

Adult Sabbath School Lessons

THESE WERE VICTORS

April-June 1983

2nd Qtr. No. 352

Hannah received Samuel
"as a treasure consecrated to
God"—*Patriarchs and
Prophets*, p. 571.



V B S vacation Bible School

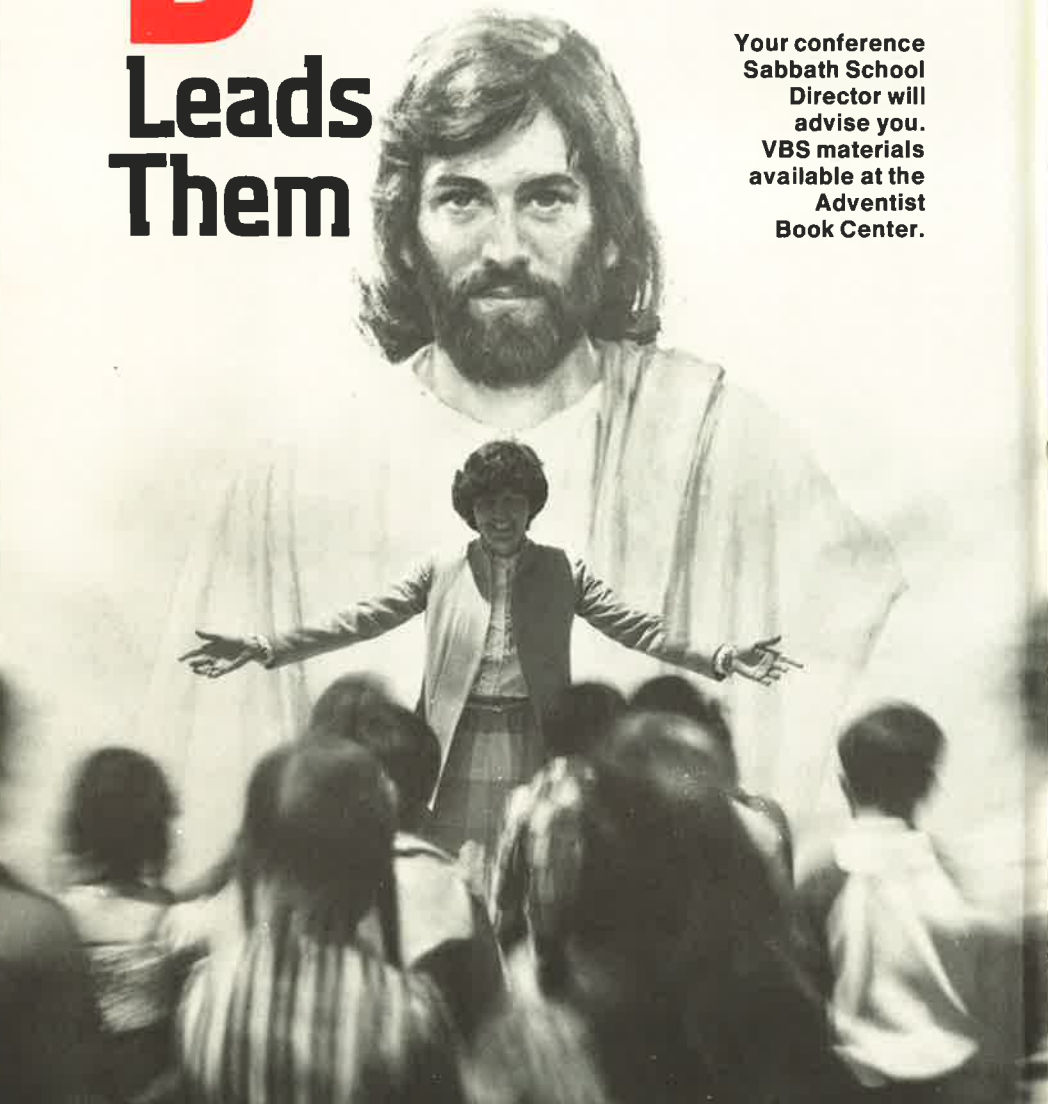
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Thank you for helping us to help ourselves in this, the "Total Action Division," where we do things with people, not for them. Your Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering in December, 1980, contributed \$321,000 toward supplying the roofing, windows, and door frames for 127 chapels scattered across this division.

The Marirangwe church in Zimbabwe, pictured at top, was the proud accomplishment of the happy group posing in the foreground. These nine women and two men provided most of the labor. Volunteer builder Don Oltman and his wife organize the purchase of materials in each country and supervise the construction of each chapel.

The interior of the Ngocho church, Zambia, the first of the Zambian chapels to be dedicated, needs cement for plastering, window frames, and paint. But our faithful members there are thankful for their sturdy structure and thank you for showing your love for them in such a helpful way.

This quarter's Special Projects Offering will be used to construct 200 children's chapels or Sabbath School facilities in Trans-Africa. Thank you again for your prayers and offerings.

Kenneth J. Mittelider

Kenneth J. Mittelider, President, Trans-Africa Division

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These Were Victors

Introduction for Quarter

This quarter's lessons consider ways in which God, the giver and keeper of covenants, dealt with 13 individuals—7 men and 6 women. These persons were not among the most famous or best known in Scripture. Inspiration has recorded only enough information to show us their road to triumph within God's covenant love revealed fully in Jesus Christ, leaving us with many intriguing questions unanswered. Some of them were from well-known families, while others emerged from obscurity. A few set in motion events which stretched into the distant future, while others appeared on the stage for one or two episodes and then are never mentioned again.

These personalities faced crises through which their characters not only developed but were also revealed. By their responses to circumstances the direction of their lives was fixed. Yet each faced the crisis of life in a way which was the result of previous experiences in the grace of God, covenant relationships with God, and everyday relationships with man. Talents granted by Heaven enabled each to fulfill the divine purpose of life, and through cooperation with Heaven human victory was gained.

The victories gained by these persons were not seen as spectacular to men. Stephen was stoned as a martyr to his faith, while Jonathan's loyalty to his insane father cost him his life at the point of a Philistine sword. Yet we believe that in the sight of heaven each of these men and women were victors. They responded faithfully to God's gifts of the eternal covenant. Their lives reveal God.

The triumph of some is of a simple kind. Hannah's victory over the tensions of a rival and the frustrations of childlessness, and Abigail's control of her feelings in a home with a drunken sot for a husband were acknowledged by Heaven with rich blessings. The circumstances of each life were similar to conditions in many of ours. In fact, these persons were surprisingly like us. In their reactions and responses we discover our own, and in their yielding to the grace of Jesus Christ and to the guidance of the Spirit we should discern our path to victory, remembering that these lives did not flower in a night, but were the product of years of preparation.

During this quarter we shall study only lives of victors. Nothing revealed about them must be overlooked because nothing is irrelevant. In some cases facts are few. Circumstances must be carefully reconstructed and applications frankly and humbly offered with the constant prayer that the Spirit will grant us insights into our own needs and give us willing minds to adapt our lives to the implications of these insights. We shall then discover that in the experience of each of these biblical characters there is a personal, encouraging message for us today.



March 27 to April 2
Adult Lesson

1

Stephen—Faithful Martyr

MEMORY TEXT: “A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men” (Prov. 18:16).

The times were exciting. Pentecost had opened the floodgates of heaven, and cascades of the Holy Spirit had fallen to energize the disciples. Multitudes joined the believers who had witnessed the ascension of Jesus, and the Christian church was growing. Pentecostal tongues had crossed racial, cultural, and linguistic frontiers.

This internationalism was fraught with explosive possibilities. Soon Christian believers allowed cultural prejudice to develop, precipitated by trying conditions. The Grecian Jewish members murmured against the Hebrew Jewish members “because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration” (Acts 6:1).

So the apostles, led by the Spirit, organized a group of assistants whom they called deacons—the first support team for apostolic evangelism. These took care of the day-to-day routine serving of tables. (See Acts 6:2.) Among these deacons we hear of a talented and energetic man by the name of Stephen. As a shooting star which soon disappears but leaves a glow in the memory, he still lightens the consciousness of the Christian church today.

In our brief look at the life of this premier deacon we shall consider the office he enhanced. We shall study the breadth of his vision and the influence of his relationships which spread far beyond the Christian community. His internationalism soon found him in conflict with the exclusive Jews, and his Christ-pervaded messages challenged the traditionalist Hebrew theologians. He was dragged into the Sanhedrin to answer for his faith, but his defense of his life was cut short by the vindictiveness of a lynch mob. The outcome was the firmer organization of the church and an impact on Saul of Tarsus that contributed, undoubtedly, to his conversion. One task, one crisis, one victory, and Heaven allowed Stephen’s life to end by the crushing blows of a hail of rocks.

Stephen—Faithful Martyr

1 Sunday
March 27

Part 1—Tragedy or Triumph?

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13).

Mankind generally regards death as a tragedy, and rightly so. Inspiration, however, shows that some things can be worse than death, sometimes. Since the Fall, with its resultant grief and sorrow, pain and frustration, death sometimes can be a blessed release for the sufferer. The Lord knows too that some might not be able to face the future and so allows such to fall asleep in death (Isa. 57:1, 2). People may even be converted because of a loved one who has died in faith and whose earlier appeal to his friends has become stronger because of this fact.

What revealing testimony did Paul give about himself toward the end of his life? Acts 22:4, 5.

Saul of Tarsus was one of the most brilliant of the leading lights among the Jews. The leaders therefore pressed him into the trial of Stephen. But in this Christian deacon Saul met more than his match. His arguments met, his pride bruised, he was impressed with the truth of the gospel but fought back by increasing his efforts to destroy the infant church.

“After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. For a time he was a mighty instrument in the hands of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God. But soon this relentless persecutor was to be employed in building up the church that he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had chosen Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the tidings of salvation through His blood.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 102.

Can we see the effect of Stephen’s defense upon Paul’s thinking? (Compare Stephen’s defense with Paul’s early sermons, Acts 7 and 13:14-36.)

As we analyze Stephen’s method of historical, prophetic application of Scripture with that revealed in Paul’s early sermons, we discover a marked similarity. Because Stephen’s words were etched in Saul’s brain by the fire of the Spirit’s illumination, Saul never forgot what he had heard. So instead of being merely the tragic end of Stephen’s short life, the deacon’s martyrdom was a major means for the conversion of Saul and contributed much to the apostle’s later ministry.

Part 2—The Stuff of Martyrs

“Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:5).

Of all the seven deacons, the inspired historian singles out Stephen as the first and most outstanding. Not only was he “full of faith” and of the Holy Ghost, he was also “full of . . . power” (Acts 6:8). “Full” means that he had room in his heart for nothing else. The Spirit possessed him because Stephen responded in total faith and self-surrender. The result was a life fully empowered to fulfill its divine design.

What immediate results followed the ordination of the first deacons? Acts 6:6-8.

The immediate results of the ordination of the first seven deacons, with Stephen as their leader, was a surge of evangelistic enthusiasm. Through Peter’s preaching the church grew by addition (Acts 2:38, 47), but through Stephen’s it was greatly multiplied. Stephen proclaimed the gospel while he carried on the routine tasks of a deacon. This attracted the priests, and a large group of these professionals accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

In what way did Stephen prove the truth of Solomon’s observation in Proverbs 18:16?

The Holy Spirit bestows His gifts as He chooses. Everyone has a special endowment which may be used for the advancement of the truth or left buried in the earth. Gifts of God, when put to work for Him, grow. This was true in Stephen’s experience. As he used the abilities which the Spirit had bestowed upon him, his influence grew until it shook the highest legislative body in Israel.

In the setting of Jerusalem at that time, how did Stephen meet the various factions of the Jews? Acts 6:9, 10.

There were, in Jerusalem, various sects of Judaism, each with its own peculiarity. Stephen showed himself a master of them all. They had, however, one thing in common. They hated the Nazarene and His followers. But their combined enmity left Stephen unscathed. His wisdom in dealing with people, as well as the spirit he showed, were the sources of his strength.

THINK IT THROUGH: What qualities led Stephen to be willing to die for the ideas he taught rather than to escape?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 89, 90.

Part 3—To Be A Deacon

“They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13).

One of the important attitudes of a deacon—who cares especially for people’s needs—should be the ability to treat all without partiality, not expressing great solicitude for the wealthy and disdain for the poor. Stephen’s fairness brought him into contact with the highest members of society, while he was at the same time leader of those who cared for the day-to-day need of poor widows.

What contributed to the widening of Stephen’s ministry? Acts 6:8.

Stephen also was a miracle worker, although we are not told what miracles he performed. Whatever they were, they had three purposes: (1) They pushed him even more before the people, thus enabling him to proclaim the gospel in widening circles of influence. (2) They deepened his power with the multitudes. (3) They established the Christian believers more soundly in the faith.

Upon what charges did certain Jews try to overthrow Stephen? Acts 6:11-14.

Since they were unable to disprove his theology and exposition of the Scriptures in a quiet, orderly manner, the Jews resorted to other methods. By bribing false witnesses to spread lying rumors that Stephen was blaspheming the temple and the law, they succeeded in rousing the populace against the evangelist.

As Stephen faced his judges, what contrast was noted between his appearance and theirs? Acts 6:15.

Dragged into the judgment hall of the Sanhedrin, with people acting like a pack of wolves thirsting for his blood, Stephen stood calm and unafraid, his face looking like that of an angel. So Christlike was his character that Heaven was seen in his countenance. His wild enemies falsified what he had said and thus themselves blasphemed, while accusing him of crimes they themselves were committing.

FURTHER STUDY: 2 Cor. 12:8-10; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 97-99.

Part 4—His Last Sermon

“Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right” (Prov. 6:13). (Compare Acts 7:2, 3.)

Stephen commenced the defense of his beliefs and practices in a gentle spirit. He took it for granted that his listeners were genuinely interested in learning the truth of the Scriptures. But after he had traced the developing prophecies to their historical fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth the attentive hearers suddenly became raging demons. It was then that Stephen changed his mode of address to one of accusation.

What was the main argument of Stephen’s speech? Acts 7:4, 14, 20, 37, 44, 48, 49.

Stephen based his reasoning on the development of the history of God’s people. Abraham was promised a “seed,” and Isaac was born, but in the fullest sense the promised “seed” was not Isaac, Joseph, or Moses. Moses in turn predicted the rise of “a prophet.” And Solomon’s temple—which replaced the tabernacle built by Moses—was not the one in which God actually dwelt in Jerusalem. The implications of Stephen’s message were that the Jews needed to look to Jesus as the Messiah and the heavenly temple as the place of the consummation of the types of their history.

What part did Saul play at the close of Stephen’s trial? Acts 7:58.

When the Jewish leaders discerned the direction toward which Stephen’s speech was moving, they realized that it fixed the location of Jesus of Nazareth in prophetic history. Saul of Tarsus, who had failed in his attempts to silence Stephen’s words, now joined with the mob in encouraging them to stone Stephen to death (Acts 22:19, 20). He assisted by caring for the garments of the witnesses.

What reactions were produced by Stephen’s defense? Acts 7:54.

Luke records that Stephen’s enemies became violent with rage—perhaps under some conviction. Cut to the heart, they dethroned reason and scriptural logic and began to function on an emotional level. Satan, and not God, ruled their hearts, leading them to murder an innocent man.

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 99, 100.

Part 5—The Martyrdom

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

Before his lips were finally closed in death, Stephen pointed out to the Jewish elders and scribes and the council of the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12) led by the high priest (Acts 7:1) that they were resisting the appeals of the Holy Spirit just as their fathers had done. They were refusing to accept the implications of the inspired Word and were deliberately refusing to obey the clear teachings of the law. Their action marked the end of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 and signaled the rejection of the Hebrews as a nation by God.

Whom did the law require should cast the first stone in a case of such a penalty? Deut. 17:7 compared with Acts 7:58; John 8:7.

The law stipulated that the witnesses to the crimes should be the first to cast the stone of execution. While we are not told that Saul of Tarsus actually threw a stone at Stephen, he certainly was as guilty of his murder as if he had done so, because he aided and abetted those who carried out the martyrdom.

What beautiful spirit did Stephen continue to show before he died? Acts 7:59, 60.

In the last moments of his life Stephen’s mind was in heavenly places with his Lord and Saviour. It was into the everlasting arms of Jesus that he yielded his life. On his knees he prayed for those who were bent on destroying him, leaving us the perfect picture of a follower of Jesus who allowed Christ to live out His life in him.

In his dying moments, whose example and instructions did Stephen follow? Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 23:34, 46.

Jesus had taught His disciples to love those who persecuted them and to pray for those who worked harm to them. Stephen had learned these lessons perfectly. As the stones crashed about his head and prostrate body, his lips moved in prayer for his tormentors. Saul probably heard that prayer and later gave Luke an eyewitness account of the scene. (See Acts 1:1; compare with Luke 1:1-4.)

FURTHER STUDY: Heb. 11:36-40; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 100, 101.



Part 6—The Harvest

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried . . . : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Our Saviour knew from His own experiences and with prophetic insight that not everyone in every age would be willing to accept His messages. In fact, He was aware that on occasion the gospel would stir up deadly animosity and outright rejection. But while He warned of this, He added that His representatives were not to allow depression to bind them about but to look beyond the present to ultimate victory.

What does the Lord foretell of the sower of gospel seed that could help us in our witness today? Ps. 126:6.

The Old and New Testaments lay down an important principle of evangelism. The sower of the gospel seed must water the soil and soften the seed with his tears. This suggests that the speaker must perceive the awful consequences that will come to those who reject his message and present his words with tremendous pathos and appeal.

How did Jesus demonstrate this ideal in His evangelism? Heb. 5:7; Luke 19:41.

Jesus Himself was “a man of sorrows.” Tears were in His voice as He pleaded with the multitudes to accept His messages as well as when He denounced those who rejected them. Christ’s success lay in His total emotional involvement with what He was saying and doing and in His intense longing to bring salvation to those who were lost.

What influence did Stephen’s death have on Paul the apostle? Compare Phil. 3:4-14 and 4:12, 13.

Saul of Tarsus was a proud and ambitious Pharisee. (See Acts 23:6.) As a result of listening to Stephen and witnessing him as he saw a vision of Jesus, Saul’s priorities were completely altered. Now he was ready to give up all for Christ (1 Cor. 4:9-13). His ambition henceforth was to spend and be spent for his Master. One day Stephen will realize what his death has meant to the Christian church throughout history.

FURTHER STUDY: Matt. 10:16-22; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 576, 577.

Lydia— Businesswoman

MEMORY TEXT: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chron. 16:9).

