelieve God. They failed at this time because of their lack of faith.

Discussion

1. About how long had it been since Israel left Egypt when the spies were sent to Canaan? If they had faith, could they have possessed the land at this time?
2. Why did they not believe that they could enter the land? What was their main

problem?

3. Look at the statements made by Caleb. What reasons did he give for going into the land at this time? Was he right?
4. How did the people respond to Joshua and Caleb?
5. Discuss the punishment given to Israel for their faithlessness. Who would enter the land?

Korah's Rebellion: Numbers 16

Korah was a Levite who had a desire to be a priest. He thought that Moses and Aaron had gone too far and exalted themselves above everyone else. So he gathered 250 leaders together against Moses and Aaron and rebelled.

Moses was distraught over this, and told Korah that God would show whom He had chosen. They gathered with firepans for incense outside of the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord appeared.

God told the people to get away from the dwellings of the rebellious men. Moses then told the people that if these men died like ordinary men, then God had not sent him; but if the ground opened up and swallowed them, then the rebels had spurned the Lord. Just as finished saying this, the ground opened up and the families of the rebellious men were swallowed up, and fire came down from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.

This event demonstrated that God had chosen Aaron and his family for the priesthood. Korah and the rest of those who were with him had rebelled, not against Moses and Aaron, but ultimately against God who had chosen and sent them. Moses recognized this when he said that Korah and his company were "gathered together against the Lord."

This teaches us that rebellion against God's order of things is a direct rebellion against God Himself. Further, it is a very serious offense to spurn that which God has given. Korah and those with him learned this the hard way. Today, we must pay attention and keep from following that path.

Discussion

1. Who was Korah and what did he want?
2. What was the complaint that was given against Moses and Aaron?
3. How was it to be shown whom God had chosen?

4. What was the punishment for their rebellion? Why was it so severe?
5. What lessons can we learn today from considering this incident?

Aaron, The High Priest: Numbers 17–18

Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first High Priest of Israel. He worked together with Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity. However, he did not himself enter the land of promise because he had shared in the sins of Moses at Meribah (Numbers 20).

Not only was Aaron the first High Priest, but his descendants were to be the priests. They were from the tribe of Levi. After the erection of the Tabernacle according to the exact instructions of God, Aaron and his sons were consecrated to their priesthood.

Of course, they were not perfect. Aaron himself sinned, when Moses was receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai, by helping the children of Israel make a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32). And his sons, Nadab and Abihu, died because they engaged in activities that were unauthorized by God (Leviticus 10:1–2). So they had their problems to overcome.

Aaron's priesthood was challenged by Korah, also of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 16). However, God made it clear that it was Aaron whom He had chosen, and no one had a right to challenge God's order of establishment. As an added affirmation of Aaron, God had leaders of each tribe get a rod on which their names were to be written. The rods were then put in the Tabernacle, and the one which sprouted would indicate whom God had chosen. The next day, Aaron's rod had sprouted, producing blossoms and almonds. God showed once and for all whom He had chosen for the priesthood.

Shortly after the Meribah incident, Aaron died on Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom. His priestly garments were taken and given to his son Eleazar, the next High Priest; and the children of Israel wept for 30 days.

Discussion

1. Discuss the role of the High Priest. Why did he have to dress in a certain way? What was his purpose?
2. How did God demonstrate that Aaron and his sons were chosen for the priesthood? Could this be changed?
3. Why was Aaron not allowed to enter the promised land?
4. Discuss the office of High Priest as a type of Jesus Christ. How does it

foreshadow Christ? What is Jesus' role as our High Priest?

Moses Sins: Numbers 20

Though Moses was a man of faith, he was not flawless. This is seen in the fact that he sinned himself. In particular, Numbers 20 records a sin that he commits which would end up costing both him and Aaron the opportunity to enter the promised land.

Once again, the people were murmuring about their conditions, fussing that there was no water for them to drink. They complained that they would have been better off to die earlier, and asked why they were brought out there to die. Moses and Aaron went before the Lord, falling on their faces. God told them to take a rod, assemble the congregation, and speak to the rock so it would yield water. Moses took the rod and said, "Listen, now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then he struck the rock twice, and water came out.

Though it yielded water for the people, Moses had sinned in the way he went about it. God told Moses and Aaron that they had failed to believe Him, and did not treat Him as holy before the assembly. How so? Notice that God told Moses to speak to the rock, and Moses struck it. He failed to do exactly what God had said.

The consequences of his actions were that he could not bring the children of Israel into the promised land himself. This demonstrated how serious his offense was.

One lesson this account teaches is that no one can sin against God without punishment. Even those who are so highly regarded do not have a right to dishonor God. Failure to do what God says means that we fail to believe Him, and we fail to treat Him as holy. We would always do well to keep this in mind.

Discussion

1. What exactly did Moses do that was sinful?
2. Discuss the nature of sin in this context: how does sin show a failure to believe God? How does it fail to treat Him as holy?
3. What were the consequences of this sin? Why was it so severe?
4. Discuss lessons we may learn from the sin of Moses, and the consequences God issued. Is anyone immune from sin and its consequences?

The Bronze Serpent: Numbers 21

Family Devotionals

As the Israelites journeyed toward the promised land, they were going around the land of Edom. The people once again began to complain about food and water, saying that they loathed the “miserable food.” In response, the Lord sent “fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died” (Numbers 21:6).

The people confessed that they had sinned by speaking against the Lord, asking Moses to intercede for them so that God would remove the serpents. Moses did so. The Lord told him to make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard. Whoever was bitten could then look at it and live. So Moses made one of bronze and set it up.

This event teaches some important lessons. The people had once again lost sight of God’s provision and protection for them. When circumstances are not what we might desire, we cannot afford to lose focus upon God and what He has provided for us. Further, God will not tolerate such lack of gratitude. Sin brings punishment and consequences. But God is also merciful. He provided for them a way to avoid death.

Jesus referred to this incident and compared it to His own death on the cross (John 3:14–15). As the serpent was lifted up among the people, so Jesus was lifted up. And as the people had to look to the brass serpent to save their lives, so we must look to the lifted up Savior for our salvation. Through Jesus, God has provided life and all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Discussion

1. Why were the people complaining this time? Again, what does complaining demonstrate?
2. What does the punishment of the serpents indicate about how they think of such rebellion?
3. What role does Moses play in this incident?
4. How is God’s mercy shown?
5. Compare the lifting up of the serpent with the death of Jesus. How are they alike? Then compare how their lives were saved with how we are saved today.

Balaam and Balak: Numbers 22

As the children of Israel camped in the plains of Moab, the people of Moab were very afraid of them. Balak, the king of Moab sent messengers to Balaam, a gentile prophet, asking him to come and curse the Israelites (Numbers 22). Balaam sought God’s will to see if he should go; God told him not to go, for these were a

blessed people. However, Balak sent for Balaam again, with a better offer for his service. Balaam asked God again, apparently determined to go with them. God told him to go and speak only what He put Balaam's mouth.

This angered the Lord, who knew Balaam's heart. The angel of the Lord stood in Balaam's path, causing the donkey on which he was riding to turn aside. Balaam struck the donkey for this. Again the angel stood in the path, and the donkey finally laid down. Balaam struck the donkey again, and the Lord opened the donkey's mouth to ask why Balaam was striking her. Finally, Balaam's eyes were opened to see the angel, and he confessed his sin. Then Balaam continued to go with Balak's messengers.

Balak met Balaam on the border of Moab, asking why Balaam did not come at first. Balaam replied that he would only be able to speak what God put into his mouth. As the story unfolds, we see that Balaam is unable to place a curse on the children of Israel.

It can be a bit confusing to understand why God told Balaam to go with Balak's men, only to get angry at Balaam for going. Perhaps the answer lies in Balaam's heart. Remember that God had already given Balaam an answer not to go. Perhaps Balaam coming back to God after that indicated that he was determined to go after all, in which case God told him to go. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that Balaam's heart betrayed his true intentions.

Discussion

1. Who was Balaam? Was he an Israelite? Does the fact that he was a gentile prophet say anything about God's dealings with other nations? What?
2. Why did Balak want Balaam to curse Israel? What were the Moabites afraid of?
3. Why was the Lord angry with Balaam for going, especially after He told him to go? Why did the Lord open the mouth of the donkey?

Balaam Blesses Israel: Numbers 23–24

Balaam, the gentile prophet, was called upon by Balak to pronounce curses upon the children of Israel. Though God was at first displeased with Balaam, He allowed Balaam to go to Balak on the grounds that he was say only what God put in his mouth. Instead of curses upon the children of Israel, God would have Balaam pronounce blessings upon them (Numbers 23–24).

Balak built altars as Balaam told him to. Then, as Balaam prophesied, he spoke of Israel as a nation that "will not be reckoned among the nations." It was a blessing. Balak called Balaam's attention to this, to which Balaam replied that he could only speak what God told him to. They went to another place where Balak wanted

Israel cursed. Once again, Balaam pronounced a blessing. Balak tried one more time, but to no avail. Balaam blessed Israel again. Balak was angry at Balaam, telling him that he would not be honored as had been agreed upon.

Balaam prophesied again, but this time it was an oracle against Moab, Edom., and Amalek, among others. Moab would be crushed, Edom. would become a possession, and Amalek's end would be destruction. These nations were all the enemies of Israel, and since God was providing for and protecting Israel, her enemies would suffer the consequences.

God's plans cannot be thwarted. No matter who it is, or how much one has, no one can ultimately stand against what God has done or will do. As Balaam spoke in one of his oracles: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19)

Discussion

1. Review why Balak wanted the children of Israel cursed.
2. Discuss the blessings that Balaam pronounced on Israel (23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9). What do they say about God's people?
3. Why is it not possible to thwart God's plans? What do these prophecies say about God?
4. Discuss the curses put on the enemies of God's people (24:15–24). As a project, try to locate these places on a Bible map.

Israel and Idolatry: Numbers 25–26

As Israel was located on the borders of Moab, the people began to "play the harlot with the daughters of Moab" (Numbers 25–26) They offered sacrifices and bowed down to the gods of Moab (Baal). Because of this God had the leaders who engaged in this slain out in the open.

While the people wept over this at the tabernacle, one of the Israelites brought a Midianite woman to his brothers, in the sight of the people. Phinehas, a priest of Aaron's family, saw this, and took a spear and went after them. He pierced the man and woman through both of their bodies, and "the plague on the sons of Israel was checked." 24,000 died because of the sins of the people on this occasion.

Idolatry (and all that is associated with it) is the one problem that the children of Israel allowed to plague them through their history until the time of captivity. After they entered the promised land, they did not completely drive out the

idolatrous people around them, and so it became a terrible thorn in their side. They should have learned their lessons early on from Egypt and here with Moab. But the following generations would still “play the harlot” with the false gods of other nations.

Though most of us would not think of literally bowing down to some idolatrous image, it is still possible that we can be guilty of idolatry. You see, idolatry is practiced in principle when one puts other things before God. The apostle Paul calls “greed” or covetousness idolatry (Colossians 3:5). If we desire something else above God, then we are guilty. Thus, the warning to flee from idolatry is very appropriate for all times (1 John 5:21).

Discussion

1. What does it mean when it says that Israel “played the harlot”? Why is that an appropriate figure for what they did?
2. Locate Moab and Midian on your maps. How were the two nations related? Why are they mentioned in the same context in Numbers?
3. Who was Phinehas? How did he help remove the plague from Israel?
4. Define and discuss idolatry. In what forms is it practiced? How can we be guilty of it today?

Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy is a restatement of the Law to a new generation of Israelites who were about to enter the promised land. The Hebrew name for the book literally means “These are the words.” In Jewish tradition, it is called Mishneh Torah, which means “repetition” or “copy of the law.” It is written in ancient treaty or covenant form. It restates the basic commandments given through Moses, and warns the new generation of Israelites not to depart from the precepts given to them by God. Blessings are pronounced upon them if they carefully follow God’s commandments; curses await them if they turn from following the commandments (ch. 28).

To ensure that the Law would be kept through each generation following, they were to teach the commandments of God diligently to their children (4:9; 6:4–9). Had they been diligent to do this, the history of the nation might have turned out much differently. But ultimately, they were not “careful to do” all that God had commanded.

Moses’ final address to the children of Israel before his death, and before they crossed the Jordan, is filled exhortation. “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you.

He will not fail you or forsake you” (31:6). He gave orders for the Law to be read by the priests to all the people “at the end of every seven years.” This would ensure that every generation would hear the Law. There would be no excuse for any of the children of Israel to be ignorant of the commandments of God. How sad that years later, God’s people would be destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6), and for going after other gods (31:16–18).

Discussion

1. What is the book of Deuteronomy? Why was it important to Israel?
2. What did Moses say that parents should diligently do? How can parents learn from this today?
3. Read chapter 28 and discuss the blessings and cursings. What were they? How could they avoid God’s judgment?
4. What lessons can Christians learn from Deuteronomy? Why is this book significant to us today?

Death of Moses: Deuteronomy 34

God had already determined that Moses would not enter the promised land, due to his sin in Numbers 20. So Moses knew that his earthly time was nearly up as he repeated elements of the Law to the new generation of Israelites before they entered. Though he still had vigor and strength, he knew he could go no further.

Moses was indeed unique in his time. There was “no prophet ... like Moses.” He did prophesy, however, about another prophet like himself (ch. 18). This was fulfilled in Jesus. Moses provided the spiritual leadership necessary to carry out the task he was asked to perform. He would be sorely missed by Israel.

Before Moses died, he was allowed to see the promised land from Mount Nebo east of the Jordan (Deuteronomy 34). God told him that “this is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes but you shall not go over there” (34:4). Moses died there in the land of Moab, and God Himself took care of the burial. The children of Israel wept for thirty days over Moses’ death.

Joshua was the one chosen to replace Moses and actually lead the children of Israel into the promised land. He was “filled with the spirit of wisdom,” and the Israelites “listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses” (34:9). It was a monumental task to take over where Moses left off, but Joshua could do it because of his own relationship with God.

Moses was dead. Now it was time for the Israelites to cross over to the land which

God had promised. After 40 years in the wilderness, this generation would see the land promise fulfilled.

Discussion

1. What kind of character and faith did Moses show during his life? How old was he when he died?
2. Who is the Prophet like Moses (ch. 18)? How are He and Moses alike? Who is the superior prophet, and why?
3. How much of the land was Moses allowed to see? Recall again why he could not enter it.
4. Who was chosen to lead after Moses? What kind of man was he?

Joshua, Rahab, and the Spies: Joshua 1–2

Moses was gone and Joshua was left as the capable leader of the Israelites. They stood at the threshold of the promised land after being 40 years in the wilderness. It was now time for them to enter and conquer the land (Joshua 1–2).

God spoke to Joshua to encourage the people not to be afraid. God would be with them as long as they kept His law before them at all times. Joshua commanded the people to prepare themselves what they were about to do. The people promised that they would obey Joshua since the Lord was with him.

Joshua then sent two men as spies into Jericho where they could view the land. They lodged with a woman named Rahab. The king of Jericho heard about this, so he told Rahab to bring the men out. Rahab had hidden them, however, and told the men looking for them that the spies were already gone. After, she went to the roof where the spies were, and told them that she knew that God had given them the land. The people were afraid because they had heard about the mighty acts of God. Then Rahab requested that she and family would be spared when the Israelites came to take the land. The spies were let down the city wall on a rope. They escaped and made it back their own camp. Joshua responded by saying, “surely the Lord has given us all the land into hands.”

Though Rahab did not know much about Yahweh, she showed faith in His ability to overtake other nations. She and her family were spared when the Israelites marched around the city and the walls fell. God’s power and protection is seen.

Discussion

1. Why did God have to tell Joshua that Moses was dead? What was the point?
2. How much territory did God promise?

3. What did God tell Joshua about His relationship with them? Were there any conditions? If so, what were they?
4. Why were the spies sent to Jericho?
5. Who was Rahab? Why is she so important to the account?
6. How did Rahab help the spies escape? What was she promised in return?

Crossing the Jordan: Joshua 3–4

After God talked with Joshua, the children of Israel set out to enter the land. They came to the Jordan River and lodged there before crossing. The people were then told that when they saw the ark of the covenant, they were to follow it at a distance.

The instructions were given that “when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap.”

That is exactly what happened. When the priests stepped into the edge of the waters, the water dried up and the people walked across the Jordan on dry ground. Once again, God’s power was displayed to His people.

Joshua was told to select twelve men, one from each tribe, to pick up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan. These stones were to be set up as a memorial to this occasion, “so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”

When the priests came up from the Jordan, the waters “went all over its banks as before.” The people set up camp at Gilgal, just east of Jericho, and the stones were set up there (another group of stones was set up in the Jordan where the priests had stood). God’s power would be remembered so that they would continue to fear Him.

Discussion

1. Why were the children of Israel to keep at a certain distance from the ark of the covenant?
2. At what point would the waters part? When did they return to their original

3. Why were they told to take up twelve stones? How many piles of stones were there? Where were they set up?
4. Discuss the purpose of the memorial. Read especially 4:6–7, and 21–24. What can we learn from all of this?

Jericho: Joshua 4–6

Upon hearing that the children of Israel crossed the Jordan, the people of the land were disheartened. They knew they could not stand up to the God of Israel. The first place the Israelites would take was the city of Jericho.

Before taking Jericho, Joshua was confronted by a “man” standing with a drawn sword. Joshua asked, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” This was the “captain of the host of the LORD,” who told Joshua to remove his sandals. Then God told Joshua that He had given Jericho into their hands on the condition that they march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests were to carry trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day the people were march around the city seven times. Then the priests would blow the trumpets, and all the people would shout. When they did this, the walls of the city would fall, and the Israelites could go in and take the city.

Israel followed God’s instructions exactly, under Joshua’s leadership. They were further instructed that they were to take nothing from the city as spoil, and that they were to spare Rahab and her family because of what she had done for the spies. They all did what God said, the priests blew the horns, they shouted, and the walls fell flat, “so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.”

This took faith for them to act as they did. One can only imagine what the people of Jericho were thinking, but God’s way worked just as He planned. These are great lessons even for us today who are trying to please God.

Discussion

1. Why were the hearts of the people in Canaan melting?
2. What feast did the Israelites observe while they were camped at Gilgal? What food ceased on that day?
3. Who appeared to Joshua? What was the message?
4. Be able to tell what the Israelites had to do in order to conquer Jericho. How did it go with faith? What can we learn from the account regarding our faith

5. What were they told that they could not do in Jericho? Why is this significant?

Achan: Joshua 7–8

The Israelites had been sternly warned that there was to be nothing taken from Jericho for personal gain. The city was under a “ban,” and all was devoted to the Lord. If one violated this, he would be “accursed and bring trouble” on the nation. That was clear enough.

Achan must have thought he could get away with it (Joshua 7–8). He took some things that were under the ban, and “therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel.” This was not known, though, until they tried to attack the city of Ai.

About three thousand men went to the city of Ai to attack it. However, “they fled from the men of Ai.” Israelites were being killed, and “the hearts of the people melted and became as water.” Obviously, God was not fighting for them on that occasion. But why? That’s what Joshua wondered.

God told Joshua that Israel had sinned. So in order to find the guilty person, they would have to go through a process specified by God (lots). They eventually found that it was Achan, so he confessed that he had sinned. He and his family were stoned to death.

We may learn from this that sin is serious business. We cannot disregard what God teaches and expect to go unpunished. Sin is an attack on the character of God Himself. We must not take that lightly.

With the sin out of the camp, Israel could go back into battle with God on their side. After defeating Ai, Joshua built an altar. The people stood, half in front of Mt. Gerizim, the other half in front of Mt. Ebal, and the blessings and cursings of the Law were read to the people.

Discussion

1. What was the warning given to the children of Israel about Jericho? Who violated it? What was his punishment?
2. What lessons can we learn about sin from this? Why is it such a problem according to God?
3. After the sin was exposed and dealt with, what were the people able to do? How did they accomplish it?

4. Read chapter 7:30–34 again along with Deuteronomy 28. Talk about the blessings and the cursings of the Law. Why is that such an important part of the Law of Moses?

The Gibeonites: Joshua 9–10

What Israel had done to Jericho and Ai was becoming well known to the people of Canaan. One of these, inhabitants of Gibeon, decided to try to trick the Israelites instead of fighting them. The Gibeonites dressed up and acted like envoys from a far country. They found Joshua at the camp in Gilgal and said, “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us” (Joshua 9–10).

The Israelites were not free to make a covenant with people in the land, and they were a bit skeptical. But the Gibeonites insisted, “We are your servants.” Their plan worked like they wanted.

The mistake that Israel made at this point was that they “did not ask for the counsel of the Lord” (9:14). So Joshua made peace with them, and a covenant to let them live. So the Gibeonites returned to their city.

A few days later, Israel came up against the city and found that the Gibeonites were indeed in the land. Because of their oath, they did not destroy Gibeon, but made them servants instead. Joshua was angry with their deception.

When other kings in the land heard of this, they tried to fight against Gibeon. Israel came to their aid and defeated the other armies. While the armies fled, Joshua spoke to God, asking that the sun would “stand still” to give them time to pursue the enemies. God granted this, and Israel destroyed their enemies. The reason why Israel was so effective is stated several times: “because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.” And even today, God fights for His people (Romans 8:31ff).

Discussion

1. Why did the Gibeonites want to make a covenant with Israel? What was this covenant?
2. What error did Israel commit? Why was it a problem for them to make a covenant with people in the land?
3. What did God assure Joshua of when Israel went to battle?
4. How did God aid in the fight against the enemy kings?
5. What notable miracle occurred during this battle?

6. What lessons may we learn from these chapters?

Division of Canaan: Joshua 11–17

The children of Israel entered the promised land and began conquering the people of the land, waging a “long time war” with all the kings. Eventually they conquered the “whole land,” and Joshua “gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes” (11:23). Then they had rest.

All the tribes would receive portions of land. Ephraim and Manasseh were descended from Joseph, and represented his double portion. The Levites would not receive a large portion of land, but were given 48 cities instead, 6 of them designated as “cities of refuge.”

Before crossing the Jordan, some of the land east of the Jordan was promised to those from the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh. The men from these tribes still had to cross the Jordan to help conquer the land, then they could return to their territories. The other nine tribes, and half tribe of Manasseh, were divided up throughout the land of Canaan west of the Jordan.

“Thus the sons of Israel did just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they divided the land” (14:5). As long as they would continue to follow God, He would protect them and keep them in the land. But if they turned away from God, they would suffer the consequences of eventually being expelled from their land. Under Joshua’s capable leadership, they came into the land, conquered it, and remained faithful to God. This generation experienced the blessings that God had promised through Moses.

Discussion

1. Which tribes received an inheritance east of the Jordan? Why were they told to cross the Jordan and fight even though they already had their land?
2. Why did the Levites not receive a portion of land like the rest of the tribes? What were they given instead?
3. What were the cities of refuge? What was their purpose?
4. Who were Ephraim and Manasseh?
5. How would the conquering and division of the land play a role in the development of God’s plan for the salvation of mankind?