In the Asian town of Thyatira the Lord saw the woman Lydia (although that may not have been her actual name). Her inner drive sought for the better things of life. She found no satisfaction in her pagan religion. Her seeking soul longed for something more satisfying. The Thyatirans produced a purple cloth, dyed with their famous and popular color. Lydia (or the woman of Lydia) chose the business of selling these materials. In the course of her work she could have encountered Jewish merchants and learned about the true God.

Her yearning for a more satisfying religious life may have led her to find God in Judaism. A drive toward perfection would induce her to sell only the very best goods available. Perhaps seeking for a more lucrative market, she would travel to Europe and establish herself in the Roman colonial Greek city of Philippi. There her business acumen, the quality of her merchandise, and her skills in handling people would contribute to her prosperity. Her understanding personality could overcome any prejudice between Europeans and Asians, and her business skills could disarm sex discrimination. Lydia was apparently accepted in the land of her adoption.

In this lesson we shall consider the Christian development of the Asian woman, Lydia, in the charter membership of the Christian church in Europe and study her development as a leading spirit in the church at Philippi. We shall first look at Lydia as a one-time heathen woman who migrated from Thyatira, Asia, to Philippi, Europe. We shall consider the providences which guided Paul and Lydia to meet in a land foreign to both. We shall observe the way the Spirit prepared Lydia’s mind for the gospel and how she became a Christian only to be plunged into a storm of bigoted religious and social forces which Satan was using to destroy her faith. Yet her loyalty and fearless hospitality to those who were instrumental in bringing to her the message of salvation remained firm. We shall consider how Lydia helped to build up the church at Philippi, which elicited the magnificent epistle by Paul to express his joy in Christ on its behalf. All these events were milestones on her road to victory.

Part 1—An Asian in Europe

“There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). (See also verses 6-14.)

Prevented from preaching in Asia (verse 6), frustrated and possibly ill, Paul reached Troas (Troy). The Spirit had plans for him outside Asia and led him to Europe. At his initial evangelistic stop at Philippi, Lydia became the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe, and a new continent was opened to the gospel.

“A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened.” [Acts 16:14.] Lydia received the truth gladly. She and her household were converted and baptized, and she entreated the apostles to make her house their home.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 212.

Lydia was not a European, but a migrant from Thyatira in Asia (modern Turkey). This city was a military and mercantile center. Lydia had possibly cut loose from family and friends, from hometown and business associates, and with an open mind and an adventurous spirit had established a successful business on her own in an alien country. (Talk with a friend who has migrated and learn what this does to broaden thinking.)

What reflection might there be of Lydia’s Thyatira in the Thyatira of Christ’s later message? Rev. 2:18-29.

The later rebukes of Christ to the church in Thyatira may reveal that these believers had not yet made it a suitable setting in which to foster the growth of new Christians.

Because of the popular product of her hometown, in what business was Lydia engaged? Acts 16:14.

The Thyatirians were famous for their dye works that produced a popular purple dye, that was made from the murex shell rather than from the madder root. The material that was dyed was used for Roman togas, loose outer garments. Togas were used throughout the empire, and we can envision Lydia selling them in Philippi. Inscriptions found in the Thyatira area reveal that there was a guild of purple dyers in that city to which Lydia may have belonged before moving to Philippi.

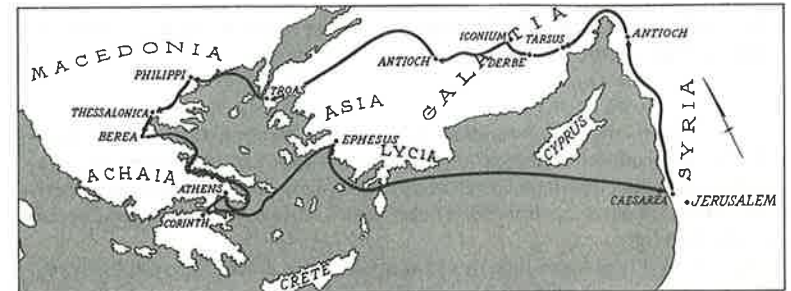
THINK IT THROUGH: What relationship do you see between providence and coincidence?

FURTHER STUDY: Rom. 8:28; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 211.

Part 2—A Vision and a Voyage

“After he [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10).

Some have surmised that Paul, weary and ill, consulted Dr. Luke in Troas and was used by the Spirit to convert him. The physician would then express a longing for his home folk in Europe to receive the gospel. However, early Christian tradition makes Luke a native of Antioch in Syria. If that were a fact, then longstanding suggestions that Luke was the man of Macedonia seen in Paul’s dream could scarcely be true. (See William Ramsey, *Paul the Traveler*, p. 202.)



With what purpose in mind did Paul and Silas embark directly for Europe in the company of Luke? Acts 16:10-12.

Paul concluded that the Lord was directing him forward. Selecting Luke as his companion, he prepared to travel to a new continent. From this point (Acts 16:10) Luke introduces the first of the 106 “we’s” that indicate his presence. Their ship went on “a straight course,” for Paul would brook no delay in responding to a summons from heaven.

Because Philippi was a Roman colony and outpost it was an influential local center for art, commerce, civil government, and military power. Here Paul, himself a Roman, came directly in contact with a flourishing example of Roman imperial organization.

What principle of evangelism motivated Paul when he heard of a group of pious Sabbath-keeping worshipers nearby? Acts 16:13.

On their first Sabbath the missionaries went to where prayer was “wont to be made”—a place along the stream Gangites. Away from the city, habitually in prayer, these women were prime targets for Paul’s evangelism. Discovering a group of those who were investigating sacred things, he followed up their interest with personal contact.

Part 3—Prayerful Worshipers of God

“And a certain woman . . . which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened” (Acts 16:14).

Luke’s phrase “worshipped God” is a Hebraism indicating that Lydia was a partial convert to Judaism. She had taken the first step away from paganism and was now a worshiper of the one true God, Yahweh. This statement is important. It tells us that Lydia had been following the light as God had led her. Having taken the first step, she now was prepared to take the final step into the full light of the gospel. Only because she had been faithful to the little light she had received did God grant her additional illumination.

In what way did the Spirit prepare Lydia’s mind to respond to Paul’s gospel appeal? Acts 16:14.

Lydia “continued to give attention,” is the force of the words “heard us.” Her attitude was one of keen interest and sustained concentration. Because she was absorbed with the truths presented by Paul and understood them, she was prepared by the Spirit to take the next step on her journey into light.

As it applies to Lydia, what is the significance of the symbolic word “heart”? Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:18, 19.

The Scripture uses the term “heart” to describe the faculty which plans and decides. The Spirit had opened Lydia’s “heart” for the reception of life-altering ideas. Heaven worked in harmony with Paul’s preaching on earth. God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves. His servants are His helping hands. Could the vision which summoned Paul to Philippi have been timed to meet the needs of this woman who was ready to advance into light?

What was the immediate response of this outstanding woman to Paul’s preaching? Acts 16:15.

When the call was made to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Lydia was ready to take the next step, baptism, signaling that her old life was buried and a new life in the Spirit had begun. Her “household,” which may refer to her family and servants or to those who worshiped in her house, followed her example.

Part 4—Consistent Christianity

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Paul had planted the seeds of Christianity in Europe, and they had taken root in the heart of Lydia. But had this woman refused to take the next step and be baptized, she would have “frustrated” God’s plan for her.

As a member of the church now, what arguments did Lydia press in her offer of hospitality? Acts 16:15.

Lydia was so appreciative of the spiritual help Paul had been and so concerned at the poor lodgings of the missionaries that she offered them hospitality in her possibly spacious home. This successful businesswoman was humble and modest, stating that only her relationship to the Lord made her worthy of being the hostess of the Christian workers. Luke’s expression, “she constrained us,” suggests that while at first Paul seemed a little reticent, Lydia was most pressing in her invitation. This verb is used outside the New Testament to describe the use of force.

In what ways did some other citizens of Philippi react to the preaching of Paul’s gospel and his healing ministry? Acts 16:16-22.

Through this spiritualistic medium, Satan sought to discredit Paul and Christianity. Witnesses to the truth must represent the truth, and she did not. After Paul exorcised the evil spirit, those who had exploited this woman for gain engineered a riot. The citizens of Philippi did not fight Christianity because of its erroneous teachings. Their reaction was based on economics. Because the profits of some suffered, they roused public opinion against the apostles. (Jesus was treated likewise—Matt. 8:34.)

In view of the anger of her neighbors, what principle did Lydia follow in allowing the unpopular apostles to remain in her home? Heb. 13:2, 3 compared with Acts 16:40.

Lydia was not a fair-weather Christian, showing that she was friendly and helpful to the apostles only when they were riding the crest of popularity. She sets us an example of Christian faithfulness and loyalty to the leaders of the church even in times of danger.

Part 5—Loyalty and Hospitality

“They went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia” (Acts 16:40).

Knowing where they would be welcome, the persecuted Paul and Silas went directly to the home of Lydia. While the authorities were cowed by their guilt because of their unjust and illegal conduct toward the Roman Christian missionaries, the businessmen whose revenue had been curtailed were still angry in spite of the riot. But Lydia, who possessed a helpful attitude toward the persecuted, paid no attention to this state of affairs.

Viewed in these circumstances, what does this act demonstrate regarding the faith and love of Lydia?

To encourage Paul and Silas to find refuge in her house showed considerable bravery on Lydia’s part. She might have reasoned that her business would be adversely affected, but true friendship does not stop to consider whether the friend in need is unpopular. Adverse circumstances should draw out concern.

What did Lydia and the new and harried converts to Christianity themselves need from the apostles? Acts 16:40.

As the missionaries observed the needs of the new converts to Christianity, their own sufferings and shame were forgotten. They comforted and exhorted the believers in order to strengthen them to stand for the faith. While Lydia was giving all the help she was able to give to Paul and Silas, the missionaries in turn gave the new converts messages calculated to help them meet the trials which lay ahead.

Following the departure of Paul and Silas to further evangelism, what did Lydia and the little band of Christians succeed in doing in Philippi? Phil. 1:1-6.

The sequel to our story is found in Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians. The little band of disciples, with Lydia as a pillar among them, grew in numbers and flourished to Christian maturity. Prayer had been a way of life, and the Lord opened their minds to learn. They grew efficient to serve. They grew efficient at spreading their light and attracting others into their fellowship, and so the church increased in numbers and flourished. Will it not do the same today?

FURTHER STUDY: Job 6:14; Rom. 12:13; *The Adventist Home*, p. 445.

Part 6—Church of the Joyful Heart

“I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:3, 4).

Paul’s reference to “those women which laboured with me in the gospel” is thought by some to include Lydia and the women associated with her. Be that as it may, she would certainly qualify as one of them!

Into what kind of church fellowship may we assume that Lydia’s Philippian friends eventually developed? Phil. 1:5-8; 2:18; 4:10, 14-16.

These passages from Paul’s letter to Lydia’s church call to mind the kind of happy, serving Christians these members grew to be. Their “fellowship,” sympathy in his bonds (in Philippi and Rome), and their caring all encouraged him. Their constant joy and generous offerings in helping Paul more consistently than all the other churches he had founded upheld him. Can we see behind all this the spirit of Lydia, the first European Christian?

What does the key thought in Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians evoke concerning the spirit of Lydia? Phil. 1:4, 25, 26; 2:2, 16-18, 28; 4:1, 4, 10.

“The theme of the epistle is joy in Christ. Though it was written in prison, with Paul unaware of what lay ahead, the words ‘joy’ and ‘rejoice’ are used again and again. The phrase ‘in Christ’ is used repeatedly, and when joined with the thought of joy, well expresses the theme of the epistle.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 139.

Even a cursory reading of Paul’s epistle to the church in Philippi brings to the heart the joy and rejoicing which the apostle felt as he remembered his friends in that city. As he reviewed Lydia’s reception of the missionaries, the diligence with which she studied, the dedication with which she yielded to the Spirit, the kindness she shared, Paul was filled with gladness.

THINK IT THROUGH: Had you been a member at Philippi, would you have had any reservation about Lydia’s significant part in its growth?

The fact that Lydia was a woman weighed nothing with the Lord or with Paul. Her role in the founding of Christianity in Europe continued throughout Paul’s ministry. In Christ all differences disappear. Only love and understanding remain.



Onesiphorus— Pastor's Helper

MEMORY TEXT: "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17).

Onesiphorus (Oné-sif-o-rus) lived through hectic days in Ephesus as he watched the Christian missionaries establish a church in that city—days that shook the worshipers of Diana to their foundations. He listened to the crowd in the amphitheater shouting for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Through these exciting events the Spirit was working on his heart until he and his household became Christians and grew to be a bulwark of the believers in the city.

Onesiphorus was deeply appreciated by Paul, if only for his many acts of kindness showered upon the apostle. As Paul patiently waited on Nero's death row, he remembered his friends of yesteryear. His prison epistles generally end with a list of those for whom he prayed and to whom he sent his good wishes. He often included a few personal words about something helpful he remembered about some of them.

His last letter to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, contains two references to Onesiphorus. These four verses rank among the most appreciative expressions of gratitude found in Scripture. In our study we shall consider Paul's words closely and from a number of angles. (We shall supplement them with parallel scriptural principles.)

We begin our analysis of these verses by assessing the terrible danger in which Paul was situated and the bearing this had on those associated with him. Then we shall study how Onesiphorus ignored all personal hazard as he sought to locate the apostle in Rome and then fearlessly helped him in every way he could. The third section considers the loyalty and friendship shown selflessly in contrast with crass self-serving. The fourth seeks to analyze the true motivation for service, leading into Paul's remembrance of the effect upon himself of the presence and ministry of Onesiphorus. The lesson concludes with Paul's absorption with the last judgment and its settling of accounts, including eternal life and mercy for Onesiphorus and his family.

To have filled the mind of the apostle's last hours with such fragrant memories of friendship and helpfulness is to have achieved a place with the immortals. Onesiphorus attained this position and moves us to copy him. (See Heb. 10:24.)

Part 1—In Mortal Danger

"This [teaching] continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

The Lord arranged special circumstances to establish the work in Ephesus, a great center of commerce and culture. Paul first baptized 12 disciples of John. He next debated for three months in the synagogue. Finally he settled down to a teaching ministry for two years. During this span Paul performed "extraordinary miracles" (verse 11, NIV), including the exorcism of evil spirits. Paul's ministry electrified the city—"the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (verse 20, NIV). But this resulted in a loss of income for the craftsmen who made the idols of Diana, and they precipitated a riot, after which Paul left Ephesus. It was probably during Paul's stay in Ephesus that Onesiphorus was converted.

When Paul became a prisoner, what occurred in the attitude of some of his friends? 2 Tim. 4:10, 14.

When Paul's later arrest in Jerusalem and transfer to Rome occurred, many of his erstwhile friends became fearful for their own safety. Often under the tyrants of Rome, the family and friends of a condemned man were themselves condemned to death. To associate with Paul after Nero had sentenced him to die took great courage. Many of Paul's friends lacked this and forsook him.

How complete was Paul's abandonment by his Asian friends? 2 Tim. 1:15.

Paul had waited in vain for someone from among his many acquaintances in Asia to visit him. None of the church members from this region came to be with Paul in spite of his ministry in converting them.

What lies behind Paul's statement concerning Onesiphorus' attitude toward his "bonds"? 2 Tim. 1:16. (Compare Matt. 25:43.)

As Paul wrote, his mind was flooded by the recollection of one from the city of Ephesus who proved to be an exception to his statement. Onesiphorus had shown an attitude all too rare in his day; he was "not ashamed" of Paul's chains. In face of terrible danger to himself he had found Paul. In face of ridicule he was not ashamed to be called a Christian and a friend of Paul, cost what it might.

Part 2—A Friend in Need

“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim. 4:16).

Paul reminded Timothy that when he had been first called upon to answer for his faith before Nero, not a single friend had stood by him to comfort and pray with him. Looking upon this cowardice as a sin, he prayed for their forgiveness. We cannot be certain whether the apostles referred to Nero as the lion (verse 17), whether he had actually faced one in the Colosseum, or whether he was calling his hidden foe, Satan, a lion (See 1 Peter 5:8).

What did Paul recollect that Onesiphorus had done for him at Ephesus? 2 Tim. 1:18.

In his Roman dungeon, Paul must often have recalled his experiences at Ephesus, where he was confronted by the angry crowd shouting, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” He had then been encouraged and helped by Onesiphorus. His expression “ministered” literally means “acted as a deacon in the church.” But the term may also describe the way Onesiphorus had been personally helpful to the apostle.

When Onesiphorus arrived in Rome, what attitude did he show toward Paul? 2 Tim. 1:17.

“Sought me out,” that is, “kept on intensively looking for me.” Paul recounted to Timothy that when Onesiphorus arrived in Rome he “diligently” set about trying to find his whereabouts. The prison in which the apostle languished was hard to find, but Onesiphorus persisted, going from jail to jail, fearlessly disregarding the possibility of arousing suspicions against himself.

What manifestations of a similar courageous relationship did Jesus praise? Matt. 25:36.

The Saviour described with approval those who had found Him in prison. This means that when a helpful, friendly, pastoral visit is paid to a prisoner, the Lord accounts the kindness as done to Him.

THINK IT THROUGH: Are Christians today expected to follow Christ's example in being ready to lay down their lives to help those who have been condemned to death?

Part 3—Loyalty in Trouble

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Heb. 6:10, NIV).

This same spirit was shown by Onesiphorus for Paul. The Scriptures record the exhortation of Paul that all Christians should seek to live this kind of a life of service. Nowhere does the Bible discredit good works, only the wrong motives for doing them.

What parallel to Paul's abandonment by his friends do you think of in the experience of our Lord? Matt. 26:56; 2 Tim. 1:15.

It evidently came as a great shock to Paul when he stood before Nero, who held the power of life and death over him, that all his Asian friends had decided to be absent. After the long years of self-sacrificing service, the hardship he had endured for them, and the dangers he had faced—to be so treated by those whom he considered friends hurt him deeply. Then he remembered two men in particular, otherwise unknown, who especially opposed him and betrayed his trust.

Who ignored public opinion and dared to make contact with Paul? 2 Tim. 4:11; 1:16.

But the apostle remembered two of his old friends who had stood steadfast and loyal to him—Dr. Luke, his beloved physician, and Onesiphorus, the helpful layman from Ephesus.

Through what circumstances is true friendship revealed? Prov. 18:24; 19:17.