The Land Promise Fulfilled: Joshua 18–24

God had promised to Abraham that his descendants would become a great

nation, that they would possess the land God had shown him, and that through his seed (Jesus) all the families of earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-7). While in Egypt, Abraham's descendants grew into a great nation. Their "defining moment" came when they departed from Egypt and received their own Law from God through Moses (cf. Exod. 19-20). However, before they would receive the land promise, they would spend 40 years in the wilderness.

Finally, under Joshua's leadership, they conquered the land of Canaan and divided it up according to their tribes as God had commanded. Before Moses died, he told the people that if they remained faithful to God, He would bless them "in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Deut. 28:8). Their blessings would be great. However, the warning was also given that if they did not continue to obey God, then they would lose the blessings God was offering, including the land. All they needed to do was listen to God.

As God promised through Moses, the land promise was finally fulfilled. So complete was the fulfillment, that it was written: "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Josh. 21:43-45; cf. 23:14).

Discussion

1. Name and discuss the promises given to Abraham. When were they each fulfilled? How do you know?
2. At what point is the land promise said to be fulfilled? How much of it was fulfilled?
3. What were the conditions for the Israelites to enter and maintain the land God gave to them?
4. Read Joshua 24 again. Discuss the significance of Joshua's conviction. What commands and warnings did he give to Israel? How long did the nation serve the Lord?

Ehud: Judges 3

Shortly after Joshua died, the people of Israel began following the gods of the pagan nations around them. God was displeased with this, so He would allow other nations to gain control over Israel for periods of time. After the people would repent and cry out to the Lord, He would provide a deliverer, or "judge," to save them out of their oppression. Then they would have peace. So the cycle

would continue, as recorded throughout the book of Judges.

One of the kings who gained control over Israel was Eglon, the king of Moab. He, along with the Ammonites and Amalekites, defeated Israel and made them serve him for eighteen years. Israel finally cried to God for help, and the Lord raised up Ehud as a deliverer.

Ehud, a left-handed man, made a double-edged sword and bound it on his right thigh under a cloak. He presented Israel's tribute to Eglon, then asked to see Eglon in private to deliver a secret message. Ehud met Eglon alone, drew his sword and thrust it into Eglon. Eglon was "very fat," and the sword was engulfed in Eglon's belly. Ehud left the room and locked the door. Eglon's servants waited outside the room for a while, but then became anxious and unlocked the door to find their king dead. Meanwhile, Ehud escaped.

When Ehud arrived at Seirah, he blew a trumpet and charged the Israelites to pursue the Moabites. "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years."

Discussion

1. Why did God allow Israel to fall into the hands of pagan nations around them?
2. What sins did the children of Israel commit? What was so wrong with it all?
3. What were the "judges" God raised up? Why did He raise them up?
4. After being severely distressed, what would the people generally do?
5. Who is Ehud? Who were the enemies at his time? How did he conquer them?

Deborah: Judges 4-5

After the death of Ehud, the children of Israel once again returned to their evil ways. Therefore, God "sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan." The commander of his army was named Sisera. Jabin oppressed the children of Israel for twenty years, so they cried out to God for help.

Apparently there weren't many strong men to lead Israel. A prophetess named Deborah would sit under in the hill country of Ephraim, and the children of Israel would go up to her for judgment. She sent for a man named Barak and told him that God had commanded them to go up to Mount Tabor to meet Sisera, and God would deliver Sisera and his army into the hands of Israel. Barak said he would go if she would go with him. Deborah told him she would go, but that he would not receive the honor for winning the battle, "for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman."

Sisera met Barak in battle, and “the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak.” Sisera fled on foot to the tent of a woman named Jael. She covered him with a rug and he fell asleep. Then she took a tent peg and drove it through his temple into the ground. He was sold into the hand of a woman.

Israel defeated her enemies that day, and the song of Deborah is recorded in Judges 5, giving praise to God for what He had accomplished among the people.

“Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; but let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.”

And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

Discussion

1. Since Deborah was a prophetess, what does that mean she had the ability to do?
2. Why would the people go to her for judgment?
3. Why was Barak not going to receive honor for defeating Sisera?
4. Who was Jael, and what was her role in this victory?
5. Who is given ultimate credit for defeating the enemies of the Israelites?

Gideon: Judges 6–8

Gideon was another deliverer, chosen by God to help Israel out of severe oppression by the Midianites. Israel’s crops were being destroyed, the land devastated, and they were forced into caves for refuge. God had let this happen because the people had been disobedient.

The angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, telling him that the LORD was with him. Gideon questioned this because of the conditions of Israel, but God told him that he would deliver the people. At God’s command, Gideon tore down the altar to Baal and built one to the LORD.

Gideon gathered an army together to fight against the Midianites. At first, God said there were too many; they might be tempted to think that they defeat Midian by their own power. Many went back home, but there still remained 10,000. God said this was also too many, so a test was prepared to pare the army down to 300.

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With these 300 men, Gideon soundly defeated the Midianites. The fact that there were so few in the army proved that it was by God's power that they were victorious. Because of Gideon's leadership in overcoming the Midianites, the people of Israel wanted him to become their ruler. Gideon declined, however, saying, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you" (8:23).

As long as Gideon lived, the people remained in the right path. But as soon as Gideon died, the people once again returned to their old pattern of sin, "playing the harlot" by following after false gods. Gideon had done so much good for Israel, but they "did not remember the LORD their God," nor did they "show kindness" to Gideon's family.

Discussion

1. Who were the Midianites? Locate where they came from on a map. How long did they oppress Israel? What did they do to Israel, and why did God allow it to happen?
2. Why did God not want Gideon's army to be very large? What test was given to trim the army down?
3. How did Gideon determine if it was God who was really speaking to him?
4. Why did Ephraim contend with Gideon?

Jephthah: Judges 10–12

After other judges, the children of Israel committed more evil, so God allowed the Philistines and Ammonites to oppress them. This lasted for about eighteen years. Finally, the Israelites cried out to God once again and put away their idols.

Jephthah had been an outcast because he was the son of a harlot. "Worthless fellows" had gathered themselves around him. But when the Ammonites came up against Israel again, the people of Gilead asked Jephthah to lead them in their fight. Jephthah was skeptical about this at first since they repudiated him before, but he finally agreed to lead them.

Before Jephthah went to battle the Ammonites, he made a vow to God: "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." Subsequently, he subdued the sons of Ammon.

His vow, however, would cause him much pain. When he returned to his house, his daughter was the first to come out and greet him. She was his only child. He

tore his clothes and told her of his vow. She responded by telling him to fulfill it as he had said. He sent her away for two months, and then he fulfilled his vow.

Though Jephthah was victorious over his enemies, this teaches a strong lesson about being careful what we promise. Rash vows will come back to sting. The next time you are thinking about making a vow, think of this.

Discussion

1. Who was Jephthah? Why was he an outcast?
2. What kind of people gathered around Jephthah?
3. Who oppressed Israel at this time? Why did the people want Jephthah to lead them? How did he initially respond to their request?
4. What was Jephthah's vow to God? Why would we call this "rash"?
5. Did Jephthah fulfill his vow? What was his daughter's attitude?

Samson: Judges 13 – 16

"Samson." The name gives us images of a long-haired strong man who would single-handedly defeat lions, thousands of men, carry large gates, and pull down giant pillars. And it should, because that's what Samson did.

Samson was dedicated from birth as a Nazarite (to be distinguished from Nazarene). God had chosen him to be a deliverer of Israel against the Philistines. The Spirit of God would stir him up with great strength to be able to defeat the enemies.

Samson had his problems, though. He was sidetracked by his love for women and his temper. At times he appeared somewhat out of control. And his weakness for women caused him to tell the secret of his strength.

Yet his feats were astounding. With his bare hands he tore up a lion. He caught 300 foxes, tied their tails together, attached torches to them and sent them through Philistine fields. With the jawbone of a donkey, he defeated a thousand men. He had amazing strength.

Delilah was his downfall. Through her persistence, she got Samson to tell her the secret of his strength. By cutting his hair, he would lose his strength. She turned him over to the Philistines, who took away his strength and put out his eyes. In the end, however, Samson defeated thousands of Philistines. He was brought before a crowd who wanted to mock him. He prayed for his strength to return, and used it to push down the pillars of the structure, killing more Philistines in

that act than all other times combined.

Discussion

1. What is a Nazarite? Who were Samson's parents? How did they find out about having their son?
2. What were some of Samson's weaknesses?
3. Discuss his amazing feats. What did he do? How could he do them?
4. Who was Delilah? How did she get Samson to divulge his secret? What were the consequences?
5. What was Samson's last great feat? What did it accomplish?

Ruth and Boaz

During the days of the judges, there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem went to Moab with his wife and sons. He died there. His wife was named Naomi. The two sons took Moabite women for wives, and one of these women was named Ruth. The sons also died.

Naomi decided to return to Judah, and told her daughters-in-law that they should return to their homes. One of them did, but Ruth was determined not to leave Naomi: "where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried..." So Ruth to Judah with Naomi.

Naomi had a wealthy kinsman named Boaz. Ruth asked permission of Naomi to go to the fields and glean among the grains. She came upon a field belonging to Boaz, who asked who the woman was. When he found out, he asked her to stay in his field because he favored her. He had heard about her loyalty to Naomi, so he let her glean from his fields without hindrance.

At Naomi's direction, Ruth found where Boaz slept. She went in and laid down at his feet. Boaz was impressed by her and told her that, as a close relative to Naomi, he would "redeem" her if no relative closer could. Boaz searched for the closest relative and told him that he could buy some land and redeem Ruth also, to raise up children. The relative could not do it, so Boaz was given the opportunity.

Boaz took Ruth to be his wife. They had a son named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the father of David. This Moabite woman who came back to Israel became a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

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Discussion

1. Where was Moab? Locate it on a map.
2. Who was Naomi? Who was Ruth? What did Ruth say to Naomi to show her loyalty to her?
3. Who was Boaz? How did he come to know about Ruth?
4. What did it mean for Boaz to “redeem” Ruth? What law or principle was this according to?
5. Who were the descendants of Boaz and Ruth?

Eli and Samuel: 1 Samuel 1–3

During the days of the judges, a woman named Hannah, wife of Elkanah, was unable to have children. She was distressed over this, and so she prayed to God about it. She made a vow to the Lord, promising that if God gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord. Meanwhile, Eli the priest was watching her, thinking she was drunk. But she told him that she had poured out her soul before God.

God listened to Hannah and gave her a son, who was called Samuel. She, in turn, kept her vow and gave him back to the Lord, bringing him to Eli. She praised God for what He had done for her.

As a boy, Samuel ministered before the Lord. He would wear a linen ephod that his mother made for him every year. During these days, visions were infrequent. One night, God called Samuel. But Samuel thought it was Eli calling, so he ran to see what Eli wanted. This happened three times, and Eli figured out that it was God. He told Samuel how to answer. So when God called again, Samuel responded, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

God told Samuel what was going to happen to Eli and his house because of Eli’s wicked sons. Samuel did not want to tell all of this to Eli, but Eli insisted that Samuel not hide anything from him. So Samuel told Eli what God said, to which Eli responded, “It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him.”

So Samuel grew up serving the Lord. Everyone in Israel came to know that Samuel was a prophet of God. They knew that Samuel spoke the word of God to them; and so he would become the last judge of Israel.

Discussion

1. Who was Elkanah? Who was Hannah? Why was Hannah distressed?

2. What vow did Hannah make before God? Did God hear her prayer? Did she fulfill her vow? What did Eli think of Hannah at first?
3. Why was God going to bring judgment on Eli's household?
4. What was Samuel's relationship to Eli? How did Samuel respond when God called him?

Samuel and Saul: 1 Samuel 8-12

Samuel served as Israel's last judge. The people recognized that Samuel was getting old, and they were concerned about a future leader. They did not trust his sons, so they demanded that a king be appointed. Samuel was displeased about this, and he prayed to God. The Lord told Samuel to listen to the people, for it was not Samuel that they had rejected, but God Himself as their king. God would grant them a king, but Samuel was to warn the people of the problems that would come as a result.

The first king to be chosen was Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a "choice and handsome man," and he was "taller than any of the people." So he seemed to be the perfect choice for a king. At first, Saul appeared to be a humble man, intent on doing what was right. This was going to quickly change, however. Because of the sins that Saul committed, his dynasty was not going to be established.

Israel was thrilled to have a king. On the day they made Saul king, they offered up sacrifices of peace offerings to God and they all "rejoiced greatly." To the children of Israel, it seemed like a great day.

Samuel addressed the people again, making it clear that he had walked uprightly with God and before the people. He then reminded them of their past, how God had brought them out of Egypt and settled them in the land. But they had forgotten God, so He allowed them to be punished. Samuel reminded them that they needed to be faithful to God if they will continue to prosper, especially now that they had a king. If they did not abandon God any more from that point, God would not abandon them. "But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away."

Discussion

1. What was the problem with Samuel's sons? Why did the people demand a king?
2. What was Samuel's reaction? What did God tell him?
3. Why would having a king ultimately be a problem?

4. Who was Saul? What were some of his characteristics?
5. Discuss Samuel's speech in 1 Sam. 12. What were his main points?

King Saul: 1 Samuel 13–15

King Saul began his reign with the support of the people, but he soon departed from the ways of God. He was a great warrior, but his presumptions about serving God caused him much trouble. The Philistines were pressing on Israel, and the people were starting to scatter. Saul was waiting in Gilgal for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice. But since Samuel didn't come right away, Saul decided to offer the sacrifice himself. Samuel told Saul that this was foolish, and against the commands of God. As a result, his kingdom would not endure; his dynasty would end with his death.

As a warrior, Saul was successful. He fought his enemies with courage. "He acted valiantly," and delivered Israel from those who would plunder them. It was his disobedience to God that would be his downfall.

This disobedience is again exemplified in 1 Samuel 15. God told Saul to strike Amalek, not sparing anyone or any animal. Saul did defeat the Amalekites, but he did not obey God. He captured the king alive and spared the best of the animals, destroying only that which was "despised and worthless." God told Samuel how Saul had turned from following His commands. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul made an excuse for his disobedience: they were kept alive for service to God. Samuel's response, "to obey is better than sacrifice," shows that God wants obedience first. Sacrifice is nothing if it's not according to His will. Because of Saul's disobedience, he would be rejected from being king.

He began as "little" in his own eyes. He ended as one who did evil in the sight of God.

Discussion

1. Who were Saul's primary enemies? Locate their positions on a Bible map.
2. Why did God reject Saul from being King? What does that mean?
3. Give some examples of Saul's evil actions. What do these actions reveal about Saul's character?
4. Discuss the expression, "to obey is better than sacrifice." How can that be applied to our situation today?
5. What other lessons can be learned from these chapters?

David and Saul: 1 Samuel 16

God rejected Saul's dynasty in Israel, and chose to replace him with David, a man after God's own heart. David was not chosen because of his stature or looks, but because of his heart. Even before David officially became king, Samuel anointed him as the next king over Israel.

Meanwhile, Saul was having increasing troubles. The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an "evil spirit" was terrorizing him. Saul's servants suggested that he seek someone who could help soothe him by playing music. Saul agreed, and they brought him, of all people, David. David was a shepherd who was also skilled at playing a harp. He was described by Saul's servants as "a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him" (1 Sam. 16:18).

David came to work for Saul, playing music, attending to him, and even serving as an armor bearer. Saul grew to love David very much, and sent to Jesse, David's father, to tell him, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight."

Thus every time that Saul would become depressed by the evil spirit, "David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him." David's charisma is apparent in this relationship with Saul. Unfortunately, Saul would eventually turn against David in fits of rage, attempting even to kill him. However, David would ultimately prevail and become the next king over Israel.

Discussion

1. Why was Samuel told to go to Bethlehem? Who was there? What was his purpose?
2. What did God tell Samuel about the kind of person he would be anointing as king? What features was Samuel looking at? What does all of this teach about God?
3. What does it mean when it says that Saul was terrorized by an "evil spirit"?
4. How is David described? Are any of these qualities useful to him when he is a king?
5. How would you characterize David's relationship with Saul?

David and Goliath: 1 Samuel 17

The Philistines were challenging the children of Israel. Both armies were camped

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on opposite sides of the valley of Elah. The Philistines sent their champion, Goliath, to taunt the children of Israel, who were fearful of the giant. Goliath's challenge was that the Israelites should send one of their men out to fight with him. Whoever would win, the other people would become servants of the victor's people. "I defy the ranks of Israel this day," Goliath would say.

Meanwhile, David was sent from Bethlehem to bring some supplies to his brothers, who were camped out with Israel at Elah. When he arrived, he saw what Goliath was doing to his people. He was dismayed at how the children of Israel were responding, and he determined that he would go out and face Goliath. "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"

At first, the men of Israel did not think David could fight Goliath. But David convinced them that they should let him go fight, and Saul conceded. David even tried on Saul's armor, but it wouldn't work for him. So he took his stick and went to the brook where he picked out five smooth stones for his sling. Goliath was insulted that they sent David out, but David's confidence in God was unshaken: "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

David took a stone, slung it, and struck Goliath in the forehead. Goliath fell to the ground dead, and David took Goliath's own sword and removed his head with it. When the Philistines saw this, they fled. David's faith in God prevailed against the enemies of the Lord.

Discussion

1. Locate the valley of Elah on a map. See if you can find Socoh and Azekah. Why was this an important location?
2. Describe Goliath. How tall was he? What was his armor like? What was his attitude toward Israel?
3. Why did David think he could fight Goliath?
4. Contrast David's faith with the rest of Israel's fear. What made David successful in service? Why was Israel so afraid?

David and Jonathan: 1 Samuel 18–20

Jonathan, the son of Saul, became a very close friend to David. At first, even Saul liked David very much and put him in charge over his armies. But Saul became jealous of David and began to be suspicious of him. It was so bad that Saul tried to kill David. Yet, through all of this, Jonathan and David remained very close.

Because of their friendship, Jonathan refused to try to kill David, even though Saul had given the order to do so. Instead, Jonathan helped David escape from Saul, and spoke highly of David in Saul's presence. It even appeared as though Jonathan persuaded his father, but it did not last. Saul was determined to kill David.

David had also married Michal, Saul's daughter. She also aided David in escaping from Saul as he tried to kill him. Jonathan came to David's side again, vowing to do anything that David asked. They worked out a plan to determine Saul's intentions. As it unfolded, it was shown that Saul continued in his intentions to kill David. Saul even threw a spear at Jonathan. So because of Jonathan's help, David was able to escape.

The friendship that existed between David and Jonathan is expressed again in 1 Samuel 20:17. "Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life." It was this brotherly love that they had for one another that caused Jonathan to act against his father's evil intentions. Jonathan later died in battle with his father, but it was his love for David that helped pave the way for David's own kingdom.

Discussion

1. At first, how did Saul treat David? What turned Saul against David? How did Saul attempt to kill David?
2. Describe the relationship between David and Jonathan.
3. How did Jonathan try to convince Saul that David did not deserve death? Did it work?
4. What plan did David and Jonathan work out to determine Saul's intentions? What was the outcome?
5. How important do you think Jonathan was to the life and reign of David?

King David: 2 Samuel 1–12

After the death of Saul, David returned to Judah and was established as king over Israel. At first, his capital was in the city of Hebron. The house of Saul was still fighting against David, but eventually it would die out, and David would be the undisputed king.

David's reign became the standard for all future kings of Israel. God was with him, and established his throne over the people. God told David, "I have been with you wherever you have gone and cut off all your enemies from before you;

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and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth” (2 Sam. 7:9). While David reigned, the borders of Israel were enlarged, and Jerusalem itself was taken and made the capital city (after this it was known as the city of David).

David was not without problems, however. Though he was a man after God’s heart, he still did wrong at times. He was responsible for the debacle of trying to move the ark on a new cart (2 Sam. 6). But the most notable sin of David was his adultery with Bathsheba, and then trying to cover it up by having her husband killed in battle. Because of his sins in this matter, David was severely rebuked, then suffered terrible consequences in his family the rest of his life. He would come to know great sorrow as a result of all this.

Yet the defining characteristic of David was that he always returned to God. He did not let his pride ruin him forever. He repented of his sins and still was a great king. Before the end of his life, he made arrangements for a temple to be built. He would not build it, but he paved the way for Solomon, his son, to complete it. David’s legacy would ultimately be complete in Jesus Christ.

Discussion

1. What was David’s attitude toward Saul? How did he react over Saul’s death? How did he treat Saul’s family?
2. What did David accomplish for Israel while he was king?
3. What were some of the sins David committed? How did this affect him through his reign? How did he respond to the sins?
4. In what ways did David become a forerunner of Jesus? How would Jesus come to sit on David’s throne? When did this happen?

King Solomon: 1 Kings 1–3

As David’s reign drew to a close, Solomon was preparing to become king. David’s primary concern was that Solomon follow the Lord faithfully. So David gave Solomon the charge: “Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn.”

At first, Solomon seemed intent on following this charge. He “loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David.” When God told Solomon He would grant him whatever he asked for, Solomon prayed for wisdom. This pleased God, and God gave him not only wisdom, but also great wealth and power.

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Sadly, Solomon did not continue in the ways of God. He began to multiply wives to himself, and allowed them to worship their false gods. It would not be long before Solomon himself began to worship in a way that was not pleasing to God. He ruled the people with wisdom, but he lost sight of this wisdom in following God.

Solomon accomplished much as king. He expanded the borders of Israel to its greatest extent. His reign was one of peace. It was a “golden age” for Israel. But his most notable accomplishment was the building of the temple. It was a glorious structure around which the Israelites could rally.

No one knows for sure if Solomon repented of his sins. If he wrote Ecclesiastes, it is possible that it reflects his thinking toward the end of his life. However, Solomon’s life should be a warning to us all. If we allow outside influences to determine our life’s course, we can fall away from the right path of God.

Discussion

1. Discuss David’s charge to Solomon. Did he follow this?
2. Discuss Solomon’s prayer to God. What did he pray for? What did God give him?
3. Why did Solomon turn away from God? What factors contributed to this?
4. What was Solomon’s greatest accomplishment? How did this affect Israel?

Job (1–2)

The book of Job is unique. It stands alone as a work that probes the questions concerning suffering and God. The events of the book probably date close to the time of Abraham, during what we typically know as the “Patriarchal age,” prior to the giving of the Law of Moses. No one knows for sure when it was written, or who exactly wrote it. But its inspired character is unquestioned.

Job lived in a land called Uz. He is described as a man who was “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.” He was also a very wealthy man, “the greatest of all the men in the east.” It seemed like Job “had it all.”

Job could not see “behind the scenes.” He did not know about Satan’s plan to attempt to make Job turn from God. Satan stood before God and make accusations against Job, as being one who served God only because it paid him to do so. If Job were to lose his possessions and family, then Job would curse God, Satan argued. This was allowed. Job responded by worshipping God. Satan then argued that if Job himself were to suffer, then he would curse God. So God allowed Satan to test Job by not only taking his possessions and family, but also

by causing great physical suffering for Job himself. This sets the scene for the rest of the book.