Inspiration is perfectly clear in its description of genuine friendship. When things go wrong and problems multiply and dangers lurk, then a true friend stands out clearly by his presence, concern, and helpfulness. A friend actually can be more helpful than a blood brother. Jesus, of course, is the paramount example of true friendship to a world beset by difficulties. Onesiphorus was following the example of the Master of whom Paul had given him such a glowing picture.

THINK IT THROUGH: At what point does the right for self-preservation override the Christian duty to share our resources with those in dire need?

FURTHER STUDY: Rev. 2:19; James 2:14-26.

Part 4—Loving Ministry

“In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity” (Titus 2:7).

Onesiphorus was so filled with the Spirit which had actuated his Lord whom he followed, that his good works naturally followed. While he did not possess the power to liberate Paul physically, he did, by his kindly presence, free his heart from despair and lift his soul into heavenly places. By the comforting presence of such a convert and former church member as Onesiphorus, Paul must have been thrilled.

Why would Paul's petition to God include the family of Onesiphorus? 2 Tim. 1:16.

The apostle remembered the entire family of Onesiphorus and invoked Heaven's mercy upon this household. The Lord had assured mercy to the merciful, and in the crucial days in Ephesus the whole family of Onesiphorus had evidently rallied around the apostle. Now it was Paul's turn to minister to Onesiphorus in prayer.

What was the significance of Paul's special petition on behalf of Onesiphorus himself? 2 Tim. 1:18.

In his second invocation on behalf of Onesiphorus, the apostle looked beyond the present to the end of time. He prayed that the mercy of the Lord which his friend had enjoyed would still be his portion in that day. Paul's absorbing attention was on his own end and on the last judgment, and he emphasized this thought regarding Onesiphorus also.

How thoroughly had the Spirit incorporated Christ's attitude into the life of Onesiphorus? Luke 10:30, 33.

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates the principle of selfless indifference to personal danger displayed in helping those in need. The Good Samaritan might have argued that the murderous robbers were lurking near and might attack him at any time. But he helped an injured stranger in spite of this possibility. Onesiphorus likewise came to Paul's side when his erstwhile pastor needed him most.

THINK IT THROUGH: In God's work today, who is willing to risk visiting God's servants imprisoned for their faith?

FURTHER STUDY: Matt. 5:7; 6:33, 34.

Part 5—Refreshed by His Presence

“The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Tim. 1:16).

True friendship is not on today and off tomorrow. It is abiding and constant. Onesiphorus “oft,” or “often,” or regularly visited Paul. Too frequently we allow personal, selfish considerations to bring our visits to those in need to an abrupt and disappointing end. To remain faithful until the job is done is a virtue displayed so well by Onesiphorus.

Note the complete absence of partiality in Christ's assessment of Christlikeness in His followers. Matt. 25:45.

Perhaps in the very part of the world in which you find yourself today there is a brother or sister of humble means who is in need of the help which you could give. Would you do more for them if they had more status? more influence? “Inasmuch,” said Jesus.

How may we gain similar refreshment? Ps. 39:13.

In this psalm David meditated about man and time. The length of man's life is short and its quality uncertain (verse 5). He then exclaimed, What am I waiting for? What does life have for me? (verse 7). Turning to God, he asked for forgiveness (verses 8-11). His meditation and prayer finally focused on his own death (verse 12). His concluding prayer was, “O spare me, that I may recover strength” (verse 13).

Coming back to the New Testament times, we are reminded of the “refreshing” that Jesus received with His special friends. “At the home of Lazarus, Jesus had often found rest. The Saviour had no home of his own; He was dependent on the hospitality of His friends and disciples, and often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household, away from the suspicion and jealousy of the angry Pharisees. Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, holy friendship. Here he could speak with simplicity and perfect freedom, knowing that His words would be understood and treasured.

“Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

THINK IT THROUGH: While Paul mentioned nothing regarding any material help given to him by Onesiphorus, do you think his encouragement was even more important to Paul than the donating of “things”?

FURTHER STUDY: Matt. 11:28, 29.

Part 6—A Rich Reward

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Those who learn from the Spirit of Christ are responding to long-distance planning in the mind of God. The apostle often wrote of a future time at which God would bestow rewards closely connected with “righteous judgment.” (See 2 Thess. 1:4-9.) Paul calls this day of reckoning “that day” (verse 10). (Compare 1 Cor. 3:12-14.) It will climax plans laid with the foundations of this world.

Since God gives all good gifts anyway, why did Paul pray for Onesiphorus? 2 Tim. 1:18.

Paul remembered Onesiphorus in his prayers. As the apostle looked forward to the day of reckoning, he invoked mercy from the Judge of all on his behalf and his house. This passage has been used by the advocates of prayers for the dead. And it may be that Onesiphorus was dead at this time. But just as the thief on the cross asked to be remembered on the day that rewards were bestowed, Paul wished that Onesiphorus would then receive a merciful judgment.

Since God will do what is best, why pray at all? (See 2 Chron. 6:14-42; Daniel 9; Jude 20, 21.)

The Lord insists that His people pray the Lord of the harvest to “send forth labourers” (Matt. 9:38), and for the giver of good gifts to grant the latter rain (Zech. 10:1). God can do for us when we pray what he cannot do when we do not pray. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 525.) Because of the great controversy between good and evil, Satan can say, “Let him alone, he is mine!” But when man prays sincerely, he moves into the sphere of God’s grace, and opens the way for Heaven’s power to work.

As the shadows of his own impending execution deepened, in what connection did Paul mention Onesiphorus’ family? 2 Tim. 4:19.

The family of Onesiphorus had been of great help to Paul and in memory was still a comfort. Only as we aspire to character qualities shall we attain to them. As we observe patience, tolerance, and love in one another we want to become like Him. The most inspired example is Jesus. By beholding Him we are changed into His likeness.



Hannah—Pious Wife and Mother

MEMORY TEXT: “Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul” (Ps. 25:1).

The Scriptures record the stories of several childless couples. There were Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Manoah and his wife, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Elkanah and Hannah. When a son was eventually born to each of these, he was to fill a very special place in the plans of God. In each case the mother had an unusual responsibility in training her child.

The time that some of these specially called children lived at home was limited. It may be that Hannah had only three years to train her son Samuel. But during the time she had she accomplished more than some mothers do in a lifetime. Does this not suggest that quality of early training is more vital to the future of a child’s development than the quantity of years with his mother?

Hannah, Elkanah’s first wife, was barren. For a Hebrew woman, that was pure anguish. To add to this continual ache within her soul, she must share her husband’s love with another woman. But the anguish must deepen yet. As the children of this Peninah multiplied, her arrogance made Hannah’s life an unbearable and constant misery. Scripture is exhibiting here that the married joy of Eden is still God’s best plan.

When after Hannah, in great faith and courage, commits her life and future entirely to God, the Lord intervenes. Through His weak and not too worthy representative, the high priest Eli, He commends Hannah’s petition for a son. Content and trusting, she returns home to await the outcome of her prayer. In due course, the Lord grants her boon. Fulfilled and joyous, Hannah does not forget or withhold her pledge to the Lord of her babe for a lifetime of service. She devotes her days to rearing him in preparation for the awesome separation ahead.

We shall notice the scriptural portrayal of the ideals in marriage and shall study with deepening admiration the reactions of Hannah in the face of almost unbearable ridicule and rejection. We shall get a glimpse of the efficacy of divine counseling and therapy and will note the prophetic nature of Hannah’s praise poem and her insights into God’s purpose. The lesson will conclude with a consideration of Hannah as a mother and the results of her training of Samuel. Few mothers since Eve deserve more credit than does Hannah.

Part 1—Pious Family

“This man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh” (1 Sam. 1:3).

Even though the evil and degenerate sons of Eli were the ministers of the sanctuary, Elkanah, the Levite, regularly attended the services at Shiloh. Because the services of the sanctuary were despised and the worshipers disgusted, Elkanah might have argued that as a Levite he could do better elsewhere and therefore refrain from attendance. In spite of conditions described in 1 Samuel 2:12-17, there were faithful people like Elkanah and Hannah.

In what ways do the Old Testament Scriptures treat multiple marriages in a devout family setting?

As in certain countries and cultures today, there were in Old Testament times many instances in which a man took more than one woman as wife. This seems sometimes to be related to the fact that the first wife is unable to bear a child, especially a son and heir. Divine instruction, however, gave no support to this custom, and some outstanding characters found grief in following it. (See Gen. 21:8, 14; 30:1-24.)

What does the fact that Hannah is the first wife to be mentioned indicate regarding the status of Peninnah? 1 Sam. 1:2.

The fact that Hannah is mentioned ahead of Peninnah suggests that Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. It would be customary for Elkanah to decide that since Hannah could not have a child, he should marry another woman to build a family. But here, as in other instances in which God's original plan was broken, problems arose—even in a devout family—and hostility and heartache resulted.

What effect did careful religious observances in Elkanah's home have on domestic tranquility? 1 Sam. 1:3, 6.

The home of Elkanah, the Levite, was evidently characterized by outward acts of piety. Even the yearly festivals found the entire family at the sanctuary. But this round of religious ceremonial worship was no guarantee that the lives of all the worshipers were acceptable to heaven. Peninnah even used these occasions to taunt her rival, and Elkanah's efforts to reassure Hannah seemed only to deepen the injury.

FURTHER STUDY: 1 Tim. 3:2; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 569.

Part 2—Family Tensions

“When the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife . . . portions: but unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion” (1 Sam. 1:4, 5).

During the festivities that followed the thank offering, Elkanah gave gifts to each member of his family, and a double portion (NIV) was given to Hannah, signifying that his affection for her was the same as if she had a son.

What effect did this special generosity of Elkanah's have on Peninnah? 1 Sam. 1:6.

The jealousy of Peninnah, whose feelings of insecurity in the family were undoubtedly intensified, led her to overreact against Hannah with ridicule of her childlessness. What a tragic build-up of anguish for both women, and what a dilemma for Elkanah once he had taken a second wife!

In what ways did Hannah react to her persecution? 1 Sam. 1:7-10.

When Hannah could stand the family pressures no longer, she left to be by herself. Perhaps in her anguish she felt that she might give way to anger or even revenge against her tormentor. Her decision gave her time to gain poise by being alone with the Lord at His house. Oblivious of the presence of Eli, the high priest, she poured out her feelings to the Lord and learned that the best counsel comes from Heaven when the distressed are alone with God.

What was the significance of Elkanah's appeal to Hannah? 1 Sam. 1:8.

Unable to extricate himself from the problems in which his decision to marry a second wife had entangled him, Elkanah tried to help the situation by protesting and proving his love to Hannah. While his affection was surely genuine enough, it only stirred up feelings of resentment in the rival family. Did he know the history of Abraham? If he too had waited God's good timing, he and Hannah, with less heartache, would have had the son for which they yearned.

THINK IT THROUGH: What forces common to human experience produced family tensions in the home of Elkanah?

FURTHER STUDY: Ps. 56:4-9; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 569, 570.

Part 3—Patience Under Reproach

“She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore” (1 Sam. 1:10).

Only one who has shared Hannah’s fruitless longings for a child can know of the depth of Hannah’s “bitterness of soul.” When she could contain herself no longer nor find solace and counsel from any earthly source, she carried her burdens to the sacred court and its symbols of salvation. She poured out her heart in prayer to God. She did not pretend that all was well, but in bitter intensity she told every thought and feeling to her heavenly Father. She was certainly carrying out the apostle’s later recommendation: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

While she was praying, what did Eli, the high priest, think? 1 Sam. 1:9, 12, 13.

Conditions in Israel had become so bad that Eli, the high priest of the house of God, concluded that Hannah was drunk like so many other worshippers. While circumstances might have contributed to Eli’s hasty judgment, the high priest was wrong in making his value judgment against Hannah. How careful we must be not to judge by appearances only!

What would lead Eli to interpret her actions in the way he did? 1 Sam. 2:12, 13. (Compare Hosea 4:9.)

The priesthood had deteriorated, and the principle later articulated by Hosea (4:9) had produced dire results. The people were evidently as bad as the priests, and Eli suspected that this distraught woman pouring out her soul in prayer to God was actually a drunken hypocrite. What a pathetic picture this is of the judgmental Eli operating in a depraved society!

With what quiet words did Hannah respond to his false accusation? 1 Sam. 1:15, 16.

How respectful and gentle Hannah was! She might have resorted to vehement self-defense, but instead her honesty and piety breathed through her response to this false accusation. She proved the validity of Solomon’s observation that “a soft answer turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15:1). Persecuted at home, misjudged by the pastor in church, apparently deprived of God’s blessing in childbearing, Hannah nevertheless maintained her faith and her faithfulness.

Part 4—God Intervenes

“Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (1 Sam. 1:17).

Eli immediately realized his blunder and moved from accusation (verse 14) to benediction, “Go in peace!” The word he used, *shalom*, also means “health,” “fulfillment,” “restoration,” “recompense.” From being bereft, rejected, and empty, Hannah would now be blessed. Was this a prophetic prediction that a child would be given? Eli seemed fervently to wish it so. In Scripture the sons of a number of childless couples—eventually granted through predictive promises—filled positions of great importance.

Eli’s words restored faith and trust in Hannah’s heart. In this story, as with the story of Abraham and Sarah, God enabled Hannah to conceive (verse 19). Again, only another childless woman who receives her life’s longing can know the joy of obtaining a child from the Lord! In the very name Hannah gave her son she acknowledged that God had heard her prayer (verse 20).

How did Hannah care for Samuel? What was the purpose behind her decision? 1 Sam. 1:21, 22.

Hannah, not required as a woman to go to the tabernacle for the appointed feasts, spent her time and energies taking care of her son. Elkanah continued his faithful compliance with the commands of the Lord. “During the first three years of the life of Samuel the prophet, his mother carefully taught him to distinguish between good and evil. By every familiar object surrounding him, she sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1008.

At Samuel’s dedication, what did Hannah’s faithfulness and Elkanah’s trust in God lead them to do? 1 Sam. 1:24-28.

If indeed Hannah only had little Samuel for three years before returning him to the Lord, we can understand that he was cradled in love and sheltered from every danger. As Hannah nursed him, she shared with his expanding mind her own piety and trust in divine providence. We can believe that she was steadily supported by the affection and cooperation of her husband.

FURTHER STUDY: Eccl. 12:1; Eph. 6:1-3; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 570; *Child Guidance*, pp. 194, 195.

Part 5—Faithfulness and Thanksgiving

“Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:28).

As soon as Samuel was old enough to leave his mother, Hannah decided to carry out her promise made before his birth that she would “lend” him to the Lord for the rest of his life. The tabernacle was located at Shiloh, the home of Eli, the high priest and judge of Israel. According to law (Numbers 30) we may believe that it was necessary for Elkanah to support Hannah’s vow. Samuel later noted that “they worshiped the Lord there” (1 Sam. 1:28, RSV), indicating that Elkanah, the Levite, joined in the dedication of the young child.

How did Hannah’s feelings of trust and joy expand her vision beyond the trials produced by her family adversary? 1 Sam. 2:1-4.

Samuel, who wrote these books of Scripture, included his mother’s poetic, prophetic affirmation or hymn. At this solemn/sad/joyous occasion Hannah reached the heights of prophetic ecstasy. Her “horn” (symbol of strength) gained power from God. Her lips were freighted with thankfulness at His salvation. The Lord was her rock foundation. Then she noted that the Lord had vindicated her.

In what way may Hannah’s prophecy be seen to reach forward to the coming of Christ? 1 Sam. 2:10.

This is the first place in Scripture in which “anointed” or “Messiah” occurs. For centuries students have taken this to be a prophetic allusion to Christ and have pointed out the similarity between Hannah’s song of jubilation and Mary’s “magnificat.” (See Luke 1:46.) There is a connection between 1 Samuel 2:1, 2, where Hannah refers to the victory and salvation flowing from the Lord, called the Rock, and the salvation gained by Christ over all enemies from all times.

In what family situation was Samuel thrust? 1 Sam. 2:11, 12, 17, 18, 22.

Except as his tabernacle duties shielded him, the young, innocent, child was placed in a family in which the children of Eli were “sons of Belial,” careless regarding sacred things, dissolute in their habits, and vicious in their conduct. As the Babe of Bethlehem later faced a hostile world, so did this child grow up in an evil family environment. Samuel’s early training and his mother’s earnest prayers, however, proved sufficient to sustain his relationship to God’s grace for the rest of his life.

Part 6—Imprint of Early Years

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Although early training is not a form of predestination, it is true that Joseph, Moses, and Daniel received careful training from their parents when they were young. Although Joseph (16), Moses (12), Daniel (18) were teenagers, Samuel may have been much younger when he left home. But however early it was, the foundation of his character had been laid. The first years of babyhood are shown in Scripture to be the most vital in child training. Too many parents think that they can train their children “when they understand better.” But the fact remains that the first years are the most important of all. Hannah taught Samuel respect for God and obedience to his mother during his early years.

How did Hannah demonstrate her maternal instincts toward her son? 1 Sam. 2:19.

While the child Samuel lived in Shiloh, his mother’s prayers supported him daily. Hannah also prepared his clothes and, as he grew year by year, she brought her gifts of love for her beloved son. Although Eli’s sons lived irreligious lives, Samuel, at a very early age, showed a strong inclination to serve the Lord.

In what way did Eli express his appreciation of Hannah’s piety, and how did the Lord bless her? 1 Sam. 2:20, 21.

Moved by Hannah’s consecration of her child to the Lord, and conscious of his own weakness with his sons, the aging high priest blessed the family in the name of the Lord. While Elkanah and Hannah had several other children, Samuel continued to grow “before the Lord” and, as his advancing years permitted, was given greater responsibilities.

How successful was Samuel’s early training? 1 Sam. 3:1, 19-21.

Samuel’s life was one of ministry, lived as in the very presence of God. First the high priest Eli and then the people as a whole began to recognize that Samuel was a remarkable young man. A summary of his life of service—that includes establishment of the schools of the prophets, the stabilizing of the worship of the sanctuary, and the anointing of Israel’s first king—reflects the integrity and loyalty to God that Hannah’s early training had planted within him. Toward the end of his life, however, he showed the same defects in child training as Eli had. (See 1 Sam. 8:1-5.)

Onesimus— Runaway Slave

MEMORY TEXT: “The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings” (Prov. 5:21).

In the days of Paul, slavery as then practiced, was an accepted condition in society and even the Scriptures did not directly condemn it. The working out of Paul’s preaching in the gospel of Jesus Christ, however, brought its eventual downfall. (See 1 Tim. 6:1, 2.) But in his own day and setting, Paul urged Christian slaves not to render “eyeservice [working only when watched]” (Eph. 6:5, 6) or to be thieves (Titus 2:9, 10), but to work faithfully for their masters (Col. 3:22, 23). He warned masters, at the same time, not to treat slaves harshly but to remember their Master in heaven (Eph. 6:9). Historians estimate that in the days of the New Testament a third of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves, and schoolteachers, lawyers, and physicians might be found among them.