Job lost his children, but his wife remained, and she told him to curse God and die. She was no help to Job in this situation. Then Job had three friends who came to comfort him. They sat silent for seven days before they spoke up. From chapter three on, the book records the conversations that took place between Job, his friends, Elihu, and God.

Discussion

1. What kind of a man was Job? Discuss the descriptions given of him. How can we emulate this?
2. How did God express confidence in Job?
3. What charge did Satan make against Job?
4. Why did God allow Job to be tested so severely? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and discuss this in connection with Job's suffering. How can this apply to us?
5. What intentions did Job's friends have in coming to visit him?

Job II (21-42)

Job was suffering tremendous pain. Emotionally, he had lost his children and possessions. Physically, he was in a terrible state. His wife had told him to curse God and die. His friends would begin to accuse him of sin. How would your faith hold up under such circumstances?

Job's friends appeared to have good motives (how many of us would sit for seven days without saying anything in order to comfort one in pain?). But it was Job who broke the silence. He spoke against the day he was born, expressing his deep turmoil. This opened the door for the friends to speak up. The pattern is that the friends speak, then Job answers. There are three rounds in which this happens.

The "theological" position of the three friends is that one suffers personally because of some sin in his life. Because Job was suffering so much, then he must have committed some terrible sins. It only made sense to them that this was the case. Job, however, knew better. He defended his innocence. Though he expressed continued faith in God, he questioned God's justice and wondered why God had allowed this to happen.

Elihu, a younger man listening to the discussion, stepped in to defend God and rebuke Job. Finally, God Himself appeared and spoke, showing that none of them knew as much as they thought they did. He humbled them all.

The book deals with the problem of suffering, but does not give us all the answers we may like to have. Essentially, God tells Job that he doesn't know all the factors and reasons why God may allow certain things to happen. So we need to just trust God in His wisdom and power to do what is right. In the end, Job repented of his false conclusions, and he was restored to a greater position than before.

Discussion

1. What concept did the friends have regarding the relationship between suffering and sin? Is this correct? Discuss this relationship.
2. In what way did Job misspeak? Why did he need to repent?
3. Who was Elihu? What did he have to say?
4. Discuss God's answer to Job in ch. 38ff. What should tell us about God? How should one respond to all of this?

Psalms

The name "Psalms" comes from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament). Essentially, the word indicates "praises," though many of the Psalms are in the form of prayers. Many of these songs of praise were written to be accompanied by a musical instrument, as was allowed during the Old Testament period.

There are 150 Psalms in our Bible. Of these, David is thought to have written about 73 of them. Other authors identified are Asaph, the sons of Korah, Moses, Heman, Ethan, and Solomon. Some psalms do not identify an author. They were written then over a long period of time, and compiled probably after the return from captivity. By the New Testament days, it was referred to as the book of Psalms (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20).

The Psalms are filled with emotion. They are heart-felt expressions to God, with a range of feelings. They show sorrow and heartache, as well as joy and gladness. They praise God for his greatness and power, and petition Him for help in times of severe difficulties. They are inspirational to us even today, as we attempt to pour out our hearts in praise and prayer toward God.

Psalm 119 is a good example of the practical value of the book. This chapter expresses a wonderful attitude toward God and His will. It shows the delight that one has in God and His word. "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (vs. 11). "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end"

(vs. 33).

Discussion

1. What does the word Psalms indicate? Who were some of the authors? Do you know anything about these men?
2. What kinds of emotions do you find in the book? Can you give examples of several types of feelings expressed?
3. Are there any prophecies contained in the book? Find some of them and show their fulfillment in the New Testament.
4. Suggestion: read Psalm 119 together and discuss some of the verses and how we can benefit by this same attitude now.
5. What is your favorite Psalm?

Proverbs

A “proverb” is generally a short, compact statement that expresses some truth about life or human behavior. These statements are typically meant to be “truisms,” or generalized observations; so one should not be surprised to find an occasional “exception.” However, it is the truth of the statements that need to be focused on and adhered to. The use of figurative language is a common feature of a proverb.

The book of Proverbs was in large part written by Solomon. 1 Kings 4:32 says that Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. Proverbs 1:1 refers to it as the proverbs of Solomon. Later, we find, however, that there were other authors who wrote proverbs in this book. But Solomon is the primary author.

The book was written “to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion” (1:4). The book covers a range of topics, including: wisdom, folly, morality, parental responsibility, righteousness, wickedness, life, conduct, etc. It describes how to be wise, how to avoid immorality, and generally how to please God. It describes the character of righteous people, such as is found in the chapter 31 description of the worthy woman.

Proverbs is one of the most practical books in the Bible, even though it was written so long ago. It deals in depth with the “art of living.” Wisdom is based completely upon a proper respect and fear of the Lord. By living according to the principles found throughout the book, one is assured success in service to God.

For practical instruction on attaining wisdom, knowledge, and understanding about life, turn to Proverbs. It is a blessing to read and learn.

Discussion

1. Who wrote the bulk of the Proverbs? Why was he qualified to write them?
2. What is a proverb?
3. What are some of the figures used in the book? (see, for example, chapter 1:20–33)
4. What are some of the features of “wisdom” in the book?
5. Find and discuss some of your favorite proverbs.

Ecclesiastes

The Septuagint word for “Preacher” is ecclesiastes. This is the way it is titled in our English Bibles. It is said to be written by “the Preacher.” Most indications are that Solomon is the author.

Ecclesiastes focuses upon the meaninglessness of life without God. “All is vanity” is a common expression. One can devote his life to all kinds of pursuits, but in the end, it is all vain. This is a key point to the book.

The Preacher had tried his hand at many things in life: worldly wisdom, power, self-indulgence, wealth, etc. Yet all of these avenues of pleasure came up empty. He was satisfied temporarily, but they left a void that could not be filled by any worldly pursuits. This is the life without God.

There are many wise principles found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Above all is the principle of the need to include God in our lives and plans. Wealth without God is worthless. Power is vain. Pleasure is ultimately empty without God. However, with God, one can enjoy the things of this life. One can enjoy the fruit of his own labor. Life gains great meaning with God.

Though one is taught to enjoy life, everything must be done with the understanding that God will bring everything to judgment. After discussing the various ways of life, the author reaches the great conclusion: “The conclusion, when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13–14) If we keep this in mind, we can enjoy our lives “under the sun” and find the greatest meaning and happiness by serving God.

Discussion

1. Why do you think the book is named for “the Preacher”?

2. Why is Solomon generally thought to be the author?
3. What does “vanity of vanities” mean? Why does the author conclude this so many times?
4. What various avenues of life are discussed in the book? Why are they vain without God?
5. In what way can we learn to enjoy life? What do we need to always remember?

Elijah: 1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 2

Elijah was a prophet of God who worked during the days of the wicked king Ahab in Israel. He was a righteous man whom God heard and helped. His story is one of courage in the face of tremendous opposition.

To Ahab and the followers of Baal, Elijah was a troublemaker. But Elijah knew better. He told Ahab, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals” (1 Kings 18:18). It was on this occasion that Elijah challenged Ahab to gather all the 450 prophets and the 400 prophets of the Asherah to Mt. Carmel.

The prophets all gathered at Mt. Carmel, and Elijah told them to quit faltering between God and Baal. Elijah told them to prepare an altar, call on Baal, and see if Baal responded. They did this and received no response. After a time, Elijah prepared his altar, even poured water on it, then called on God, who answered with fire from heaven. There was no doubt who the true God was. The prophets were taken and put to death.

Elijah demonstrated conclusively the power of God. Sometimes it seemed he was alone; he was threatened for his own life. But he, and Elishah after him, were miracle workers at a time when people were following after other gods. Elishah followed in Elijah’s footsteps. Their work was effective and necessary in a turbulent time for God’s people.

Elijah had prepared Elishah to take his place. As they were together, “there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). Elijah never saw death.

Discussion

1. Describe Ahab and Jezebel. Who were they? What did they do? How did they support evil in Israel?

2. Try to make a list of the miracles performed by Elijah. What effects did they have?
3. Why was Elijah's test on Mt. Carmel so effective? What was Baal? The Asherah?
4. Who was Elishah? Why was he important to Elijah?
5. Describe Elijah's ascent to heaven.

Naaman: 2 Kings 4-5

Naaman was captain of the army of Aram. He was considered to be a great man, highly respected, "because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram." He was valiant. But he had the terrible disease of leprosy.

A girl from Israel had been taken captive, and she served Naaman's wife. She told his wife about Elishah in Samaria. Arrangements were made for Naaman to go to Elishah. When he arrived, Elishah sent a messenger instructing him to go wash (dip) in the Jordan River seven times and he would be healed. This angered Naaman, for he thought more would be made of the situation. As he was leaving, one of his servants spoke to him about it, reminding him that it is not that difficult to do. So Naaman did as Elishah said, and he was healed.

Naaman's response was that he recognized that "there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." The miracle produced its desired effect. Naaman first had to overcome his own thoughts to submit to God's. This is an important lesson for all of us today.

Naaman's situation was much like ours spiritually. Our sin needs to be purged, but it will not happen by what we may think. We may think that there should be some great ceremony to mark our spiritual healing from sin (salvation), but this is not what God has prescribed. Elishah's instructions were simple: go wash in the Jordan. Likewise, God's instructions to us are simple: repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The action is simple. It's our will that sometimes stands in the way. Naaman had to overcome his own pride before he was healed. It is the same for us today.

Once again, God's power was clearly demonstrated in the events surrounding Naaman.

Discussion

1. Why was Naaman important to his people?
2. Who told him about Elishah? Why was this person in Naaman's house?

3. Why was Naaman angry over the instructions Elijah gave him? What did he expect? How did he respond?

4. How was Naaman finally healed? How does this compare to our situation today?

Jonah

Jonah lived at a time when the nation of Assyria was a feared enemy of Israel (c. 8th century B.C.). God spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Ninevah, Assyria's capital. Instead of going, Jonah fled the other direction. While he was on the sea, God caused a great storm. Jonah knew it was because of him, so he told the people to throw him overboard. They didn't want to do this, but eventually agreed. They threw Jonah overboard and the storm ended. The men who did this "feared the LORD greatly."

Jonah was swallowed by a great fish prepared by God. He was stay there "three days and three nights." While here, Jonah prayed to God. After the time, the fish vomited Jonah onto the dry land.

The next time God told Jonah to go to Ninevah, he went right away. His message was: "Yet forty days and Ninevah will be overthrown. At this message, the people believed in God and repented. So God spared them at this time. This angered Jonah. He did not want Assyria spared, and asked that God take his life. Jonah went outside the city and made a shelter. God caused a plant to grow up over it for shade, and Jonah was happy about that. But the next day, the plant withered, and Jonah became angry again. God used this as a lesson: "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow.... Should I not have compassion on Ninevah...?" God was concerned about the people there. Jonah was not.

Jonah teaches that God cares for all people. So should we. Even those who may be enemies will be welcomed to God if they repent. We should rejoice when this happens.

Discussion

1. Who were the Assyrians? After the events here, what did Assyria do that greatly altered the history of Israel?

2. Why did Jonah flee? How was the situation on the boat remedied?

3. How was Jonah spared in the water? Describe his prayer.

4. Why was Jonah upset when God spared Ninevah?

5. What lessons can we learn from the events of this story?

Kings of Judah: 2 Chronicles 22 – 36

David became the standard for the kings of Israel and Judah. After the kingdom divided, most of the kings were evil. Not one of the kings of Israel followed God. Only a handful of the kings of Judah followed God. Because of the sin of Israel, led by the kings, Assyria took them captive and destroyed their capital in about 721 B.C. Judah last until 586 B.C., largely because of the fact that they did have some righteous kings.

The two most notable kings of Judah were Hezekiah and Josiah. Both of them “did right in the sight of the LORD,” according to the standard David had set. Both of them spearheaded reforms in Judah that would help turn the people back to God for a time.

Hezekiah was king when Assyria captured the northern kingdom of Israel. They also tried to capture Jerusalem at this time, but were unsuccessful. Hezekiah, along with Isaiah the prophet, were righteous and God heard their prayers. “So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria...”

Sadly, Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, was wicked. He turned the people back away from God to do evil. He repented late in his life, but the evil he did were to reap terrible consequences for Judah.

Josiah was Manasseh’s grandson, and he did all he could to bring about reform in Judah. He turned the people back to God once again, but after he died they did evil. Their destruction was certain. None of the rest of the kings could stop their impending doom.

Discussion

1. Why was Israel destroyed so much sooner than Judah?
2. How many good kings did Israel have? How many did Judah have? (there were some not mentioned above)
3. Why can we confidently say that Hezekiah and Josiah were the two best kings of Judah? What did they accomplish for Judah?
4. How did the leaders of Israel and Judah affect the downfall of the respective nations? What does this say about the importance of leaders and their influences?

Isaiah

Isaiah is often called the greatest of the prophets. His work, more than any other, is messianic (pointing to Jesus Christ), and he is quoted more than any other prophet in the New Testament. He prophesied during the turbulent period when Assyria was expanding its empire and Israel was in decline. He was around when Israel fell. So he warned Judah that the same would happen to them.

Isaiah was contemporary with the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah. He worked closely with Hezekiah, king of Judah. He called the people back to God, showing the folly of those who turned away from God. Though Judah would also be destroyed, Isaiah looked beyond this to the ultimate blessings that would come through Jesus Christ. His message is very Christ-centered, showing the importance of God's plan finding fulfillment through Jesus.

Isaiah had a remarkable attitude. Chapter six tells of his vision and response. After seeing the glorious vision of Yahweh, he recognized his own sinful condition: "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips..." He also saw the sin of those around him: "...and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." This paved the way for Isaiah's urgency of the message. A seraphim flew to him with burning coal from the altar, touched his mouth, and told him his sins were forgiven. Then God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah was eager to serve the God who had cleansed him: "Here am I, send me!" This should be the attitude of all those who recognize God's greatness and have received His cleansing grace.

Discussion

1. Why do you think that some would refer to Isaiah as the greatest of the prophets?
2. What kind of prophecy is Isaiah best known for?
3. Find some examples of the prophecies about Christ. What do they teach? Where can you find their fulfillment?
4. Why was Isaiah's attitude so great? What happened that helped make Isaiah so eager to serve?

Jeremiah

Jeremiah lived not too long after Isaiah, beginning his work in about 627 B.C. The work of Jeremiah covered the period just before and during the Babylonian kingdom took control of Judah. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, had involved the nation in such wickedness that destruction was inevitable. Josiah brought great reforms, but the damage had already been done.

Family Devotionals

Assyria, the conquerors of Israel in the north, fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Starting in 605 B.C., the Babylonians took control of Judah, carrying away captives in three stages (605, 597, and 586 B.C.). In 586 B.C., Jerusalem and Solomon's temple were destroyed.

Through all of this time, Jeremiah kept trying to warn the people of her impending destruction because of the idolatrous and evil practices. Judah had played the harlot, acted corrupt like her sister Israel, and would go into a 70-year captivity.

Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet" because he lived, prophesied, and expressed great sorrow through this terrible time. He was told to keep speaking God's word, even though he would be opposed by kings, priests, and the people. Eventually, Jeremiah would be compelled to go to Egypt.

Jeremiah also pointed to the future. Though Judah would fall into captivity, the people would one day return, and the Lord would still work out His plans for the redemption of mankind through the Messiah. Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the new covenant is well-known (Jer. 31:31-34). It pointed to a time of ultimate forgiveness through Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 8:6-13).

Discussion

1. Read Jer. 1:4-10. What did God say about Jeremiah? Why did Jeremiah offer an excuse? How did God answer him? What would be the nature of Jeremiah's work?
2. Why is Jeremiah known as the "weeping prophet"? Besides the book that bears his name, what else did he write?
3. Read Jer. 31:31-34. Discuss the nature of the new covenant. When was it fulfilled?
4. What can be learned from the message of Jeremiah today?

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a young man in Judah when Nebuchadnezzar came in 605 B.C. and took away some of the princes and nobles (included in this group were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). Ezekiel was not taken then; at age 30 he could have been eligible for the priesthood, spending his time in and around the temple. This would not happen, for he was taken in the second wave of captives in 597 B.C. At age thirty, while in Babylon, he would see another temple by a vision given to him from God.

While Daniel prophesied to royalty, Ezekiel's work was among the common captives. His message is from God to a battered people in exile. This just didn't

Family Devotionals

seem possible to the ones who thought that God had been on their side. Prophets of the day had been prophesying “peace and safety” while the lone voice of Jeremiah was heard to cry out “destruction.” It is these people now realizing the price of their wickedness; and Ezekiel has a message for them: the promise of restoration.

Ezekiel’s message is filled with figures. He points to the transcendent God, who is full of power and glory. God had to punish the people for the sins, but He still loved them and wanted to bring them back to share in His glory once again.

Ezekiel’s purpose, then, is two-fold:

1. To keep before the people the reason why they were in captivity -- namely their wickedness epitomized by their idolatrous practices.
2. To tell them of God’s plans for restoration and future glory (through the Messiah). This would help them to sustain their faith in God through very difficult times.

Discussion

1. Why was this such a trying time for the people? Why were they in captivity?
2. Why is Ezekiel’s message so unique? What was his purpose?
3. How did he get this message across? What were some of the visions he had? Describe some of his actions.
4. Describe the nature of apocalyptic literature. Does Ezekiel fit the mold? What New Testament book draws from Ezekiel so much?

Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar: Daniel 1–4

Daniel was a youth when he was taken to Babylon with the first wave of exiles (605 B.C.). He was among those who had good appearance, were intelligent, and showed wisdom and understanding. Nebuchadnezzar wanted such youths to train for his own service. The king had a daily ration of food for the youths, but Daniel had already determined in his mind that he would not let himself be defiled. God granted favor to Daniel, so his decisions worked for his own good.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. He challenged his wise men to tell him the dream and interpret, but they were unable to do so. Finally, Daniel was brought before the king and was able to declare the dream and the interpretation. The dream revealed what would happen in the future with the coming kingdoms. It also foretold the coming of God’s spiritual kingdom that would be greater than all earthly kingdoms.

Nebuchadnezzar was pleased with Daniel’s abilities and promoted him, making

him ruler over the Babylonian province and the chief over Babylon's wise men. Later, the king would have another dream that Daniel would interpret for him. This time, the dream told what would happen to Nebuchadnezzar himself, how he would be driven from mankind to dwell with beasts. Essentially, he was told he would lose his mind. Shortly thereafter, this dream came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar was forced away from mankind, began to eat grass like the beasts. This was done in order to bring the king to a proper mindset about his relation to God. He needed to learn that God rules in the kingdoms of men. This experience taught him just that.

"God rules in the kingdoms of men." This is the primary theme that Daniel's work teaches.

Discussion

1. Why did Daniel not want to eat what the king had planned?
2. Describe and discuss Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. How was it fulfilled in history?
3. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. How was it fulfilled? What lessons did he learn?
4. Discuss the theme of Daniel.

The Fiery Furnace: Daniel 3

Among those taken with Daniel to Babylon were three other youths from Judah: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. We know them better by their names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. These three demonstrated their great faith in God during a very difficult time.

Nebuchadnezzar made a very large idol of gold and set it up for the people to bow down to. He expected that everyone would worship this idol at its dedication ceremony. He commanded that when they heard the sound of the musical instruments, they were to fall down and worship the idol. The punishment for those who would not bow down and worship was that they would "immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

When the music played, all the people bowed down to the image. That is, all people bowed down except the three youths from Judah (perhaps Daniel was not in the province at this time). Some of the Chaldeans came to the king and told him that these three were disobeying his orders, and so they should be cast into the furnace of fire.

Nebuchadnezzar was enraged when he heard this. He ordered that Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abed-nego be brought before him. He gave them another chance to bow down to the idol, but they refused, saying that they did not need to answer to him in this matter. They expressed their faith in God, who could deliver them from the plans of the king if he so chose. Regardless, they would not bow down, for they knew it was against the will of God. The king was filled with wrath, and had the heat to the furnace turned up. They threw the three men into the furnace. To the king's surprise, they were unharmed by the fire. God indeed delivered them.

What a great lesson of faith for all of us, when we are tempted to give in to the wishes of the world.

Discussion

1. Why wouldn't the three young men bow down to the idol made by the king?
2. Why do you think the king was so angry about this?
3. How did the three respond to the king? Why did they appear so confident?
4. Discuss various lessons we can learn from this account.

Daniel and the Lions: Daniel 6-9

After the fall of the Babylonian empire to the Medo-Persian empire, Darius became king. He appointed various rulers over areas of the kingdom, and set three commissioners over them. Daniel was one of these three. But it wasn't long before he was distinguishing himself among all the rulers because of his extraordinary spirit; and the king was planning to appoint Daniel to a position over all the kingdom. The other rulers, however, were jealous and tried to find a way to accuse Daniel so that they could get him out of their way.

They knew that the only "accusation" they would be able to find against Daniel was in regard to His faithfulness to God. So they established a plan by which they could trap Daniel. They talked the king into signing a law stating that no one could make any petitions (i.e., pray) to any god or man besides the king for thirty days.

Daniel knew of this, but it did not stop him from praying to God as he normally did. The plotters waited for Daniel to pray, then they accused of him disregarding the king's laws. Though Darius did not want to harm Daniel, he had signed the law, and the penalty for violation was stated: Daniel would have to be thrown into a den of lions.

Daniel was put into the den, and no one would have thought that anyone could survive such a penalty. Darius was upset about all of this, and couldn't eat or

sleep that night. At dawn, the king went to the den to see what happened. He called out to Daniel, asking if his God was able to save him. Daniel responded that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. He had been spared.

Darius was pleased over this. He brought Daniel out, then had Daniel's accusers thrown into den. Finally, he decreed all men should fear the God of Daniel! And so should we.

Discussion

1. Why was it so difficult to find an accusation against Daniel? What does this say about how we should live our lives?
2. What was Daniel's attitude and reaction toward the law that had been given?
3. Why was Darius so upset over the situation with Daniel?
4. Discuss Darius reaction and decree after Daniel was saved.

Ezra

Jeremiah had prophesied 70 years of captivity for the Jews. This time began around 606–605 B.C. For the next 70 years or so, God's people would be exiled in Babylon because of their sins. The Babylonian empire was overtaken by the Medo-Persians. When Cyrus, the Persian, became king, he would issue a declaration of restoration for the Jews that would free them up to return to Jerusalem and start rebuilding what they had lost. This decree from Cyrus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy some 200 years earlier (Isa. 44:26–45:1). The return to Jerusalem started in about 538–536 B.C.

Ezra discusses this time of restoration. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who was appointed governor, the people would return home and start rebuilding the temple. Because of opposition, the people stopped building for about 15 years. Under the urging of Haggai and Zechariah, and with the support of king Darius (not the one from Daniel), they finally finished the temple. It was completed in about 516 B.C.

Ezra himself returned to Jerusalem in about 458 B.C., some 80 years after the initial decree from Cyrus (and just shortly after the time of Esther). Ezra's mission was to reform the spiritual condition of the people, to teach the law of God, and restore proper worship.