Living this side of the abolition of modern slavery, and with our great revulsion for that institution, it is difficult for us to grasp what the New Testament institution actually was like. So we may find it difficult to understand some aspects of this study. Onesimus [O-nes-i-mus] was a slave, and for this reason Paul wrote his epistle to Philemon. We humans long for freedom, and when controlled by another, we yearn for independence. (See 1 Cor. 7:21, 22.) Onesimus was no exception. In spite of the fact that he had a Christian master, he decided to steal away with some of his master’s money or possessions.

Addressing Philemon in a personal letter, Paul reminded the Colossian that he had been converted to Christianity through the apostle’s preaching (Philemon 19). He recalled that Philemon had established a church in his own home (Philemon 2), which may suggest that he was the leader of the church. The servants in Philemon’s household surely had heard of Christianity, and some may even have become Christians. Onesimus could not have been ignorant of the claims of the gospel.

Years later Paul, the Christian preacher, made a powerful impact on Rome, even in Caesar’s palace. Onesimus probably learned of this; and with memories awakened by the Spirit, he found Paul, listened to him, became a Christian, repented, and decided to make restitution.

Part 1—Master and Slave

“Not now as a servant but above a servant” (Philemon 16).

Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon, and Roman law granted to the master the power of life or death over his “servants.” How Onesimus had come to be a slave, whether through heredity, debt, or as a prisoner of war sold on the market, we are not told.

Although Paul’s free nature would rebel at the practice of slavery, it was not yet time for the infant church to tackle this gigantic institution. He urged Christian slaves to be faithful in service. He had words for masters also. (See *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 459, 460.)

What was the faith of Philemon, the owner of Onesimus, and what was his position in the church? Philemon 1-7.

Paul had converted Philemon, a citizen of Colossae, to Christianity. Philemon had then established a church in his home (verse 2) to which he invited his neighbors, until they grew into an active community. As we read between the lines of Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, they were a sophisticated, philosophical group with whom he shared some of his deepest insights into what Christ means to a believer.

Why do you think Paul never made a frontal attack upon the institution of slavery? 1 Tim. 6:1, Col. 3:22-25; 1 Peter 2:18-20.

Paul gives us no direct answer to our question. There were, however, many other abuses of personal rights in the culture of his day. These were not directly attacked either. The church and the gospel were revolutionary enough in their earliest days. To persuade men that Christ was God, that He was the Messiah, that He was risen from the dead—these were mammoth tasks. Those who believed would come to see the need for reformation of society. Sometimes it was long in coming. It will only be complete in the better world.

THINK IT THROUGH: What suggestion does the silence of Scripture on slavery give us on social problems today? In addition to considering the differences between the church in that day and ours, read Ephesians 6:5-8 and *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 509, 510. Jot down some thoughts to share with your class.

FURTHER STUDY: Gal. 3:28, RSV; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 459.

Part 2—Runaway in Rome

“Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

We note that upon arrival at Rome, Paul was placed under house arrest, probably chained to a soldier but allowed to meet his friends as well as to propagate the gospel. As was his custom, he must first have contacted the members of the Jewish community.

How far-reaching was Paul’s evangelism in the capital? Phil. 4:22.

Probably through members of his guard a knowledge of the dynamic and intriguing teachings of the gospel by Paul reached into Caesar’s household. Coupled with his witnessing was the “charge” against Paul sent from Palestine, outlining the strange teachings for which the Jews had attacked him. This document attracted the curious to investigate and then the spirit would convict by the preaching of the Word.

Who is mentioned as having listened to Paul’s gospel and accepted Christianity? Philemon 10.

During Paul’s stay at Rome, Onesimus entered the picture. After his break for freedom, Onesimus must have hastened to the nearest port and embarked for a distant land. How long he had traveled or where he had been we are not told, but he eventually reached Rome. He could have heard about Paul in conversations his master had had with his friends at home in Colossae. Perhaps Philemon had personally spoken with Onesimus about Paul and the saving Messiah. Whatever might have been the reasons, the Spirit directed Onesimus on his journeyings to Paul’s lodgings in Rome and into his powerful influence for Christianity.

How had Onesimus previously treated his master Philemon? Philemon 11, 18.

Onesimus had evidently robbed his master and made off with enough valuables or money to support himself in his wanderings. Perhaps he had justified his conduct by rationalizing that he was merely paying himself for wages unjustly held back. The more Onesimus became involved with Paul and the principles of Christianity, the worse his past actions appeared and the more clearly he saw his duty.

FURTHER STUDY: Acts 28:30, 31; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 456.

Part 3—The Convert

“I am sending him back to you now, and with him goes my heart.”

“Now he is not just a slave, but much more than a slave: he is a dear brother in Christ. How much he means to me!” (Philemon 12, 16, TEV).

In spite of the laws and customs of the day, Paul the prisoner must have struggled with the question of the return of Onesimus to his master. Perhaps restitution of whatever the slave had taken was Paul’s greater burden (Philemon 16-19). Certainly he did not hope that the old master-slave relationship would be restored (verse 16). There were grounds for a new relationship now.

Having influenced Onesimus to return to his master, what does Paul say of his decision? Philemon 11-13.

As a Christian pastor, Paul wrote to Philemon, gently telling him that, although Onesimus had been unprofitable in repaying evil for good, he was now reformed and would be a useful addition to Philemon’s household. The apostle emphasized how he had grown deeply attached to Onesimus and would love to retain his services.

With whom did Paul arrange that Onesimus should travel back to Colossae? Col. 4:7-9.

Paul arranged that Tychicus, carrying Paul’s letter to the Colossians, should accompany Onesimus back to Colossae. As a stalwart disciple, Tychicus would reinforce the principles of Christian conduct in the mind of Onesimus.

With what appropriate words might the returned “prodigal” slave have addressed his master? Luke 15:17-19.

Like the prodigal son, Onesimus might have blurted out words of confession and promises of change. We can almost see Philemon throw his arms about him, forgive him, and receive him back.

THINK IT THROUGH: What advice would you have today for the return of Onesimus to Colossae and to his master? On what basis?

FURTHER STUDY: Ex. 22:5, 7, 12.

Part 4—What Now?

“Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Col. 3:22).

According to Roman law there were no options open to Onesimus but to return or be returned to his master. He could then face whatever punishment, even death, which his master or the judges might mete out. As a good Christian, Onesimus should return home and make amends to his injured master. Repentance and forgiveness do not serve as restitution. They reinforce it.

As a child of God, what were Onesimus’s obligations according to biblical principles? Eze. 33:14-16.

As a Christian, Onesimus now had a double obligation to go back to Philemon. The Scriptures require confession and restitution for all wrongs done to another or to his property. As a disciple of Jesus, Onesimus had to go back and offer to do what he could to undo the wrongs he had perpetrated.

How did Paul propose to help the returning Onesimus out of his difficulties? Philemon 19.

In his letter to Philemon, the generous Paul assumed the debt which Onesimus had incurred in running away. He reminded Philemon, however, that he himself was in debt to the apostle for the hope of the gospel. Paul suggested that after the reconciliation had been achieved Philemon might wish to send Onesimus back as his representative in service.

In what way did Paul show respect for the opinion of Philemon? Verse 14.

Paul reminded Philemon that years before, through his preaching, Philemon had become a Christian and thus owed his mentor and pastor a debt for sharing with him the principles of eternal life. He gently reminded Philemon that he (Paul) had a Christian claim on the services of Onesimus that would allow the slave to stay and care for Paul in lieu of Philemon (verse 13). But the apostle indicated that he would give Philemon the opportunity to exercise Christian love in sending Onesimus back to Rome to fill Philemon’s place.

FURTHER STUDY: Rom. 13:8-10; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 457, 458.

Part 5—Forgiveness and Repayment

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28).

The Bible is uncompromising in taking the position that the thief not only cease from stealing but also restore what he has stolen. (See Eze. 33:15 and Luke 19:8.) Onesimus had no choice but to make things right if he wished to remain loyal to his heavenly Master.

Does Christian forgiveness eliminate the need for the thief to restore what he has taken? Philemon 18, 19.

Forgiveness of the guilt of sin does not remove the consequences of sin. Forgiveness for the guilt of fornication does not absolve the sinner from the responsibilities brought about if a child is conceived. Forgiveness for the guilt of thievery does not cancel the responsibilities for repayment of stolen goods by the reformed thief.

What did Paul foresee that the return of Onesimus would demand of his master? Philemon 17.

Paul saw that the return of Onesimus would provide Philemon with a grand opportunity for exercising Christian forbearance and forgiveness. Only as the Christian forgives his debtor can he himself hope for forgiveness from his Divine Creditor. (See Matt. 18:23-35.)

In what way did Paul show Philemon his trust in his experience in the Lord? Philemon 20.

Paul expressed perfect confidence in the Christian maturity to which Philemon had now attained. The venerable apostle gently pleaded with Philemon to act in such a gracious way in forgiving Onesimus that the report of his generous act would flood Paul’s heart with joy. Then, surely, Paul’s ministry on Philemon’s behalf would not have been in vain.

“The apostle asked Philemon, in view of the conversion of Onesimus, to receive the repentant slave as his own child, showing him such affection that he would choose to dwell with his former master, ‘not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved.’ He expressed his desire to retain Onesimus as one who could minister to him in his bonds as Philemon himself would have done, though he did not desire his services unless Philemon should of his own accord set the slave free.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 457.

THINK IT THROUGH: To what extent did Paul take undue advantage of the affection which he knew his convert, Philemon, had for him?

Part 6—New Relationships

“Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel” (Philemon 13).

Paul urged Philemon to give up thinking of Onesimus as a runaway slave who was a sneak thief. He should begin to consider him as a converted child of heaven who was therefore now a brother and an equal in the sight of heaven, as was Philemon himself. In the church of Christ there must be neither masters nor slaves.

How did Paul recommend that Philemon should later treat his runaway slave? Philemon 15, 17.

No matter how faithfully a slave might serve his master, the infirmities of old age would one day slow him down and eventually bring his service to an end. But Philemon should now regard Onesimus as a brother and friend with whom he had the privilege of living forever in the eternal kingdom of God. Prior to this the two men were master and slave, but now in Christ they were partners in service to Him and their fellowmen.

In what ways did Paul show his confidence in the transforming power of grace, both in the life of Onesimus and in that of Philemon? Philemon 21.

Now Paul uses his authority as pastor, strongly hinting that Philemon behave as a true Christian and accept Onesimus back into full Christian fellowship and the family relationship. He ended his appeal by expressing confidence that Philemon would go well beyond the “second mile.”

Upon what conditions would Philemon be forgiven his own sins? Matt. 6:14, 15.

In the Scriptures the forgiveness of Heaven is granted only to the forgiving on earth. Those who cherish the spirit of revenge and withhold forgiveness will themselves not be forgiven. The Epistle to Philemon is a beautiful illustration of the application of forgiveness for the truly repentant.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do you really think that God wished Onesimus to return to his master with the danger that he might be handed over to the Roman authorities to be put to death?



Ruth—Helpful Daughter-In-Law

MEMORY TEXT: “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:8).

Ruth was a Moabite. Her ancestors were descended from incest (Gen. 19:30-38). She was a member of the nation which plotted to destroy Israel through Balaam’s incantations (Num. 22:1-6) and then eventually succeeded even more through seduction of Israel’s youth (Num. 25:1-9, 16-18). The Moabites were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and through the years they continually quarreled with Israel. The Lord forbade Moabites from entering Israel (Deut. 23:3).

The times in which Ruth lived were barbaric and lawless, an age when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). (See also Judges 17:6; compare Deut. 12:8.) Even the worship of God had become a formality and the leading priests were degenerate (1 Sam. 2:12-17). God allowed the affliction of famine (Ruth 1:1) to test His people. The family of Elimelech decided to take the law into its own hands, disobey the Lord’s requirement that His people should occupy Palestine (Deut. 1:8; 6:10), and leave Bethlehem for Moab.

Elimelech’s son Chilion married Orpah, and his son Mahlon was wed to Ruth, both Moabites—mixed marriages forbidden by the Lord. Instead of bettering his lot, Elimelech died, and his death was followed by the deaths of his two sons, leaving three widows.

On Naomi’s resolve to return to Bethlehem, Orpah decided to stay in her homeland. Ruth, however, determined to accompany her mother-in-law wherever she might go. This week we shall study the life of Ruth and especially consider the outcome of her decision to migrate to Israel.

Her resolve to accept the God of the Hebrews not only revolutionized her own life but also changed the history of the world. The character development of this once heathen woman is an illustration of the power of grace working in the sphere of God’s patient tolerance, and her kinsman/redeemer Boaz is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s mercy for all mankind permits a heathen woman to enter the lineage of David and the Son of David!

Part 1—Time of Trouble

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

A study of the concluding chapters of the book of Judges reveals every man doing what he would, without regard to what pleased God or was a blessing to his fellows. In this environment even good persons are influenced to compromise on their adherence to the expressed requirements of God. A way may appear to be advantageous in the immediate context but can prove disastrous in the long run. (See Prov. 14:12; 16:25.)

What brought about the departure of Elimelech and his family from their home town? Judges 21:25; Ruth 1:1, 2. (See Judges 18 through 21 for background.)

“A drought that affected the territory of Judah would not necessarily affect the tableland of Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea. Moab was blessed with an abundant supply of water, a rich soil, and semitropical vegetation. Its people spoke a language closely akin to that of the Hebrews.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 429.

The terrible social conditions in Israel, coupled with a severe famine in Bethlehem, influenced Elimelech and Naomi to take their two sons and look for better things among the heathen Moabites. They might have argued that there were many good persons among nonbelievers; and because things had not gone too well in Bethlehem, they should leave “to improve themselves.” This reasoning, with variations, may be heard among God’s people today. Because God had ordered His people to maintain their own inherited portions, it amounted to disobedience for Elimelech to abandon his.

In the light of God’s attitude toward mixed marriages, do you think the Lord approved of Mahlon’s marriage to Ruth? Ruth 1:4; Deut. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15.

It is not surprising that the two boys, Mahlon and Chilion, growing up among the Moabites, would sooner or later fall in love with Moabitish young women. Both boys eventually married out of the faith. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God has pointedly forbidden such marriages. Yet Ruth is finally accepted.

What eventually became of Elimelech and his family? Ruth 1:3, 5.

FURTHER STUDY: Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23-25; *The Adventist Home*, p. 67.

Part 2—Return to Israel

“Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6).

The three widows must have discussed the future often. Then one day Naomi heard good news from her far-off homeland: the Lord had granted His people bread! She might have thought, “A little more patience, a little trust, and we would be home now instead of here in a foreign land.” Naomi decided to return home.

In view of Naomi’s appeal to her daughter-in-law to seek for “rest” or fulfillment of life, what do you think were the motives for Orpah’s decision to return home? Ruth 1:8-14.

The two Moabite young widows must have listened to Naomi’s announcement with many fears and questionings. According to custom they had left their families and joined the family of their husbands. Now they had to make a radical and sorrowful decision once more. With tears and kisses Orpah decided to start back home. Ruth clung to her mother-in-law.

What were the motives for the convictions expressed by Ruth? Ruth 1:16, 17.

Shall we suppose Ruth had learned from her husband to love and worship the true God whose character her mother-in-law had also represented to her? Did she realize that it would be difficult to continue her worship were she to return to her home and be married to a Moabite man? She resolved to immigrate to Israel.

An analysis of Ruth’s statement of purpose reveals that she had given the matter careful thought. She first expressed her love and loyalty to Naomi as a person. She then affirmed her acceptance of Naomi’s people, Israel, as her own. Their ways and philosophy she was ready to adopt. Her most telling point had to do with her newly adopted religion. Until her death she vowed to remain true to her new God and His way of life.

THINK IT THROUGH: What lessons in trust and obedience did Naomi’s troubles lead her to teach her daughter-in-law?

FURTHER STUDY: *Christ’s Object Lessons*, “The Lord’s Vineyard,” p. 301; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 19.

Part 3—Gleaning Barley

“They two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?” (Ruth 1:19).

No sooner had decisions been reached than action was taken. Orpah left, and Naomi and Ruth resumed their journey back to Bethlehem. On their entry into town Naomi found herself among friends who spread the word of her return. It was harvest time! She had left in a famine (Ruth 1:1) afraid of the local difficulties. She returned after irreversible tragedy and found God blessing His own.

What did her daughter-in-law volunteer to do for Naomi? Ruth 2:1-3.

The energetic, enterprising, and helpful Ruth immediately volunteered to glean. The field she began to glean happened to belong to Boaz, whom Ruth, of course, could not know was a kinsman of Elimelech and Naomi. “Hap” (happen) means chance. But was it? Or was it a providence?

In what ways did divine provision anticipate and allow for the poor in Israel? Deut. 24:19, 21.

The benign laws covering gleaning that the Lord had given to Israel long before were designed for just such circumstances as now confronted Naomi and Ruth. These laws had a threefold thrust: (1) to teach landowners to exercise generosity; (2) to enable the needy to develop initiative; (3) to bring honor and gratitude to the name of God because of His kindly forethought.

What character qualities did Boaz, the wealthy Hebrew landowner, discern in the stranger, Ruth? Ruth 2:4-17.

Boaz was a pious and godly man whose servants reflected his character. Cherishing no race prejudice against a Moabite, he allowed her to stay in “the house,” or field shelter, and urged her to remain close to his women because he understood the violence of the age. Boaz reminded Ruth that he was aware of her love for her mother-in-law and offered a prayer that God would reward her *works* because of her *trust* and submission to the protection of the wings of “the Lord, the God of Israel” (Ruth 2:12, RSV).

FURTHER STUDY: Lev. 19:9; 23:22.

Part 4—Kinsman-Redeemer

“Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen” (Ruth 2:20).

Naomi was thrilled by the way events were turning out. Surprised by how speedily Ruth had obtained enough barley, she was even more delighted on learning the identity of the kindly farmer. Naomi remembered the law of redemption and saw its implication for Ruth.

What responsibilities had the Lord placed on a kinsman/redeemer relationship? Deut. 25:5-10.

The term “near of kin” (*goel* in Hebrew) means one granted authority to “redeem” his near relative. In order for this function to operate, a relative’s property might be in the hands of a creditor, or there might be a childless widow with no prospect of her husband’s name surviving, or someone might be in personal danger. The kinsman/redeemer must then do all in his power to restore the situation to normal. He must buy back the property, marry the widow so that their first son would perpetuate the line of the dead husband, and protect the endangered lineage.