When Ezra arrived, he found the spiritual condition of the people unacceptable. Many of the priests and leaders had entered into marriages God had forbidden. They married idolatrous, foreign wives, and were in danger of being right back in the condition they were in before captivity. Under Ezra's leadership, this was

remedied, and the people could get back on the righteous path once again.

Discussion

1. Who was Zerubbabel? What position did he occupy? Why was he important to the return from captivity?
2. Why did the work on the temple cease? Which prophets pleaded with the people to continue? When was it finished?
3. Who was Ezra? What position did he occupy? Why was he so important to the spiritual restoration of the people?
4. Why did the people have to put away their foreign wives? Why was such a drastic measure necessary?

Nehemiah

Just a few years after Ezra returned to reform the spiritual condition of the Jews, Nehemiah would return to rebuild the walls of the city itself (c. 444–425 B.C.). Together, Ezra and Nehemiah would help restore the spiritual and political state of the Jews.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia (not a lowly position!). He had heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still unrepaired, and this troubled him greatly. As he stood before the king, the king noticed his sadness, and asked what the problem was. Nehemiah prayed to God first, then told the king. The king, Artaxerxes, granted Nehemiah leave to go to Jerusalem and oversee the work of rebuilding the walls of the city. In fact, Nehemiah would be governor of the area for a time.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and saw what was needed. It would be a formidable task, but with God's help, and the willingness of the people to work, they could accomplish the job. They set their minds to the work.

They received much opposition. People from the outlying areas would ridicule, mock, and threaten. But Nehemiah kept right on with his work, refusing to let anyone else stop what he was there to accomplish. He told his detractors: "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem" (2:20). It was this mindsight that the people indeed were successful. They finished their work in an astounding 52 days!

Of all the great characteristics of Nehemiah, perhaps the most notable is the fact that he was a man of prayer. His faith in God played a vital role in his accomplishments. That's a lesson we all need to learn.

Discussion

1. Why was Nehemiah upset over the news about Jerusalem?
2. What position did he occupy? Why would this have been such an important position?
3. What kind of a man was Nehemiah? List some of the characteristics you see in him.
4. Suggestion: go through and find the places where Nehemiah prayed. Discuss these prayers and how they can help you.

Esther

Esther's place in history is unquestionably significant. She appeared on the scene about 40 years after the Temple was rebuilt, and about 30 years before Nehemiah's return to rebuild the city walls. In the meantime, she filled a vital role in helping to save the Jews from an attempt at annihilation. It may, in fact, have been her work that helped pave the way for the work of Nehemiah. Further, her work greatly impacted the future coming of the Messiah.

Though the name "God" does not appear in this book, it is without doubt a book about God's providence in sparing his people from destruction. Esther was a beautiful Jewess who was chosen to be a queen of Persia. Her uncle, Mordecai, watched over her and helped her through her time of adjustment. Mordecai himself uncovered a plot to kill the king. He told Esther, and she told the king. Mordecai's name was recorded, and this would be important down the road.

Haman, whose authority was second only to King Ahasuerus, had declared that everyone should bow to him. Mordecai refused, and this triggered a plan on Haman's part to eliminate all Jews. Esther found out about this, and interceded with the king on behalf of her people. The result was that Haman's plot turned against himself, and he was hanged on his own gallows which he made for Mordecai.

Esther's courage in exposing Haman resulted in salvation from a decree of annihilation. She showed great wisdom and courage. Because of the events recorded in this book, the Feast of Purim was instituted, and Jews still observe this today. God can use two people such as Esther and Mordecai to accomplish great things for His people.

Discussion

1. Who was Vashti? Why was she replaced as queen?

2. Who was Esther before becoming queen? Why did she find such favor in the king's sight?
3. What role did Mordecai play in these events? Why is he so important to the outcome?
4. How was Haman's plot revealed and overturned?
5. Discuss the importance of these events in the unfolding of biblical history. How does this book show God's providence?

The Birth of Jesus: Matthew 1-2

The time had come. From the foundation of the world, God had a plan. He foretold the coming of the Christ through many prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. Finally, this great promise that God had made to Abraham regarding his "seed" would come to fruition in Jesus the Christ (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:16).

Mary was a young woman who had a mind to please God. The angel Gabriel was sent to her to tell her that she had been chosen by God to give birth to a son. This would not be just any ordinary child. This child would be "Immanuel," God with us. He would be the One who would save the people from their sins. Though Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph, she was a virgin, so this conception of this child would be miraculous. The angel also appeared to Joseph to assure him that he should take Mary to be his wife.

Micah prophesied that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem (5:2). Though Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, circumstances brought them to Bethlehem (a census), which is where they were when Jesus was born. His birth brought great joy. It was announced to shepherds, who praised God for it. Wise men from the east came to worship Him. God's salvation had come into the world!

Not everyone was happy about this event, though. Herod was paranoid because Jesus was being called a King. He tried to have Him killed by slaughtering all the male children under a certain age. Because of this, Joseph and Mary took Jesus down to Egypt for a little while, before returning back up to Nazareth where Jesus would be raised.

With the heavenly host, we can praise God for sending Jesus: "Glory to God in the highest!"

Discussion

1. Think back on the promises God made about the Christ. What was His purpose in having Jesus come into the world?

2. Why is the name "Jesus" significant? Why was he also called "Immanuel"?
3. What was miraculous about the conception of Jesus? Why did Joseph need to be convinced to take Mary as his wife?
4. What circumstances got them to Bethlehem? Why was that important? Why was Herod upset at the birth of Jesus?

John the Baptist: Matt. 3, 14; Mark 1, 6; Luke 1, 3; John 1, 3

Shortly before the birth of Jesus, another child was born. This child would be called John. His purpose? to be the one who would prepare the people for Jesus Christ. Isaiah had prophesied about John: "A voice is calling, Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:2). John was to be the forerunner of Christ, the one who could smooth out the path before Jesus.

John was fully aware of his position. He was not the Christ. He baptized people in anticipation of Jesus, but he confessed, "it is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:27).

Jesus came to John in order to be baptized. John was reluctant, saying "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" (Matt. 3:14) Jesus told him to do it in order to "fulfill all righteousness." So John baptized Jesus, and the Spirit descended on Jesus, which became a sign by which John knew that Jesus was the promised One.

Thus John's testimony regarding Jesus was this: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) It was the disciples of John who first became disciples of Jesus. John's work was effective in fulfilling his purpose. He did what he was called upon by God to do.

John's dedication to truth ended up costing him his earthly life. He was able to preach to Herod, who liked to hear John. But because John told him that it was unlawful for him to be married to Herodias, he was put in prison, and finally beheaded for it. John's commitment to truth is a great example to all believers today.

Discussion

1. From the Bible texts, give a description of John: what he might have looked like, what he wore, what he ate, etc.
2. Why was John important to the coming of Jesus? What was his mission? How did he fulfill this?

3. Discuss the baptism of John. Why was it significant? Who was it for? What did it accomplish?

4. Why was John put to death by Herod? How does his example encourage us today?

Jesus' Baptism and Temptations: Matthew 3–4

Jesus came to John to be baptized. John questioned this, but Jesus told him that it would be fitting “to fulfill all righteousness” (i.e., to complete doing what is right, since baptism had come from God). So John baptized Jesus, after which the heavens opened, the Spirit descended on Jesus, and the Father spoke, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” This event inaugurated the public ministry of Jesus.

Jesus was then led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and nights first. Then the devil tempted Him. Three specific temptations are recorded: turn the stones in bread, jump from the pinnacle of the temple, and worship the devil to gain the world’s kingdoms. To each of these, Jesus responded with “it is written...”

A couple of observations are in order. First, notice that these temptations coincide with the avenues of temptation we all face: lust of the flesh (stones), lust of the eyes (kingdoms), and the boastful pride of life (jump; cf. 1 John 2:15–17). All temptation appeals to pride, but the devil was trying to get Jesus to falter in at least one area. Jesus did not fail. He was tempted in “every point” as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15), and He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18).

Second, notice the use of Scripture in overcoming the temptations. God’s word is able to give us strength and hope as we face the various temptations of life. It is powerful and effective (Heb. 4:12). We must learn to trust God and His word. If we do not do so, we are sure to fail.

Praise God for our sinless Savior! Let’s seek to follow His example in all things (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21–25).

Discussion

1. If John’s baptism was for the remission of sins, and Jesus was sinless, why then was Jesus baptized?

2. What purposes did Jesus’ baptism serve? (cf. John 1:29–34)

3. Discuss the various avenues of temptation. In what ways was Jesus tempted? How did He overcome?

4. How important is it to us that Jesus was sinless? What does it mean for us now? How is He our example?

The Twelve Apostles: Matthew 10

Jesus had a plan that he would choose certain men who would be specially commissioned as His eyewitnesses to teach and deliver His word. He chose twelve men, called apostles (those who are sent), to serve this purpose. They are named in Matthew 10:2–4.

These men had special authority from God. They could cast out demons and perform signs which demonstrated that God had chosen them. They spent over three years in close contact with Jesus. He taught them many things in preparation for His coming kingdom, and prepared them for their role in establishing the Lord's church (Eph. 2:19–22).

It was through the apostles that all truth would be delivered and confirmed. Jesus promised them in John 14–16 that the Holy Spirit would be sent to them so they could carry out their mission. God would reveal His word of the New Covenant through them. Note especially John 16:13, where Jesus promised them that the Spirit of truth “will guide you into all truth.” Because of this, it would be through the word revealed to the apostles that would become the means through which others could believe and have unity in Christ (John 17:20–21).

Of the twelve apostles, three were particularly close to Jesus. These were Peter, James, and John. One of the apostles, Judas, would end up betraying Jesus to the chief priests so that they could put Him to death. The apostles were humans who struggled with temptation as all do. Judas fell. The others had their problems, but ultimately they did fulfill their mission as special servants of Christ. It is because of their work, through the Spirit, that we now have the New Testament.

Discussion

1. Name the twelve apostles. Who were they? What kinds of backgrounds did they have? Who were closest to Jesus?
2. What role did the apostles play in the establishment of the church of Christ?
3. Discuss the importance of Jesus' promise to the apostles in John 16:13. Why is it important, and how does it affect our situation today?
4. What kind of men were the apostles? Discuss their strengths and weaknesses? Did they fulfill their roles? How?

Jesus Preaches in Galilee: Matt. 15–17

Galilee is a region north of Jerusalem and Samaria, primarily between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. It is a beautiful land with mountains and green valleys. It was also the land where Jesus grew up and spent much of his public teaching life. Most of His recorded miracles were performed around the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' home during His public teaching ministry was Capernaum (Matt. 4:13). This was a little fishing village on the northern shore of the sea. It was here where Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).

Galilee was also the region where Jesus' first disciples were called. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen from Galilee. When Jesus called them, "they left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (Matt. 4:22).

Matthew 4:23-25 sums up the work of Jesus in Galilee: "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan."

The work that Jesus did in Galilee is striking, given the fact that it was primarily a gentile region. But Jesus took the opportunities there to teach the large crowds and heal the sick. It was in this region where some of His most profound teaching was done. The "Sermon on the Mount," for example (Matt 5-7) was taught in the region of Galilee.

Discussion

1. Where is Galilee? Locate it on a map. What is the sea of Galilee? What role does this sea play in the gospel accounts?
2. Where is Capernaum? Why is it important?
3. Who were the first disciples of Jesus? How important are they in the developing story of the gospel?
4. What is meant when it says that Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom?

Miracles of Jesus: Matt. 8, 9,14; Mk. 4, 6; Jn. 6; Lk. 8, 9

“You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). Those were Peter’s words to Cornelius. Earlier, in preaching to the Jews on Pentecost, Peter said, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...” (Acts 2:22). The preaching of the miracles of Jesus was a significant part of the message of Christ.