What was the purpose of the plan which Naomi devised? Ruth 3:1-7.

Naomi proposed that Ruth go to Boaz and appraise him of their economic situation and her own personal needs. The plan seems odd to us with our social conventions, but evidently it was part of the culture of the day and seems not to have raised any eyebrows. If the divine regulations were on the side of the conduct of Naomi and Ruth, then in carrying out this plan they could claim the blessing of Heaven.

What did the “fear” shown by Boaz indicate concerning his character? Ruth 3:8.

Boaz, although at first startled by the presence of a woman, understood the situation immediately and promised to help Ruth. His “fear” suggests that he jealously guarded his reputation and did not wish his good name to be tarnished. Boaz was certainly a godly, clean-living man, eager and ready to serve the Lord.

FURTHER STUDY: Lev. 25:25, 47-49.

Part 5—Betrothal

“He said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman” (Ruth 3:9).

In response to Boaz’s startled inquiry, Ruth explained his relationship to her and his responsibilities. Boaz’s estimate of Ruth’s virtue shows he had investigated her behavior. His declaration that there was an even nearer kin must have daunted Ruth, but his promise to find a solution reassured her.

What were the implications of the symbolic act of “skirt spreading”? Ruth 3:9; Eze. 16:8.

Ruth’s request that Boaz spread his skirt over her was a proposal of marriage. The Lord used this as a symbol of His relationship with His people. “Garments” point to character qualities which Christ imparts to all who accept His robe of righteousness (Rev. 19:8). Only through this intimate relationship of oneness does life grow fruitful. The Scriptures speak of the Bridegroom and His bride, and the story of Boaz, the kinsman/redeemer, and Ruth, the helpless widow, illustrates the plan of redemption.

Realizing the responsibilities resting upon one “near of kin,” what did Boaz promise Ruth? Ruth 3:11-13; 4:1-4.

The next day Boaz gathered the town fathers at the gate and explained the implications of the law as it applied to Ruth and Naomi. He then pointed out to the nearest of kin his responsibility. This kinsman little sensed his privileges when he surrendered to Boaz his right to redeem the needy ones.

Following the failure of the nearest of kin, what did Boaz do? Ruth 4:5-8.

Although the nearest of kin at first agreed to “redeem” Ruth, what he had in mind was the payment of her debt on her land. He had overlooked his responsibility in her case—that as a childless widow he would have to marry her. This he refused to do lest he mar his own inheritance. His selfishness led him to shun his obligation.

THINK IT THROUGH: In what ways does the model of betrothal and marriage help us to understand the Christian’s relationship to Christ?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Desire of Ages*, p. 327.

Part 6—Marriage

What is the significance of the “rite of the shoe”?

“Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel” (Ruth 4:7).

When the nearest of kin backed out, Boaz immediately assumed all responsibilities. The foot is a symbol of possession. The privilege of putting one’s foot on one’s property was a sign of ownership. Abraham could not do this as he owned none (Acts 7:5). To take away our foot from the Sabbath means that we lay no personal claim upon it (Isa. 58:13). By giving one’s shoe to the new owner (shoe being representative of foot) the right of the former owner to trespass was surrendered.

What decision did Boaz make in responding to the desire expressed by Ruth? Ruth 4:9-13 and 3:9.

Boaz then made a solemn legal declaration of his intention and affirmed his willingness to marry Ruth. Though the law ordered Boaz so to act, had Ruth not been willing, all his good intentions would have been frustrated. It is on their choice that the heavenly Kinsman/Redeemer is able to “marry” His people and thus redeem them.

What were the implications of the levirate marriage? Deut 25:5-10.

The marriage of the next of kin to the widow of his relative, called the levirate marriage, required that the firstborn son carry on the name and title of his mother’s dead husband and not those of his real father. This arrangement ensured that the family should not die out and maintained the inheritance in the name of the original owner.

Who were the descendants of this union of the converted pagan, Ruth, and her kinsman, Boaz? Ruth 4:17-22.

The marriage of Ruth and Boaz resulted in the birth of Obed, the grandfather of David, and ultimately of Jesus. Little did Ruth realize when she left Moab a penniless widow, that she would be a key woman in the story of salvation, helping to provide the Kinsman/Redeemer of mankind. Although no Moabite might enter the congregation of Israel for 10 generations (Deut 23:3), the Lord accepted Ruth’s consecration.

FURTHER STUDY: Matt. 1:5.



Barnabas— Supportive Friend

MEMORY TEXT: “Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Cor. 2:4).

The change which conversion made in Saul’s personality was profound and radical. One moment he was a proud and fanatical Pharisee, bent on exterminating all Christians. Within a week he was wrestling with the call of the Lord for him to be an equally enthusiastic proclaimer of the gospel of Christ. Many Christians thought that his change in attitude was too good to be true and treated his attempts to mingle with the disciples as a ploy to obtain information to be used later to destroy all the believers in Christ. At this juncture Barnabas came into his own. He went directly to Saul, made friends with the former persecutor, spoke well of him to the apostles, and introduced him to various circles of Christians.

What sort of person was this fearless, open student of people who read accurately the nature of Saul’s conversion? A Levite, who counted Cyprus as home, he had three names—Joseph at home, Joses among his Greek friends, and Barnabas among the Hebrews. We are not told how he became a Christian; but when some of the Jewish converts, cast out of their homes and employment, needed food and shelter, Barnabas sold his property to supply their needs.

Barnabas was invited to pastor the church at Antioch. Realizing that he needed help, he went to Tarsus in search of his good friend, Saul. Together these two men shared a pastorate in Antioch and a missionary tour through the Greek isles and part of Asia Minor. On a proposed second missionary tour, Barnabas and Paul disagreed strongly enough to part. They did not work together again.

Later, writing to the Galatians, Paul mentioned Barnabas’s “dissimulation” before a few of his Jewish Christian friends on the matter of fraternizing with Gentile converts. In our study this week we shall try to discover how a man with the weakness which Barnabas possessed could be counted among the victors and how like some of us Barnabas really was!

Part 1—His Dedication

“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).

The realization of need is the call to service. When the gospel was preached in Jerusalem following Pentecost, multitudes of Jews became Christians. Many of them were cut off by their friends and rejected by their families. Some were homeless and penniless. Those who had means to help pooled their resources, and a spirit of brotherhood and concern spread through the groups of believers. True Christian stewardship resulted.

What conspicuous act of dedication did Barnabas carry out? Acts 4:36, 37.

Joses, or Joseph, the Cypriot Levite, electrified the believers by selling his property to help the needy. In a similar spirit, when a certain church was being built, a young truck driver stood up in board meeting and said, “My wife and I have just made the last payment on our car. We have decided that tomorrow we will take out the maximum loan we can get on our car and give this to the church building fund.” This gesture so moved the members of the church that the needed funds were immediately brought in.

How did Barnabas’s conduct influence others? Acts 5:1.

Good deeds as well as evil deeds have an influence. The generous act of Barnabas influenced a young couple to pledge the price of their property to the church. But when they had the cash in their hands, they decided to go back on their promise and keep part of the money. The problem of Ananias and Sapphira was that they wanted credit and praise but not sacrifice.

What relationship is necessary between God and the giver before stewardship is truly acceptable and effective? 2 Cor. 8:2-5.

Paul touches the spring of Christian stewardship. He declared that before the gift of “things” is brought to God, the gifts of the heart, mind, soul, and strength must be made. God wants us rather than what we have. Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira are perfect examples of opposite attitudes.

FURTHER STUDY: 2 Cor. 9:7; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71.

Part 2—His Name

“Which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation” (Acts 4:36).

Joseph, a Levite, was obviously a warm, outgoing, people-oriented person. Barnabas may mean “son of a prophet,” which Luke interprets as “son of consolation.” The Greek word *parakletos* has the meaning of someone whom you can call to your aid, an advocate. Certainly Barnabas was ready to come at a call.

In what context did Jesus use a similar term? John 14:16.

Jesus used the name “Paraclete” to designate the Holy Spirit as the One whom He promised to send as His representative. The parts of His word picture the Spirit’s attitude. “Para” (as in “parallel”) means “by the side of.” “Kletos” means “call.” He is One called to the side of the needy in Christ’s name. Personal, intimate, accepting, consoler, comforter, intercessor, helper, stabilizer—these functions the Holy Spirit fulfills. Barnabas was given the same qualities by the Holy Spirit.

How did the members of the church react to the impending return of Saul to Jerusalem? Acts 8:1-4; 9:23-26.

Following the stoning of Stephen, the Jewish fanatics led by Saul had played havoc with the Christian believers. Their homes were ransacked. Many fled, while others were killed and multitudes jailed. When they heard that Saul was returning to Jerusalem from his trip to Damascus, the believers were even more terrified. They had heard of Saul’s conversion, but many thought this was a trick which he would use to get the lists of all Christians.

As though endowed with a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:10, “discerning of spirits”), what attitude did Barnabas show toward Saul? Acts 9:27.

One of the gifts of the Spirit is “the discerning of spirits.” This can mean the ability to read character and make right estimates of motives and abilities. Barnabas seemed to have this gift.

THINK IT THROUGH: How may we develop into persons as considerate as Barnabas?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 128, 129.

Part 3—Influence on Saul and Ministry in Antioch

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied” (Acts 9:31, RSV).

So effective was Barnabas’s advocacy of Saul that the Pharisee was accepted by the believers and went among them freely. As his confidence in his brethren and in the message of God increased, Saul soon began to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles in fulfillment of his commission (Acts 9:15). So devastating were his arguments that the Greek-speaking Jews were roused in hatred to assassinate him.

What contributions were made by various persons to the conversion and development of Saul? (See Acts 7:57-60; 8:1-4; 9:10-22, 25-27, 30.)

Is one man only ever responsible for the conversion of another? God seems to employ several. Gamaliel’s tolerant and sound teaching of Scripture; Stephen’s sharp and pointed application of divine prophecies and promises, followed by his loving prayer for those who stoned him to death; the forthright commission by Ananias following Saul’s personal encounter with Christ on the Damascus road; and the accepting love of Barnabas—all were factors used by the Spirit in transforming Saul to Paul.

To what various areas was Christianity soon taken? Acts 11:19-21.

The Jewish authorities, bereft of their most shining star, continued their relentless pressures against the Christians. As conditions became more and more uncomfortable in Jerusalem, some Christians fled to the countryside. When persecution followed, they went farther. Some fled abroad. Everywhere they went they took with them the teachings of Christ and preached the gospel.

For what purpose did the apostles send Barnabas to Antioch? What was the result? Acts 11:22, 23.

As Christians multiplied in Antioch, the needs of the believers for pastoral care became clear to headquarters in Jerusalem. The apostles selected their best help and sent Barnabas to comfort and establish them in their personal relationship with Jesus. Note the expression that Barnabas was “glad.” It sounds as though he was a happy man!

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 156.

Part 4—Barnabas and Saul in Antioch

“He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

What an amazing, inspired tribute! Barnabas was a good man. Goodness consists in looking out for the well-being of all. His goodness stemmed from the fact that he was full of the Spirit. This means that every part of his thinking and acting was governed by the Spirit’s decisions and plans. Barnabas was a man of faith. He placed his actions on the basis of his beliefs. What he advocated he carried out himself. What a pastor he was! He established no personality cult; his converts were added unto the Lord.

Realizing that he needed help, what did Barnabas do? Acts 11:25, 26.

As the work grew and numbers multiplied, Barnabas thought of Saul and decided to go to Tarsus and look for him. Levi Matthew at his tax booth (Matt. 9:9), Peter at his nets (Matt. 4:18-20), Nathaniel “coming to see” (John 1:47-51), and now Saul the tent maker (Acts 18:1-4), each heard the summons “Follow me” and left all and followed. Soon Barnabas and Saul were back at Antioch to labor together.

What kind of combined ministry did Barnabas and Saul fulfill? Acts 11:26.

In the Bible story Barnabas appears as a simple, good, people-centered pastor, ready to help when needed. Saul/Paul appears as an intellectual giant with a keen, polemical mind, probing doctrines and articulating beliefs based on Scripture. What a wonderful combination the joint pastorate of these two proved to be! After Saul’s arrival we read that they taught “much people.” While Barnabas added “much people” to the Lord (verse 24), Saul instructed much people in the gospel.

What do you think was behind the name given by nonbelievers to the disciples at Antioch? Acts 11:26.

So effective were the personal relationships of the members with the Lord Jesus Christ and so clear was the proclamation by the pastoral staff of Christ crucified that only Christ, Christ, Christ sounded forth. The result was a nickname which at first had been derisive but later became a watchword—Christians.

part 5—First Foreign Missionary

“When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3).

The gift of prophecy, evident among the believers at Antioch, was combined with the gift of teaching to establish the church. (See Acts 13:1.) Christians cannot remain static. They grow or regress. The gift of prophecy guided the praying members into believing that the time had come to adopt new methods of church growth, and so Barnabas and Saul were ordained to do the work to which God called them.

Who accompanied Barnabas and Saul? How long did he remain, and what resulted? Acts 13:4, 5, 13.

Barnabas decided to take his cousin, John Mark, as their missionary companion. The intrepid three went first to Cyprus and witnessed a thrilling victory over Satan. From there they sailed to Asia. By this time young Mark was homesick and afraid, and he decided to return home.

Following the first church council in Jerusalem, what did Paul suggest that the two evangelists should do? Acts 15:36, 37.

Following their return from their missionary tour, Barnabas and Saul found themselves in the center of controversy. The first ecumenical council was held at Jerusalem to settle the status of their Gentile converts. Paul then suggested to Barnabas that they go on a return trip to encourage the churches they had raised up. Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. But Paul felt that Mark was too unstable and refused to allow him to join the missionary band.

What resulted from the suggestion of Barnabas that Mark should accompany them? Acts 15:39, 40.

The contention between the two missionaries led to a deadlock, and they abruptly parted. This frank record of the differences between the two leaders is typical of sacred history. Nothing to the point is hidden or whitewashed. Even good men may have strong disagreements and fall out. Years later Paul was reconciled to Mark and pronounced him profitable. (See Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24.)

What led Barnabas and Saul to leave a thriving church and go out as missionaries? How long did it take the developing Christian church to realize its mission to the world?

Part 6—Defeat and Victory

“So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus” (Acts 15:39).

Following the disagreement between the two Christian leaders, Paul and Silas went in one direction while Barnabas and Mark took another. In this way two teams resulted and once again the wrath of humans praised God. Was it a great tragedy, then, that these two strong individuals disagreed? Was that a sin? The fact remains that these two pioneer missionaries never worked together again.

What effect did the example of Peter and other Jewish leaders have upon Barnabas, and how did Paul react? Gal. 2:11-16.

Paul recorded an event which had occurred at Antioch during his ministry. Earlier, neither he nor Barnabas had made any difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians, even eating with them freely. When Peter came to visit, he too ate freely with Gentile Christians. Later, when men visited from Judea, Peter refused to eat with Gentiles so as not to offend these Jews. Barnabas joined in with the hypocritical posture. Paul worked with Peter and those who agreed with him and helped them understand what was right.

What had been the estimate of the leaders of the Christian church regarding Barnabas’s dedication to missionary work? Acts 15:25, 26.

In spite of his weaknesses, the brethren at Jerusalem had a high regard for Barnabas, calling him “beloved,” remembering that he had put his life on the line, risking it for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. When others were forsaken, alone, friendless or in danger, Barnabas would find them and befriend them.

What promises of Christ were fulfilled in the character of Barnabas? (Compare Mark 16:17, 18; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.)

Barnabas was a good and generous man, loving people and sacrificing in order to help them, even to risking his life on their behalf. Although He was unyielding on one occasion and was less than straightforward on another, his relationship to his Lord made him more than conqueror. It is not the isolated act, either good or bad, which determines the character, but the general direction of the life; and Barnabas’s life was directed toward his Lord and Master.

FURTHER STUDY: *The Story of Redemption*, p. 308.

Abigail— Understanding Wife

MEMORY TEXT: “Who can find a virtuous woman: for her price is far above rubies.”

“Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come” (Prov. 31:10, 25).

We probably would never have heard of Abigail if her husband had been a decent sort of man. But because he was an evil-tempered and arrogant drunkard, who happened to have some money and property and in consequence thought too much of himself and too little of his fellows, Abigail found herself in the center of a drama.

She lived with her husband, Nabal (meaning “foolish”), on an extensive stretch of sheep country south of Hebron, in the wilderness of Paran. They entertained lavishly. In the days before David and Solomon imposed law and order on the land, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Bands of vigilantes often sought to keep the marauding Ishmaelites at bay. David and his army of 600 had occasion to protect the flocks of Nabal from theft (1 Sam. 25:14-16). David then decided to ask for some help when he and his men were in need (1 Sam. 25:5-9), but his messengers were thrust aside rudely, and David was accused of being a deserter from duty (1 Sam. 25:10).

Because this haughty treatment incensed David he decided on immediate punishment. He organized his men to put the holdings of Nabal and his household to fire and sword. So terrified were Nabal’s servants that they approached Abigail (who was blissfully ignorant of what had happened) with the advice that she had better act, and act quickly, or they were all as good as dead. At this point we see this diplomatic and decisive lady acting on her own when she understood the issues. Disregarding the consequences of facing a man bent on vengeance, she prepared provisions and a company and set out to meet David.

Not only did her straightforward and persuasive words check David, but they thrust her into the developing story of salvation. (In this fact we see God working with people where He finds them. The multiple marriages of David could have been no more God’s ideal for him than they had been for Elkanah in lesson 4.) Our lesson this week analyzes Abigail’s actions as pointers to her character and seeks the reasons for her victory. Abigail lived up to the meaning of her name, “My father rejoice.”

Part 1—Her Foolish Husband

“The name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail; and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance; but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb” (1 Sam. 25:3).

Abigail, married to Nabal, the “reckless” or “foolish” one, had learned to make the best of her lot without regret or self-pity. Nabal, although a wealthy man, was churlish, that is, sour and bad-tongued. Abigail, on the other hand, was both intelligent and beautiful. She had several advantages—good looks, a good brain, and a wealthy husband. But she also had disadvantages, mostly caused by her marriage.

In those troubled times, what service did David and his band of men render to Abigail’s household? 1 Sam. 25:7, 15, 16.

In the days of the judges in Israel, and even during Saul’s reign, it was up to each owner to care for his own possessions or band together with his neighbors to do so. David and his men occasionally protected those whom they favored, and they guarded Nabal and his family and possessions from the marauding Ishmaelites and Edomites.

In their need, how did David and his men request help from Abigail’s husband, Nabal? 1 Sam. 25:4-6, 8.

At the shearing time when Nabal gathered his wealth from the wool of his sheep, David sent a small group of his men to ask Nabal to share some of his bounty as payment for the help they had rendered earlier. This was a customary request under the circumstances and certainly not unreasonable.

How did David react to the treatment which he and his men received? 1 Sam. 25:10-13.

Nabal, contemptuous of David, accused him of disloyalty to King Saul. Nabal refused to acknowledge that David had done him any service and in rude and angry terms selfishly denied him and his band of soldiers their reward. His action was not only ungrateful, but dangerously rash.

FURTHER STUDY: Prov. 3:27; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 664, 665.

Part 2—The Wise Wife

“The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields” (1 Sam. 25:15).

Nabal’s servant did not go to his master when faced with this grave danger but went instead to Nabal’s wife, recognizing Abigail as a woman “of good understanding” (verse 3). This fact reveals as much about Nabal as it does about his wife. He was the formal head of the household, but she was the head in fact. By his message the servant showed that he had accurately analyzed the situation.

What did Abigail immediately do without even consulting her husband? 1 Sam. 25:18-20.

Abigail was a woman of action. She immediately grasped the implications, and in the face of impending doom she determined to act. Without even revealing to her husband what she planned, she ordered her servants to collect a considerable quantity of provisions and go before her to meet David. She followed a short distance behind, as Jacob had when approached by the angry Esau.

What had David decided to do? 1 Sam. 25:21, 22.

David was seething with rage. To have been treated so churlishly by one whom he had so thoughtfully protected riled him. Now he and his men were on their way to murder Nabal and loot his holdings and home. This, of course, would have been a grave and unconscionable sin. But in his blind rage David could not see it thus. He needed help, and God was preparing this in His own good way.

Did David really think of his decision as a good one? 1 Sam. 25:32, 33.

Even while he was fuming in anger, David’s better judgment kept telling him that he was overreacting and indulging in a temper tantrum not worthy of a child of God. His contact with Abigail provided time for him to reflect on his desire for revenge. Sensing the sinfulness of his anger, he immediately repented and thanked God that he had been stopped short before he had carried out his wild designs.

THINK IT THROUGH: What do you think of Abigail’s plan to countermand her husband’s determination not to help David and his men?

FURTHER STUDY: Rom. 12:19; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 665, 666.

Part 3—A Soft Answer

She “fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid” (1 Sam. 25:24).

As she went on her way, Abigail must have wondered what she would say when she met David. Then she saw the company of David with about 400 men (1 Sam. 25:13) approaching in clouds of dust. She watched her servants and their donkeys laden with provisions swallowed by the crowds which surged around them. Yet she fearlessly continued on her way, knowing that her life was in God’s hands. When she reached David, she prostrated herself before him.

In what ways did Abigail appeal to David’s better judgment and gently rebuke his rashness? 1 Sam. 25:25, 26.

Abigail was a wealthy and beautiful woman and the wife of one of the most prosperous men in the area (1 Sam. 25:2, 3), yet she humbled herself to the ground. On her knees she went straight to the point, begging David not to take too seriously what her husband had done. She urged David that the Lord was using her to prevent him from shedding innocent blood in his blind rage for vengeance.

What amends did she seek to make? Why? 1 Sam. 25:18, 27.

Abigail then presented her gift of provisions. She continued pleading in language which indicated that she was aware of David’s standing as the Lord’s anointed successor to the throne of Israel (verses 28-30). Candor, insight, understanding of human nature, tact, and humility, coupled with the fact that she was a beautiful woman on her knees before him—all combined to persuade David to her way of thinking.

What request for the future did her confidence that David would be the next king induce her to make of him? 1 Sam. 25:31.

Her final appeal to David was that, when all his political troubles were over and he had been established as the king of God’s people, he should remember her favorably because of what she had done to keep his hands from blood. Here her faith in the developing promise of God was clearly revealed.

THINK IT THROUGH: What techniques of communication can you discover in Abigail’s approach to the advancing David, bent on destruction?

part 4—David’s Response

“I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days” (1 Sam. 25:28).

In her brilliant, persuasive speech to David, Abigail’s personal attitude was the most telling argument. The ancient orators of Greece and Rome spoke of “ethos,” the quality which pervaded the persuasive situation. A wise and beautiful wife in contrast with a coarse and rude husband, a humble suppliant taking full blame for the consequences of an act of which she had been ignorant, a train of animals laden with a peace offering, and simple words of godly eloquence all added to her arguments an irresistible quality.

What had been the effect of Abigail’s words on the decision of the now sobered and rational David? 1 Sam. 25:34.

David honestly acknowledged what he had intended to do and confessed that he could now see that God had used Abigail to stop him from committing violence. Candor in Abigail awakened candor in David. Her quiet and humble approach defused his temper and allowed him time to reflect on what he should do.

What treatment did David then extend to Abigail? 1 Sam. 25:35.

David immediately perceived the truthfulness of all Abigail had said. He realized that he had been far too impulsive in the way he had acted. He had been intending to kill a fly with a sledge hammer. David’s last phrase revealed that his decision now to spare Nabal was solely because of Abigail’s appeal.

On returning from her successful expedition to David, in what condition did Abigail find her husband? 1 Sam. 25:36.

On her return journey from her encounter with David, Abigail must have suffered a reaction. Keyed up and scared when she met him, she must have felt a happy relief at the outcome. On her arrival home, instead of being greeted with appreciation by her husband, she found him drunk—along with his close companions—and unaware of the danger from which he had just escaped.

How did Abigail fulfill the biblical teaching recorded in James 5:19, 20?

Part 5—Understanding Human Nature

“Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing” (1 Sam. 25:36).

Abigail must have realized soon after marrying Nabal the kind of husband he was. In her “understanding” (1 Sam. 25:3) she had adapted to the situation and evolved a strategy of dealing with him. She acknowledged the facts of her situation, ignored or countermanded his decisions when she judged best, and made her own plans to do what she deemed proper. She also took the blame for his acts and worked things out for the best.

What great fact had Abigail, the wealthy sheepholder’s wife, already shown before David? 1 Sam. 25:23, 24.

David and his men had been impressed with the wealth and location of Nabal’s holdings. They were also struck with his beautiful and talented wife. As they watched her bow in the dust of the road and listened to her wise counsel, their hostility melted. Her words and actions brought about the results she desired.

Note Abigail’s earlier appeal to David’s better nature. 1 Sam. 25:31.

Abigail had watched David’s reactions to her words and observed how his anger abated. Aided by the Spirit, she saw that his conscience was gaining the upper hand. She then made her telling appeal in words something like these: “Please don’t do what you know to be wrong. Only thus will you have a clear conscience. If you carry out your designs, you will be filled with regrets for the rest of your life.”

What do we gather of Abigail’s relationship with her servants, and how does this demonstrate her skill in handling people? 1 Sam. 25:14, 17, 19.

Abigail’s ability to handle people is shown also by her relationship with her servants. She had awakened total trust and confidence in them, and they were not afraid to approach her with their problems and to open their hearts to her frankly. She treated them in a kindly way. In turn they were ready to do anything she asked of them. Tact and affection coupled with understanding characterized all her dealings.

Part 6—Her Husband, the King

“Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling” (1 Sam. 25:29).

Abigail was a woman of perception. Like many others in Israel, she must have known that Samuel had anointed David as the next king. She must have come to realize the awful state of Saul’s mind as he roamed the country seeking David like “a partridge in the mountains” (1 Sam. 26:20). She sensed that God had wrapped up the life and destiny of the future monarch in His everlasting arms.

How deep was her understanding of Samuel’s prediction concerning David? 1 Sam. 25:30.

Abigail believed the testimony of the prophet that David would be the next king and showed that she regarded Samuel’s words as equivalent to those of the Lord. Because Abigail accepted “present truth” in the testimony of the spirit of prophecy as then manifest, her faith and confidence had grown to be strong.

Following Nabal’s death, what did David suggest to Abigail? 1 Sam. 25:39, 40.

When he learned of Nabal’s death, David remembered Abigail and sent his chosen servants, as Abraham had sent Eliezer (Gen. 24:4), to contact her with the purpose of asking her to marry him. Abigail understood perfectly. Not only had her soft answer turned away wrath, but it had also planted the seed of love which brought forth the fruit of matrimony.

In what spirit did Abigail accept David’s proposal of marriage? 1 Sam. 25:41, 42.

Although a multiple marriage was not in the divine ideal, God repeatedly worked with the Israelites as He found them. So here Abigail displayed the same humility and helpfulness which she had shown all along. In an eloquent affirmation of love and readiness, she accepted his proposal. What a contrast Abigail’s two husbands were! In His own way God solved her immediate problems to her advantage and to His glory.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 667, 668.

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FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 667, 668.



Eliezer—Devoted Steward

MEMORY TEXT: “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Prov. 22:29).

Eliezer is introduced to us in the sacred story as firmly embedded in the heart of Abraham. After Abraham and Sarah finally came to the conclusion that they would never have a child, they considered adopting Eliezer. His folk came from Damascus and had joined themselves with the more than 1000 persons over whom Abraham ruled like the nomadic chief he was. Eliezer was born in this encampment and soon attracted the attention of the chief. Eventually he was to be considered for adoption by Abraham to be his son and heir.

But God indicated that Abraham should not pursue this course. In fulfillment of His promise, the Lord granted Abraham and Sarah a son to whom the heirship immediately passed.

The noble character of this devoted steward will be the study of our lesson this week. We shall observe him faithfully serving his master, with the result that everything which Abraham had was eventually entrusted to his care. We then shall study in detail the one major episode in his life which reveals his character fully.

Eliezer was asked by Abraham to travel to Mesopotamia and there seek a wife for Isaac from among his kindred. We shall see Eliezer making preparations for his trip and for the proposal. We shall follow him as he prayed his way to Haran and decided the strategy for discovering a suitable bride. We shall follow his contacts with Rebekah and Laban and the arguments that he employed to persuade them to fit in with what he believed was a divine enterprise. We shall conclude our study with the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, and the effect of this on the future of Eliezer.

Eliezer showed, in the Old Testament, something of the spirit of John the Baptist. As “the friend of the bridegroom,” he introduced the bride to her husband.

Part 1—Possible Heir

“Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir” (Gen. 15:3).

Eliezer was a Syrian, born in the large encampment of Abraham. While the patriarch had been called by God to be the father of the faithful, this plan was not exclusive. Any person might choose to join the people of God at any time. He could enjoy the benefits of the covenant through his acceptance of Yahweh as the true God and his acceptance of His laws and regulations. Eliezer’s parents had evidently decided to do this.

Driven to believe that he and Sarah were to be childless, what did Abraham request of the Lord? Gen. 15:1-3.

Abraham and Sarah had come to the conclusion that they could not hope for a child of their own and had therefore proposed adopting Eliezer as their son and heir. Eliezer also had come to be the steward of Abraham’s household, taking the day-to-day responsibility of the conduct of business and organization of an encampment which numbered over 1000 souls. We may therefore deduce the kind of talents he possessed.

What responsibilities did Abraham place on Eliezer as the result of his estimate of his talents? Gen. 24:2.

The inspired writer describes Eliezer as Abraham’s senior retainer who was in sole charge of Abraham’s possessions, trustworthy and reliable. Through the years, Abraham had placed more and more confidence in Eliezer until he came to the place where he had implicit faith in the character and abilities of this faithful servant.

How did the Lord deal with Abraham’s seemingly innocent yet demanding request that Eliezer should be accepted by Heaven as the heir through whom the Messiah should come? Gen. 15:4-6.

Abraham’s proposal that Eliezer would be his heir showed he had not yet understood the assurance which God had given to him that his *descendant* would be the Messiah. When Abraham showed doubt in God’s promise, the Lord took him out into the starlit night and reaffirmed His assurance that Abraham’s natural descendants should be as numerous as the stars. And this time Abraham believed.

FURTHER STUDY: 1 Cor. 4:2; compare Luke 16:1, 2; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 136, 137.

Part 2—Loyal Servant Tested

“The servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand” (Gen. 24:10).

If Eliezer had been informed of Abraham’s intentions, the Scriptures reveal nothing of any conflict in his life over this issue. In fact, at a later date the inspired writer noted that all Abraham’s goods were entrusted to Eliezer.

How far did Abraham go in his confidence regarding the wisdom and integrity of Eliezer? Gen. 24:1-9.

When the time came for his son Isaac to marry—which was over 50 years later—Abraham entrusted to Eliezer the delicate and important task of finding a suitable wife for his son. The patriarch laid down the conditions on which the selection should be made, but he allowed Eliezer complete freedom regarding the strategy and tactics he should employ.

What preparations did Eliezer make for his task? How practical were his designs? Gen. 24:11-14.

Eliezer immediately set about preparing for his trip to Mesopotamia. He needed provisions for the journey and gifts for the bride and her family. His destination was Haran, where Abraham’s relatives resided.

Having arrived there, Eliezer started to look in the most logical place. The bride, of the same tribe and background as Isaac, should be able to care for flocks. So he waited by the water hole.

What spirit did Eliezer show in his efforts to find a suitable woman? Gen. 24:17.

Eliezer was a man in a hurry. He had set up a strategy with the Lord and had been attracted to a beautiful woman who appeared to have the qualifications needed. Now he went directly to the task. He was prompt and decisive, trusting that God would guide him in the details of his mission.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do I take graciously the loss of some of life’s seemingly great opportunities?

FURTHER STUDY: Gen. 15:2-4; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 171.

Part 3—In Quest of a Bride

“He said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham” (Gen. 24:12).

As Eliezer rested while the women watered their flocks, he occupied himself in prayer. He often must have prayed as he traveled. Now he felt the time had come when decisions had to be made and he needed special guidance. If only this attitude of prayer characterized every couple contemplating marriage, what misery would be avoided!

What were the advantages which Eliezer noticed about the woman whom he now approached? Gen. 24:15, 16.

Could Eliezer have suspected a family connection as he watched this young woman carrying a pitcher? Did she not resemble her cousin, Isaac? She personally went down into the watering hole and filled her pitcher with water. She appeared to be unmarried and was a beautiful girl. The qualifications were adding up in Eliezer’s mind.

What reply in words and acts did Rebekah make to Eliezer’s request? Gen. 24:17-20.

Rebekah’s response to Eliezer’s request for a drink was precisely the sign he had requested from the Lord. She in turn quickly busied herself tending to his personal wants and those of his drivers, as well as the needs of their animals. Her understanding of the needs of the men and the animals, her kindness and hospitality, her energy and dispatch, all appealed to Eliezer’s idea of the qualities that Isaac’s wife should possess.

How did Eliezer in turn respond? Gen. 24:21-27.

As he wondered with mounting excitement as to whether she might be the one and whether the Lord could have answered prayers so quickly, he presented her with an earring and bracelets of gold for her services. He then proceeded with his interrogation, only to discover that she had the right family background. And there amid the dust and turmoil of bleating sheep and active shepherds, Eliezer “bowed down his head” and “worshipped the Lord” (Gen. 24:26).

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 172.

Part 4—Making the Proposal

“There was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand” (Gen. 24:33).

Arriving at the home of Rebekah’s brother, Laban, Eliezer displayed still another quality of his life. He refused to eat or rest until he had explained his errand. Eliezer would not waste his time on social niceties while his master’s business waited.

Since we know by hindsight the kind of person Laban actually was (Gen. 29:15-23; 30:25-28; 31:1, 2, 14-16, 23-43), what was a probable motive for his inviting Eliezer to his home so eagerly? Gen. 24:30.

Although hospitality for travelers may have been customary, Laban was a grasping man, bent on making money, and with little regard for the persons he used to gain his ends. We may believe that, greatly impressed by the “earring and bracelets,” he eagerly invited home this promising source of prosperity.

Isolate the main points made by Eliezer which were calculated to persuade Laban and his family of their advantage in having Rebekah become Isaac’s wife. Gen. 24:34-49.

In Eliezer’s presentation we can see the steps in his reasoning: Abraham is a wealthy man, blessed of God. He has one heir for whom he wants a bride. I have his wealth at my disposal and authority to choose a wife from the right family. The Lord has led me to this place and has answered my prayers in precise details. Rebekah appears to fit all the requirements. Now tell me whether you will allow her to marry Isaac.

What was Laban’s response to Eliezer’s appeal, and how did Eliezer react? Gen. 24:50-53.

Laban was duly impressed. Although not an especially devout man (he evidently permitted his daughters to practice some form of idolatry, (Gen. 31:32-34), he may have recognized the leading of the Lord. He agreed that his sister Rebekah should become Isaac’s wife. Again Eliezer bowed before the Lord in gratitude. Only then did he distribute his gifts and dowry, and relax and eat.

List the occasions on which Eliezer prayed during his quest for the bride. What were the progressive burdens of his petitions? Gen. 24:12-14, 26, 52.

Part 5—The Acceptance

“They called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go” (Gen. 24:58).

Only when his business had been transacted did Eliezer consent to eat, ready to return to Hebron the next day. Laban, perhaps mindful of the wealth Eliezer represented, attempted delaying tactics (Gen. 24:55); but Eliezer was persuasive and forceful, and Rebekah was willing and cooperative, and so Laban was convinced. The return trip began as soon as all preparations for Rebekah had been made.

When faced with the direct question as to whether she would go to Hebron or not, Rebekah was clear and decided. Her response was a simple, “I will go.” She was evidently an independent and clear-thinking young woman who knew what she wanted and made up her mind quickly. She had weighed the consequences and was ready to go.

In what ways had prayer prepared the way for this marriage? Gen. 24:12-14, 26, 27, 48, 52, 63.

As we review the events, we see that the road to this marriage was paved with prayer. Eliezer prayed often and acknowledged that the Lord was with him “in the way” (verse 27), had prospered his way (verses 40, 42, 56), and he had found it “the right way” (verse 48). Meantime, Isaac awaited the outcome of Eliezer’s mission and was meditating in the fields when the caravan arrived with Rebekah.

What insights are we given into the family relationships in the scriptural narrative of the homecoming of Eliezer with Isaac’s bride? Gen. 24:64-67.

“Fathers and mothers should feel that a duty devolves upon them to guide the affections of the youth, that they may be placed upon those who will be suitable companions. They should feel it a duty, by their own teaching and example, with the assisting grace of God, to so mold the character of the children from their earliest years that they will be pure and noble and will be attracted to the good and true. Like attracts like; like appreciates like. Let the love for truth and purity and goodness be early implanted in the soul, and the youth will seek the society of those who possess these characteristics.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

What was the far-reaching influence of the mission of Eliezer which resulted in the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah? (See Matt. 1:2, 16.)