The miracles performed by Jesus had a purpose behind them. Ultimately, the import is that they demonstrated that He was truly the Son of God -- God manifested in the flesh. Nicodemus came to Jesus and recognized, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God, as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn. 3:2). Jesus pointed to His works to establish His identity: “the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish -- the very works that I do -- testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me” (Jn. 5:36). When John was in prison, he sent disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One, to which Jesus replied: “Go and report to John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:4-5).

The miracles of Jesus serve to help us develop faith in Him. “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:30-31).

Discussion

1. What is a miracle? Why are miracles so important in the Bible?
2. What purpose did the miracles of Jesus have?
3. Discuss some of the miracles Jesus performed. Why were they important? What did they demonstrate about Him?
4. How do the miracles of Jesus help us have faith in Him?

The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7

The Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most well-known of Jesus’ dissertations. It was preached from a Galilean hillside near the sea of Galilee to a large crowd who had been following Him. In this sermon, Jesus teaches some of the practical matters concerning His kingdom.

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Since Jesus was going about “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23), we are safe in saying that the message from the Mount is about life in His kingdom as opposed to life under the Old Law. Jesus was not merely correcting false notions about the Old Law, He was issuing proclamations about His kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount represents the high and lofty teachings of Jesus. It points us to behavior that is above the world, above hypocrisy, and reaching toward heaven itself. “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). Our service to Christ must extend beyond outward show, coming from deep inside our hearts. The characteristics of the “beattitudes,” for example, can only come from one whose heart is where it ought to be (5:1–11).

The relationship of disciples to the world is stressed. Being “salt of the earth” or “the light of the world” is no small responsibility for a disciple, but by doing what God wants, we can lead others to Him (Matt. 5:13–16). Relationships with others is a vital part of the Christian’s life.

Most important is the relationship one has with God. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (7:21). Our concern, above all things, is to do the will of God and please Him.

The crowds recognized that Jesus taught with authority. We, as they, should be amazed at His teaching.

Discussion

1. How do we know that this Sermon is about the kingdom?
2. Why is this Sermon important to Christians today?
3. Discuss the “beattitudes.” What do they mean? What role should they have for us?
4. How did the Sermon show the authority of Christ? Why were the people so amazed?

Parables of Jesus: Matthew 13; Luke 15

“Why do you speak to them in parables?” So asked the disciples of Jesus (Matt. 13:10). Jesus’ response shows that parables were meant to be understood by those who really wanted to listen to the teaching of Jesus (vv. 11–17).

A “parable” (literally, placing side by side) is a figurative way of comparing

something earthly with something spiritual. It's like a "short story" in which something spiritual is taught through physical comparisons. The parables of the sower, the tares, or the mustard seed were not really about these physical matters, but about a spiritual lesson that may be drawn from these by analogy. In order to understand the teaching, one must understand the analogy being made.

The parables of Jesus illustrated truth about His kingdom. He began many of his parables with, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." This shows a comparison between the kingdom and the thing he was about to draw an analogy from. They used something that was familiar (sower, seed, tares, pearls, dragnets, lamps, etc.) to illustrate truth about something unfamiliar (spiritual).

The parables have a beauty about them which aids us in our understanding of God's kingdom. They bring the lofty teachings about the kingdom into a common, familiar, and practical level. Jesus "concentrated on the commonly familiar and the practical that is forever part and parcel of human life in the realm of the natural to project man's life in the realm beyond this life" (Zodhiates, Complete Word Study Dictionary, p. 1098).

In a parable, there is usually one basic lesson, and can be understood through the context which prompted the teaching. Study them well, and you will have a greater appreciation for the kingdom of God.

Discussion

1. Define "parable." Why are parables so important in the teaching of Jesus?
2. What was the purpose of Jesus for teaching in parables?
3. Read and discuss some of the parables. For examples, discuss the parable of the sower (Matt. 13), and the parable of the lost sons (Luke 15). What do these parables teach? How can the teaching be applied to our lives today?

Jesus' Later Ministry: Luke 10, 19

Jesus spent His time on this earth to accomplish several purposes, all of which had their ultimate goal in the salvation of mankind. The plan of God culminated in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Only through this means could salvation from sin be offered to a lost world.

In the process, Jesus worked on this earth to prepare the hearts of people to live in His kingdom (Matt. 5-7). He worked miracles in order to demonstrate that He was from God, and to bring people to faith in Him (Jn. 20:30-31). He taught with authority to show how His word transcends every other teaching. He worked closely with His own chosen disciples to prepare them for the task to which they were especially called. He demonstrated a love and patience that few would

understand or appreciate.

Jesus knew that His last days would be spent in and around Jerusalem. He spent more time there toward the end, fully prepared for what He knew He would have to go through. He took His opportunities to teach, but the religious leaders of the day were becoming more caustic toward Him.

He reached a fairly high point in the eyes of the people. When entering Jerusalem on a colt, people were praising Him. But this would not last long. He wept over the city of Jerusalem because the people there would reject Him. He faced much confrontation: driving money changers off the temple grounds, facing questions by the leaders who wanted to trap Him in His words, and even having to rebuke His own disciples for the way they acted at times. How foolish it must have seemed to Jesus -- the Creator come in the flesh to save mankind from sin.

We must learn to appreciate what the Lord did for us. It was not easy thing. But it was accomplished out of love.

Discussion

1. What kinds of events marked the later ministry of Jesus?
2. Why were there so many confrontations? What sparked the controversy?
3. At what point did Jesus appear to be popular? How did all of that change so quickly?
4. What can we learn about the Lord during this time of His work?

Jesus' Last Days: John 9-17

Jesus faced His last days with resolve. There was no turning back from the plan that God had set in motion from the time sin entered the world. Before His death, Jesus would spend some precious days and hours with His friends and disciples.

Though the desire to kill Jesus was already there, this was intensified after Jesus raised up Lazarus from the dead (John 11). The chief priests and pharisees were now actively looking to seize Jesus and bring Him to trial.

Just a few days before His final passover, Jesus was at the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. While Martha was serving, Mary took some very expensive perfume and began to anoint the feet of Jesus with it. The disciples, particularly Judas, were upset at this, but Jesus rebuked them and told them to leave Mary alone, because she was doing this "for the day of My burial." It was just after this that Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on the colt. The people were praising Him here, but it wouldn't be long before they were crying

for His death.

Jesus ate His final passover with His chosen disciples. It was during this sitting that Jesus performed one of His best-known acts. He rose from supper, girded Himself with a towel, and proceeded to wash the feet of His disciples. This selfless act of humility and service are set before us for all time as a great example of the attitude of Christ.

Jesus then proceeded to teach and comfort His disciples, telling them that the Holy Spirit would be sent to guide them into all truth. Though the disciples still had much to learn, Jesus was telling them that He was about to go back to the Father in Heaven. His teachings, actions, and prayer during all of this time are profound indeed.

Discussion

1. What sparked the plot to put Jesus to death? Why was this event such a powerful testimony to Jesus?
2. Why did Mary anoint Jesus? What kind of sacrifice was this? Why were the disciples upset?
3. Discuss the washing of the disciples' feet. Why did Jesus do this? What lessons was He teaching?
4. What teaching and promises did Jesus give in John 14-16?

The Trials: Luke 22; Matt. 26-27

Jesus had taken His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemene, where He went a stone's throw beyond them and spent His time in prayer to the Father. His resolve is heard in the words, "not My will, but Yours."

It was in the garden where Judas would find the occasion to betray Jesus into the hands of the chief priests and Pharisees. Coming out with weapons, Judas led them to Jesus, and kissed Him on the cheek. Even here, the events that occurred should have convicted these men of who Jesus was: their falling to the ground before Him (John 18), and the miracle of replacing the ear of the servant were both powerful demonstrations of His identity. None of that mattered to the ones intent on seeing Jesus die.

Jesus did not fight back at this point. He let them bind Him and take Him to where He would stand accused of blasphemy. He would stand before two High Priests (politically and religiously, Annas and Caiaphas), Pilate the governor of the region, and Herod the king. In the process of these trials, He would be beat on, spat on, lied against, and unjustly accused. And for what? They had no better

motive than envy. Christ's motive was love.

In all of this, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled:

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?" (53:7-8)

Discussion

1. Why was Jesus in so much agony in the garden?
2. How did Judas betray Jesus? Why did he do it?
3. What events during His arrest demonstrated the power of Jesus?
4. Why were the trials so unjust?
5. Optional Research assignments: a) Give a chronology of the events of the trials. b) In what ways were these trials illegal and unjust?

The Crucifixion: Matt. 27; Mk. 15; Luke 23

"But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering..." (Isa. 53:10a). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus prophesied that this time would come. He would have to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die a cruel death. The trials were an unjust display of cruelty motivated by envy and hatred. They had no intentions of letting Jesus go free.

Pilate examined Jesus and could find nothing against Him that would warrant death. He attempted to remove himself from the guilt of the situation by washing his hands of it. But he was weak. The people would prevail and he would send Jesus to His death.

As was their tradition, Pilate brought a couple prisoners before the people to let them decide who would be released and who would be punished. Barabbas, a known criminal, was brought out with Jesus. Justice did not matter at this point to the people. "Release Barabbas," they cried. Then what to do with Jesus? The cry of the mob still rings out loud and clear: "crucify Him, crucify Him!"

First, Jesus would be scourged. In many instances, this alone would result in death. They then would make Him bear His own cross on His beaten back. Apparently physically exhausted already, they compelled another man, Simon, to help with this. When they reached the “place of the skull,” they crucified Jesus.

Jesus was on the cross about six hours. He was fully aware of what was happening, and made several statements worthy of examination. In the end, let us remember that His death was all for us. Because of the blood He shed, we can have forgiveness of every sin.

Discussion

1. Why was Jesus delivered up to be crucified?
2. What is a scourging? Why was this done?
3. Exactly what is crucifixion? Why was this such a humiliating way to die?
4. In spiritual terms, what does the death of Christ mean for us now?

The Resurrection: Mt. 27–28; Mk. 15–16; Lk. 24; Jn. 19–21

The death of Christ on the cross was an event sparked by sin. He died because He loved us and desired for us to have fellowship with Him. We can't have fellowship with God in sin, so He provided a means by which sin can be forgiven. This was what the death of Christ was about. But it doesn't stop there. In fact, if it ends at His death, then we would be miserable people without hope. The completion of God's plan includes those wonderful words: “He is risen!”

Jesus was taken off the cross and buried according to the Jewish custom. He was wrapped in cloth, with spices mixed in. They took him to a new tomb very close to where he was crucified. A large stone was rolled in front of the opening, and guards were placed at the tomb, due to the fears of the Jews.

Early on the third day, some of the women who followed Jesus were on their way to the tomb to apply more spices to the body. They were concerned about how to move the stone from the opening. But when they got there, they were amazed to find the stone rolled away from the door. Two “men” in “dazzling clothing” were there. They asked the women: “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen.” Now they remembered again what Jesus had been saying. Now it was all falling into place.

By the power of God, Jesus was raised up. The significance of this cannot be understated. This is what provides for us the hope of eternal life in heaven (1 Pet. 1:3–4). Without the resurrection, we would have no hope, we would still be in sin, and we would be pitiable (1 Cor. 15). It is the resurrection that gives us

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victory. One day, we will be raised to be with our Lord forever. Praise God, who gives us to the victory through Jesus Christ.

Discussion

1. Discuss the events of the resurrection. Put the accounts together and come up with a composite account.

2. Why were the women concerned about moving the stone? Why is it significant that women were first to see Jesus? Why didn't the disciples believe the women at first?

4. Why is the resurrection so important to Christians?

5. What would be the consequences if there was no resurrection?