FURTHER STUDY: Ps. 37:5; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 173.

Part 6—Friend of the Bridegroom

“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled” (John 3:29).

In the cultural background of both Testaments, marriages were arranged by “the friend of the bridegroom,” who went to the home of the bride with the offer of marriage. He arranged for the dowry and made plans for the wedding. Eliezer had faithfully played this role.

Toward what goal did Paul, in this same spirit, direct his major evangelistic thrust? 2 Cor. 11:2.

The apostle Paul regarded himself as fulfilling this same role. His great desire was to discover and direct souls “as a chaste virgin,” pure and dedicated, to Jesus the Bridegroom. This love relationship of the members of His church with the Saviour is the goal toward which all preaching should lead.

When Christ addressed His disciples as His “friends,” what was He saying about their relationship? John 15:14, 15.

Jesus called His disciples His “friends” because He had opened His heart to them. He made them the recipients of His affections and directed to them the longings of His soul. They were to be His friends or watchmen who helped to find His elusive bride wherever she might have wandered or concealed herself (Song of Solomon 3:2-4).

In what way did John the Baptist fit into this “friend of the bridegroom” figure? Matt. 11:10, 11; John 1:26, 27.

John was the center of national attention, listened to and obeyed by those who turned to him. The messages of the coming kingdom of God, beyond the value of silver and gold, were entrusted to him to preach. Many considered him to be the coming One. But he was a steward, only the friend of the Bridegroom, and his task was to point men to the Messiah. In humility he happily submitted to the fact that the more Christ was honored, the more into the background he must fade. Eliezer, in his sphere, illustrated all these noble points.

APPLICATION: What can we do today as “friends of the Bridegroom” to prepare the world for Christ’s second coming?



Dorcas— Resurrected Worker

MEMORY TEXT: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

When Luke speaks of Dorcas as “a certain” disciple (Acts 9:36), he may indicate that she was well known to her contemporaries. Her qualification for a place in God’s gallery of victors was not her skill as a theologian or her fortitude as a martyr, but her diligence as a seamstress. The fruits of her salvation were revealed in her skillful handling of a needle.

Dorcas had both a Greek and a Semitic name. Perhaps one was something of a “pet” name to indicate special affection. Regardless, she was a woman much beloved. Tabitha (Aramaic), as well as her Greek name, Dorcas, meant “doe.” The female deer is the guardian of the herd, sensitive to dangers and alert to warn the others. The care and concern of this woman are thus remembered.

Another outstanding fact about Dorcas is her resurrection. Do you know anyone who has been called back to life? There are only a few examples of this in either the Old or the New Testament. Resurrected persons are very special. Yet in the hereafter most of the inhabitants of the new earth will have been resurrected.

What kind of person merits resurrection? None! The Lord has given us examples to suggest the kind of faith in Christ that will bring out the qualities of life which must be possessed by those who will be granted this boon. Dorcas is one of these. During this week we shall study her life story, which occupies only one paragraph in sacred history. We shall need to scrutinize words and weigh facts to discover the emphasis which the Spirit gives. And we shall see that the gift of resurrection is dependent on character quality as the fruitage of justification. The new lease on life was, most of all, a faith-building gift to the early church. It was undoubtedly bestowed on a worthy candidate. Her labors gave witness to the saving relationship she had with her Lord.

Part 1—Good Works

“This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36).

Dorcas led a full life, filled with good deeds for her fellowmen. Her works were evidence of the reality of her faith in Christ. “Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.

“Let no one say that your works have nothing to do with your rank and position before God. In the judgment the sentence pronounced is according to what has been done or to what has been left undone.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 381.

Analyze the difference between the “good works” and “almsdeeds” of Dorcas. Acts 9:36.

Dorcas was a seamstress. Could we think of her “good works” as a personal commitment in producing garments. For them to fit, each must be becoming and of the right color, style, and size. Her “almsdeeds” perhaps were donations of money, materials, or food. But it is possible to give money without being personally involved. Dorcas gave of herself as well as her resources.

How completely did Dorcas’s involvement in her service fulfill the ideal for Christians? 1 Tim. 2:10.

There are some who belittle good works. But “the righteousness of Christ consists of right actions and good works from pure, unselfish motives.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 528. Abraham is the example of *faith* in Paul’s writings and the example of *works* in James’s epistle. There is no conflict. Works were evidence of the reality of the faith to claim God’s promises. Faith and works are thus shown by both New Testament writers to go hand in hand.

What was the extent of Dorcas’s kind acts? Acts 9:36.

The form of Luke’s verb “she did” indicates that her activity was habitual, not spasmodic. Our characters, too, “are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine. . . .

“It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. . . . Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

Part 2—Fruit of Faith

“God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14).

It is on the basis of the “good works” that accompany genuine faith in the saving merits of Christ that the decisions of the last judgment hinge. When God sits to weigh actions (1 Sam. 2:3) in “the balances of the sanctuary” (Ellen G. White, *Letter 8*, 1900), He scrutinizes every human work. It is on the basis of the works that are the evidence of saving faith in the experience of a Christian that he will be either “justified” or “condemned.”

In parallel to the experience of Dorcas, we may ask how the “works” of Cornelius affected his rank in heaven. Acts 10:31.

In the story of the conversion of Cornelius we are informed that his good works, called “alms” (acts of mercy or compassion), were remembered before God. These received divine approval as the visible evidence of the faith in Jesus’ merits that justified him.

What part do verbal “works” play in justification? Matt. 12:36, 37.

How does Christ the Judge (John 5:22) regard “good works” in His followers? Matt. 25:34, 35, 41-43.

“Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 637.

At the same time the pen of inspiration makes it clear that good works are not the *ground* of the believer’s acceptance with God. They are the *fruit* of his acceptance based upon his faith in the all-sufficient merits of the imputed righteousness of Christ. What Christ is saying is that our actions demonstrate the extent that His love has been absorbed in our lives. It is not enough to claim to be the Lord’s. We must demonstrate His rulership in our lives (Matt. 7:18-23). To keep this matter in clear perspective is a constant call for diligence in study of the Word.

FURTHER STUDY: *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 226, 227.

Part 3—Hope Meets Despair

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). (Compare Acts 9:36, 37.)

The knowledge of Christ’s promise must have been spread through all the communities in which the gospel was preached. The Lord’s assurance regarding the possibility of resurrection for the dead came vividly to the minds of the believers in Joppa on the occasion of the death of their beloved friend. They had good reason to miss Dorcas. Her “good deeds had made her greatly beloved. She was a worthy disciple of Jesus, and her life was filled with acts of kindness. She knew who needed comfortable clothing and who needed sympathy, and she freely ministered to the poor and the sorrowful. Her skillful fingers were more active than her tongue.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 131. Although the believers went ahead and prepared her body for burial, hope lived powerfully in their hearts.

What do you think the believers hoped Peter might be able to do when he arrived in Joppa? Acts 9:38.

The faith of these Christians in Joppa is amazing. They invited Peter to help them *after* Dorcas was dead. He must have reminded them of the power of Christ to heal and restore. Is there something lacking in our faith or experience today? Would we ever think of asking someone to pray for a resurrection?

On Peter’s arrival at the home of death, what did the friends of Dorcas do? Acts 9:39.

Peter was greeted by several widows, weeping over the death of their benefactor. Joppa was a port city from which mariners went forth to sail the seven seas. As the craft were not as seaworthy as ships today, some of these sailors never returned. Is it possible that some of their destitute families formed a stratum of society to which Dorcas devoted her energies?

THINK IT THROUGH: If you were invited to a chamber of terminal illness or death, would you pray for a healing or a resurrection? Why did Peter? (See Acts 9:40.)

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 131.

part 4—Prayer of Faith

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).

Peter had listened to Christ in times past as He communed with the twelve apostles and then sent them forth. Associated with their preaching ministry, the Lord combined an incredible directive: “Raise the dead.” Now Peter, confronted with a dead woman, was led by the Spirit to claim the promise as part of his commission.

Why do you think Peter made this immediate response to his friends from Joppa? Acts 9:39.

Peter did not hesitate a moment. As a good pastor, he set forth in the company of the messengers from Joppa to do what he could for those who had called him. As a true shepherd, he answered the call without thought of his own inclination or comfort. The apostle did not suggest that the request was beyond reason.

What example which he had seen in his Master did Peter carry out? Mark 5:36-41; Acts 9:40.

Peter’s decision to clear the room of the curious and disbelieving followed Christ’s example (Luke 8:51). This procedure should be carried out today in cases of prayer for healing and restoration. It is a solemn experience to call upon Heaven for a miracle. There is no place for curiosity or unbelief.

When he was alone with the dead person, how did Peter proceed? Acts 9:40.

When he was alone, Peter knelt humbly before God and prayed. His preliminary prayer might well have been on his own behalf. “Before engaging in prayer [for healing] there should be the closest self-examination to discover if there are not sins which need to be repented of, confessed, and forsaken. Deep humility of soul before God is necessary, and firm, humble reliance upon the merits of the blood of Christ alone.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 146. Peter thus prepared his heart. Following Christ’s example, he then called Dorcas by her name and commanded her to arise. God honored his faith, and the dead woman opened her eyes and sat up. Peter’s actions were an exact imitation of the Lord’s.

FURTHER STUDY: James 5:14, 15; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 132.

Part 5—Results of Resurrection

“It [the resurrection of Dorcas] was known throughout all Joppa” (Acts 9:42).

The life and works of Dorcas became common knowledge throughout the city as a consequence of her resurrection. A further purpose for this miracle is also stated. God raised her so that the knowledge of His power might be impressively spread. (This will be one of the purposes for the general resurrection of the righteous. By it the universe will gain a revelation of Deity in a different dimension from anything which has gone before.) The resurrection of Dorcas prepared her for an even more successful ministry.

What was the initial effect of the resurrection of Dorcas? Acts 9:42.

The interest aroused by her resurrection paved the way for questions and answers. Many must have inquired as to how, why, and by whom this result came about. The same thing had happened to Peter earlier in the case of the healing of the lame man. The people of Joppa were now more ready to listen to the gospel. Many believed in the Lord, and the kingdom of God was more fully established.

What did these helpful results induce Peter to do? Acts 9:43.

Opportunities were provided for Peter to remain for many days evangelizing in Joppa. While still in Joppa in the home of Simon (Acts 10:6), Peter received the vision by which God designed to unseat racism. This opened doors to the gospel beyond Judaism and even in the homes of the hated Roman officials (Acts 10:11-16). The generous activities of Dorcas, carried on without respect to creed or race, could have been potent in molding Peter's theology of mission.

Note that in the inspired record of the credentials of Dorcas, there is no mention of theology or creed. Acts 9:36.

Dorcas is simply called a disciple. This means she had accepted the discipline of the teachings of Jesus. The story presents its own theology. It says much about God. It is the impact of God upon human lives that is the greatest theology. We are simply told that Dorcas was a Christian disciple who worked for her neighbors.

FURTHER STUDY: *Welfare Ministry*, p. 67.

Part 6—The Finally Resurrected

“Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa. 1:17).

This passage covers man's relationship to God as well as his fellow-men. It describes the character of the finally resurrected—those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Unless the life shows active piety it will count for nothing. Not those who say Yes, yes, but those who *do*, in response to their faith, will be saved.

How does Inspiration describe the way Jesus spent His life? Acts 10:38.

Christ came to give man an example of how to live day by day in order to prepare for the resurrection. In fact, His days were filled with all kinds of acts of helpfulness and compassion. “From His earliest years He was possessed of one purpose; He lived to bless others.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 70. Our lives will reflect His as our dependence upon Him reflects His dependence upon the Father.

In what circumstances did the Saviour instruct the people that they should show compassion? Luke 10:33-37.

In His story of the Jewish man who was robbed, beaten, and left half dead, Jesus stressed the need for *doing* something to help. The priest and the Levite merely looked, while the Good Samaritan did what he could and shared what he had. His was a living faith in God.

Of what are genuine “works” the evidence? James 2:18-20.

Unless the Christian life produces “good works,” it is as good as dead. Or, to put it the way it really works, a person truly justified by faith will live a life of “good works.” The life of Dorcas is a perfect example of one whose talents were used to bless her fellows. By her works she actually glorified God and spread His kingdom. Her life is recorded for our admonition. The continuing basis of it was her saving relationship by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.

THINK IT THROUGH: As the life of sanctification filled with “good deeds” develops, how is it linked with the act of justification by which a sinner becomes a saint? (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 255, 256.)

FURTHER STUDY: Rev. 22:14; *Welfare Ministry*, p. 53.



June 5-11
Adult Lesson

11

Caleb— Fearless Spy

MEMORY TEXT: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Caleb was a Kenizzite and thus, doubtless, an alien to the commonwealth of Israel. How his family had joined themselves to the tribe of Judah we are not told. But they were accepted and absorbed to the extent that later Caleb was acknowledged as one of their most prominent members. Because of this he was selected among the 12 spies as the representative of the tribe of Judah. Later in the story he is the acknowledged leader of the tribe.

Caleb first came into prominence when the spies returned to the encampment from their surveying and presented their report to the people. It soon turned out that, while they were unanimous in praising the countryside and its resources, they had been terrified by the strength of its fortresses and the size and ferocity of its inhabitants. It suddenly developed that the majority were actually advocating that it was impossible to conquer Canaan and that the entire enterprise should be called off!

At this juncture Caleb emerged as the leader he was and the servant of God that his life later revealed him to be. With his friend Joshua he sought to rally the people to go on in faith. His arguments show that he understood the meaning of the Lord's leading in Israel's past history. From this vantage point, Caleb could discern the certainty of the road along which the Lord was obviously still guiding Israel.

When he was shouted down by the faithless, Caleb boldly confronted the people, who were fast degenerating into a frenzied and spineless mob. While one section held an election appointing a successor to Moses to lead them back to Egypt, another group was preparing to stone Caleb! Then the Lord intervened and the 38 years of wandering commenced.

More than 40 years later, the 85-year-old Caleb was ready for his last enterprise. He wanted to conquer the fort located on the hill of Hebron and requested it for his possession. What a doughty warrior and man of God this victor was!

Caleb—Fearless Spy

11 Sunday
June 5

part 1—On the Borders of Canaan

“Ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come” (Deut. 1:22).

A journey of 11 days brought the people of God from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea on the borders of the Promised Land. After the episode of the 12 spies, it took 38 additional years of wandering for Israel to get back to Kadesh-barnea and start all over again. Moses reminded the people at the end of the 40 years that they had recommended to him the sending of the 12 spies.

In what self-revealing words does Moses describe his own reaction to this suggestion? Deut. 1:23.

Moses acknowledged that he had heartily acquiesced in this suggestion. It is remarkable how a proposition from one quarter soon becomes a dynamic idea in the mind of another. Did the recommendation suggest that spies could find a better route to victory in the conquest of Canaan than could the Lord by His pillar of cloud and fire? (See Deut. 1:32, 33.) Was the Lord testing His leaders and people? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 387.)

When the Lord was consulted in Israel's planning to send out spies, what did He authorize Moses to do? Num. 13:1-3.

Even if there were an element of distrust in the spy plan, tragedy in this experience came with the tide of unbelief and fear that swept Israel on the basis of the report of ten of the spies. (See Deut. 1:27-40.)

By what methods had the Lord been leading Israel effectively during their two years away from Egypt? Ex. 13:20-22.

For two years the cloud during the day which turned into a pillar of fire by night had protected, illuminated, and led the people every step of the way. Now Moses and the people ignored God's leading and slighted His presence.

THINK IT THROUGH: How did Israel affect God's timing for their conquest of Canaan (Deut. 1:32-35)? What does this story say to us today?

FURTHER STUDY: Ps. 106:13-15; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 387.

Part 2—Spy for Israel

“The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them” (Num. 13:1, 2).

The Lord ensured that the strongest of men and representative men should be selected as spies, so that the most favorable report might be presented and the least delay should be experienced in going ahead with the conquest. The spies were to be the leading princes, representatives of each of the 12 tribes.

Of what tribe was foreign-born Caleb the representative? Num. 13:6.

Caleb was chosen as the representative of the tribe of Judah. From Joshua 14:6 and Numbers 32:12 we learn that Caleb was originally a Kenizzite. Either he or one of his forebears had converted to the Hebrew faith and then had joined the tribe of Judah. By his charisma and zeal Caleb had been accepted as a leader, though not as a “prince” who held his rank by heredity.

After their exploration, what impressions did Canaan make on most of the spies, and what trophies did they take back to the Israelites? Num. 13:21-27.

After exploring the land for 40 days, the 12 spies were ready with their report. As evidence of the fruitfulness of the country, they brought back a bunch of grapes which required the combined efforts of two men to carry. They reported that the land had everything it had been described as possessing.

What direction did the majority report take regarding the possibility of Israel’s conquering Canaan? Numbers 13:28, 31.

Then someone must have suggested that they should exercise objectivity and look at the minuses. The inhabitants were giants and the cities were walled to heaven, and the tired Israelite soldiers were like insects. And the more they talked their negative ideas, the farther faith receded. It soon appeared foolhardy even to think of obeying the command of the Lord.

FURTHER STUDY: Num. 13:1-33; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 387, 388.

Part 3—The Minority Report

“Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30).

At this crisis two true men of faith appeared and tried to argue against the “realists.” Above the uproar of disappointment and fear engendered by the negative sentiments of the majority, the voice of Caleb was heard urging trust in God’s instructions and obedience to His command to go up immediately and conquer Canaan.

In their frustration and defiance of God’s will, what did the Israelites next do? Num. 14:1-4.

The “realists,” who insisted on facing “the facts,” refused to function on the platform of faith. They formed a new organization in defiance of those whom they regarded as their simplistic “brethren” and actually elected a leader with the overwhelming mandate to organize the journey back to Egypt. (See Neh. 9:16, 17.)

When Caleb refused to take the decision of the majority in silence (Num. 14:5-9), what fate did he nearly suffer at their hands? Num. 14:10.

While Moses and Aaron prayed, Caleb joined Joshua in calling on the people to remember how God had led them successfully until this time. They appealed to them to listen to the clearly expressed commands of God which came with assurances that the obedient would be rewarded. But the people were now ready to stone Caleb, the spokesman for God, because he urged obedience to God’s will.

In what spectacular way did God intervene to halt the rebels in their foolhardy venture? Num. 14:10.

Now the Lord directly stepped in. His glory appeared in the tabernacle calling the leaders to an audience with the King of the universe. This, of course, stilled the tumult and chilled the hearts of the faithless. The Judge then passed sentence: The rebellious would be punished and required to spend 40 years, one for each day of exploring, in marching round the country.

THINK IT THROUGH: In view of the Lord’s prohibition, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Ex. 23:2), is it ever right to follow debatable opinions of the majority?

Part 4—The Divine Verdict

“We beheld his glory, . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

One aspect of the glory of God is the visible light in which He sometimes veils the majesty of His presence. In the midst of Israel it had been seen as fire or as a luminous cloud. This Shekinah (meaning “dwelling”) was poetically regarded as a canopy of protecting wings. It represented the nearness or presence of God to His people.

What did God promise concerning the future history of Caleb? Num. 14:28-30.

After sentencing the faithless rebels, the Judge pronounced in favor of Caleb and Joshua and promised that they alone of that generation should live to inherit what they had seen in Canaan. It is interesting to observe how the Lord allowed feelings and ideas to develop until their logical ends were clearly discerned before He intervened. He acts in this way today.

What sentence did the divine Judge pass concerning the 10 doubting spies? Num. 14:22, 23.

God specifically singled out the 10 disbelieving spies and sentenced them to death. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 391.) They had persuaded themselves that it was foolhardy to attempt the conquest of Canaan in face of the odds as they saw them, and they might well have been sincere. But sincerity in refusing to believe a “thus saith the Lord” is rebellion. Mankind is not saved by sincerely believing error. Sincerity is not enough. Men choose what they wish to obey, and when they have gone so far, they are certain that their way is right. But in God’s sight this is apostasy.

What does the Lord do before passing sentence? See Gen. 11:5, 6; 18:21; Ex. 3:7.

The Scriptures contain several instances of the Lord’s method of judging and sentencing. He came down to investigate the builders of the Tower of Babel before sentencing them. He did the same before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had already acted thus 120 years before the world was inundated by the Flood. A pre-advent judgment precedes the sentencing, the execution of the guilty, and the saving of the believing remnant.

Part 5—On the Borders Again

“Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children” (Deut. 1:36).

For 38 years Caleb and the multitude of Israel wandered back and forth and up and down a mountainous and desert terrain some 50 miles wide and 75 miles long. Caleb marked time while his contemporaries waited to die. Impatient to battle the Canaanites, he had to battle his frustration instead and wait for the Lord’s good time.

What characterized Caleb’s devotion to God throughout this drawn-out period? Deut. 1:36; Num. 14:24.

The Lord clearly stated why He rewarded Caleb—he had “wholly” and “fully” followed Him wherever He led. Caleb’s own opinions or feelings counted nothing. He considered only God’s will as paramount. In his willingness to comply with the Lord’s behest, Caleb obeyed Heaven in the face of the violent opposition of the popular majority.

Years later, as the conquest of Canaan neared its close, what request did Caleb make to Joshua, his fellow spy? Joshua 14:6-13.

During his spying out of the land, Caleb had explored the territory around Hebron and was greatly impressed with this country. So he went to Joshua, God’s appointed leader, made his request, and gave his reasons. Not satisfied with easy victories won in the plains, he cried, “Give me this mountain!”

To what results did Caleb’s faith lead him at the conclusion of his campaign of conquest in Hebron? Joshua 14:14, 15.

Through all the years Caleb’s faith did not falter. More than 40 years before, he had followed the Lord up to Kadesh-barnea. During the 40 days of spying, and throughout the 38 years of wandering, and now near the end of the half dozen years of conquest, he was the same faithful Caleb, still wholly on the side of God. What a good old man he was, unswerving in his reliance on the Lord!

THINK IT THROUGH: Are the notorious sons of Anak (Num. 13:28, 33) typical of the giants facing you today, and how may they be overcome?

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 456.



Part 6—Qualities of Leadership

“Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife” (Joshua 15:16).

Not only did Caleb wish for a conquered inheritance, but he also desired to find a suitable husband for his daughter. The old warrior struck on a simple method. He offered his daughter to the man who would risk his life in taking the well-fortified stronghold of Kirjathsepher. This task would require skill in planning and courage in execution. Caleb felt that anyone who accepted his challenge would be a suitable son-in-law.

What request did his daughter make? Joshua 15:18, 19.

Caleb, the independent, rugged individualist, evidently had instilled his spirit into his daughter. In an age when only sons inherited, she felt that women should also have a share in the business of life. So she boldly requested a choice piece of property from her father.

What did Caleb’s response to this socially unacceptable request reveal? Joshua 15:19.

This act of broad-mindedness gives a further insight into the character of this remarkable man. Throughout his life Caleb did what he thought was right without undue regard for the prejudices, fears, and opinions of his peers. His sole norms of conduct were his love for God and submission to His will, and his longing that the Lord’s people should prosper.

List the qualities which Caleb possessed that you would like to incorporate into your life.

Caleb apparently was a foreigner accepted by his adopted people, chosen as a spy—brave, resourceful, independent, enterprising, and fearless. Totally committed to God’s program, he stood in the minority, while his peers picked up rocks to kill him. The 85-year-old veteran was eager to overcome challenges. A victor indeed!

THINK IT THROUGH: In what ways do you think that Caleb, a child of strangers and an Israelite by adoption, was affected by his heritage?

FURTHER STUDY: *Education*, p. 149.

Miriam—Forgiven Sister

MEMORY TEXT: “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Peter 1:24, 25).

Miriam was a girl of great promise. Twelve years older than her brother Moses, she was stationed as guard of her three-month-old brother, who was placed in a basket of rushes and concealed along the reedy banks of the Nile. A price was on the head of the little fellow, and Pharaoh’s soldiers were out to get him. Hidden from sight, Miriam watched, fascinated, as Pharaoh’s daughter discovered the little craft and fell in love at first sight with the wailing babe within it. Miriam ran to the princess and by her suggestion brought relief and thankfulness to the child’s parents.

Eighty years later, Miriam wrote the second chapter of her life. Safe on the far shore of the Red Sea with the fugitive Israelites, she gazed in horror at the corpses of the once invincible soldiers of Pharaoh washed up by the ebbing tide. Then in jubilation she led the hosts of women in an antiphonal response to the anthem of her brother Moses, who led the men in a hallelujah chorus. The aged prophetess and poet moved in procession before the women in solemn celebration of a victory procured by the power of God alone.

The third chapter in Miriam’s life is written in tears—tears of hot anger and jealousy as well as tears of remorse and penitence. Racism had raised its ugly head and had spat out words of venom, criticizing the administration of Moses and his marriage to Zipporah. Struck with leprosy for her accusations and faultfinding, she was cleansed and subsequently restored to fellowship. But never more is Miriam recorded as the respected prophetess and leader in association with her brothers. Had she cast such a shadow about her lamp that its light never again shone in its fullness?

Our lesson tries to catch the dread which engulfed the family of Miriam because of the death decree against her baby brother. Then it studies the songs of victory following the crossing of the Red Sea, and next covers the years of leadership, eventually ruined by jealousy. The final section considers her victory and the warnings which help us eventually to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Part 1—Impending Danger

“His sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him” (Ex. 2:4).

The days were dark with attempted genocide, for Egypt had determined to destroy Israel. All baby boys were to be killed. We can imagine how eagerly Miriam helped her mother to make a basket of rushes and placed it, with her brother Moses inside, to float among the rushes on the bank of the Nile. The alert sister was set to watch.

On her own initiative, what did she suggest to Pharaoh’s daughter when her infant brother’s whereabouts were discovered? Ex. 2:5-10.

When Miriam saw that the princess had discovered the baby in the basket, she watched the reaction on her face. As Pharaoh’s daughter read the whole story at a glance, her heart was filled with compassion, and the resolve grew in her mind to adopt the child. Impressed with this kindly reaction and stirred to hope that a solution had been found, Miriam hurried to the scene with the brilliant suggestion that she should find a nurse for the child. And when the princess agreed, Miriam rushed to get her mother.

List from this event beside the Nile the qualities which this dedicated girl displayed so early in life.

The qualities the almost teenager exhibited were courage and poise in the face of the awe-inspiring Egyptian princess. She showed a fearless disregard of consequences. Her suggestion was to the point, and almost humorous in its naïve simplicity. Quick-witted and persuasive, she impressed the daughter of Pharaoh, who had read through the thinly veiled plot. God used the faithful childlikeness and trust of this young woman to fulfill His eternal plan for His people.

Through what varied circumstances did Miriam live during the next 80 years? Ex. 2:15; 3:9, 19; 5:1, 4, 10, 23.

The conditions in which Israel lived in Egypt grew worse from year to year. As the population of the Hebrews increased, the hostility of the Egyptians intensified, deepened by fear that they might be outnumbered. Pharaoh then ordered harsh and exacting labor to be demanded of the Israelites. Affairs worsened until Israel almost reached the breaking point. Miriam lived through these tense times into her nineties, when Moses returned.

Part 2—Song of Victory

“Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (Ex. 15:21).

Moses under inspiration composed a song of triumph in which the Lord was given full credit for the victory of Israel over Egypt (Ex. 15:1-19). Miriam then led the women in an antiphonal response (verse 21). The leader realized that the morale-building value of this would enable God’s hosts to conquer Palestine (verse 14-16) and the Promised Land. Then God would reign as King (verse 18).

“This song and the great deliverance which it commemorates, made an impression never to be effaced from the memory of the Hebrew people. From age to age it was echoed by the prophets and singers of Israel, testifying that Jehovah is the strength and deliverance of those who trust Him. That song does not belong to the Jewish people alone. It points forward to the destruction of all the foes of righteousness and the final victory of the Israel of God.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 289.

With what musical and physical accompaniments did Miriam direct the women? Ex. 15:20.

The aged sister of Moses was endowed with enough charisma and musical ability that she conducted the women’s choir with the accompaniment of timbrel (a percussion instrument) and sacred processional.

The closing psalm (150:4, margin) evokes memories of this day of victory by the Red Sea in recommending that God’s people should remember to praise Him with musical instruments as well as processions. On one occasion David “danced before the Lord” (2 Sam. 6:14) in wholesome symbolic gestures of worshipful gladness.

What should we learn from Miriam’s joyous response to the challenge of the hour of victory in the Lord? Ps. 68:25, 26, 34, 35.

Different cultures express joy in different ways. Occasions arise in which we should express our love and gratitude to God with the simplicity and innocence of a child, with great joy and praise. The Scriptures record such physical and musical outbursts of thankfulness while they counsel that all worship should be decent and orderly and “unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:40, 26).

THINK IT THROUGH: What part do you think Miriam played in lifting the morale of the women of Israel?

FURTHER STUDY: Ex. 15:1-16; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 288, 289.

Part 3—Pinnacle of Power

“I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I set before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Micah 6:4).

Miriam is one of a select group of biblical women endowed with the prophetic gift. She functioned at the time when the people of God moved out from Egyptian bondage and headed toward the Promised Land. However, we are not left with any of her testimonies.

Moses had sent his wife back to Midian on their way to Egypt. At what point did she and her family come to him? Ex. 18:1-7.

Moses, sensing that there would be strong conflicts in Egypt before freedom was gained by God’s people, decided to spare his wife this stress. With his wife and children, Moses had started the journey, but before reaching Egypt he “thought it best for their own safety to send them back to the home in Midian.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255. After the horror of the plagues and the terrors of the Red Sea crossing had given place to the quiet of the desert, Jethro, his father-in-law, brought Moses’ wife and sons to join him.

After he had observed Moses carrying out his various tasks, what advice did Jethro give to his son-in-law? Ex. 18:13-24.

When his father-in-law, Jethro, a descendant of Abraham and a believer in the true God, in fact “a priest” of Yahweh (see Ex. 18:1; Gen. 25:1, 2), arrived with his daughter and grandsons, he observed the superhuman and suicidal work load of Moses. In a kind, forthright spirit he advised his son-in-law to divide his responsibilities among chosen men. Moses immediately recognized the wisdom of this recommendation and set up a whole new organization.

What are the implications of the fact that Moses did not consult Miriam before appointing the elders to assist him? Ex. 18:25-27.

Until this time the hosts of Israel had been led by Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. All three were endowed with the gift of prophecy. This close-knit family group had evidently made all the major decisions. Moses did not consult with Aaron and Miriam before he appointed this group of elders to advise and assist him, and this displeased his brother and especially his sister. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 384.)

FURTHER STUDY: Ex. 15:1-19; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 300, 301.

Part 4—Envy and Pride

“Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married. . . . And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses?” (Num. 12:1, 2).

Moses had married a Midianite woman from the Sudan or northwestern Arabia. This galled Miriam’s national pride. Zipporah was a descendant of Abraham and a worshiper of the true God (her father, in fact, was a priest of God, Ex. 2:16), but she had a darker complexion. However, for a far more important reason Miriam’s jealousy focused on Zipporah: Miriam attributed her supposed loss of power and responsibility to Zipporah. She had told her father, Jethro, of the health-destroying burdens which Moses bore. After securing divine approval, Moses implemented Jethro’s plan without consultation with Miriam and Aaron. “Smarting under the supposed neglect shown to herself and Aaron, she regarded the wife of Moses as the cause, concluding that her influence had prevented him from taking them into his counsels as formerly.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 384.

In Miriam’s evil thought, envy, racism, and color prejudice all played their parts. To attack Moses and his leadership, Miriam and her brother Aaron attacked Moses’ wife by maligning her color and her race.

What is the significance of the expression which reveals the personal pride of Miriam? Num. 12:2.

Miriam knew that she could not fault the leadership of Moses, but when the elders were appointed, she and Aaron felt their influence with Moses had been diluted with the influence and advice of the other elders.

To what end does this kind of attitude eventually lead? Prov. 13:10; 16:18.

The results of Miriam’s pride and prejudice are an example to all people in all times of the dire consequences of the cherishing of envy in the life. It poisons all relationships and ends in self-destruction. Suspicion, jealousy, criticism, contention, and divisiveness are the ugly consequences of the attitude displayed by all who follow the footsteps of Miriam.

THINK IT THROUGH: What do you think were the basic psychological problems which caused Miriam to attack her brother’s leadership?

FURTHER STUDY: Prov. 14:30; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 382-384.

Part 5—Leprosy

“The cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow” (Num. 12:10).

The departure of the cloud from the tabernacle was a signal that God’s presence had left the place of Israel’s worship. Heavenly angels and the Holy Spirit move away from individuals, families, and churches in which the cold and critical spirit of Miriam is manifested. The Lord then affirmed His sovereign right to speak through Moses in a special way open to no one else (verses 6-8). Miriam had taken upon herself a devastating responsibility when she fought God’s leadership as manifest through Moses. To signal His displeasure God struck Miriam with leprosy.

In order to better understand how leprosy is shown to be a type of sin in Scripture, match the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| — Num. 12:8-10 | a. Hypocrisy |
| — 2 Chron. 26:16-19 | b. Criticism of God’s leadership |
| — 2 Kings 5:20, 25-27 | c. Arrogant presumption in assuming responsibility of others |

What did Moses do about his sister’s sorry state? Num. 12:11, 13.

Moses refused to take offense, and immediately interceded on his sister’s behalf. The Lord’s response indicates that He decides when sin’s consequences shall take their course (one week’s punishment for Miriam) and when they end. Although God forgives the penitent sinner, He does not remove the scars left by rebellion.

What special instruction of Christ’s gospel did Moses then fulfill? Matt. 5:44.

The Lord directed His followers to love and to pray for those who criticize and speak evil against them. Miriam was cleansed and restored through her brother’s intercessions.

THINK IT THROUGH: In what symbolic ways was Miriam’s punishment suited to her crime?

FURTHER STUDY: Matt. 5:21, 22; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 384, 385.

Part 6—Cleansing

“Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again” (Num. 12:15).

God required Miriam to meditate in isolation for one week upon the consequences of her sin and the attitude of God toward it. Without this reflection, her criticism of Moses’ leadership and her belittling of him and Zipporah might appear of little consequence to her mind. But in the light of God’s sentence, these common sins appeared to Miriam in all their stark terribleness. They were as destructive and horrible as was leprosy.

What is the implication of the final inspired epithet to one who had held as important a position as had Miriam? Num. 20:1.

Nothing more is told us in the inspired history concerning any leadership role later played by Miriam in the affairs of Israel. This seems to be what happened to her in the remaining years of her life. Although forgiven and accepted back into fellowship with God’s people, it may be that Miriam had effectively and permanently cut herself off from holding any important office by her attitude and conduct. Her critical spirit reduced her usefulness. Although silence is no evidence, it is true that Scripture subsequently only records her death before Israel entered Canaan (Num. 20:1).

As Moses recalled this unfortunate episode almost 40 years later, what did he ask the new generation of Israelites to do? Deut. 24:8, 9.

In his concluding address to the new generation of Israelites about to enter into the possession of Canaan, Moses reminded them of the symbolic implications of leprosy, and then said, “Remember . . . Miriam.” Jesus told His disciples, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). All that Miriam had been, all that she might have been, the quality and the promise of her life, she herself destroyed by her jealous thoughts and corrosive words in criticizing the administration of the affairs of Israel. Today we should “remember Miriam” too.

What lessons can you learn from Miriam, who, although forgiven, seemed never to regain her influence in Israel or her usefulness in the cause of God?

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 385, 396, 410.

Jonathan—Loyal Son and Friend

MEMORY TEXT: “The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way” (Ps. 25:9).

Jonathan was once the heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. Had he been consumed by ambition to reach his goal, the history of God’s people as well as that of the world would have been different. He might have chosen to cut short his father’s disastrous reign and take the throne. He might have used his closeness with David, his rival to the throne, to have him assassinated.

That Jonathan did not follow a course of action along the lines suggested above singles him out as one of the truly great men of history. Like Moses, his main trait is meekness, the absence of self-justification. He refused, even as Jesus did, to fight for rights that obviously were his.

A man’s strength is not measured by the passions which control him but by the passions which grace empowers him to control. In this light, Jonathan is certainly a mighty man of valor. Inspiration does not record one selfish statement or one self-centered act in the entire history of his life. His loyalties included God and His kingdom, his father and his reign, his friends and his friends’ future, his family and its eventual safety in the change in dynasty that would inevitably occur.

There are challenging intertwinings of the biblical stories of David, Saul, and Jonathan, but within the limits of this week’s lessons we shall study the life of Jonathan as the Scriptures outline it. He is introduced in a time of national danger and family stress. The relationship of the disheartened king, his father, with God and His prophet was deteriorating. Jonathan’s brother-in-law, David, was selected by God to be Saul’s successor. Under such stress Jonathan’s goodness and reliance upon God appear clearly. He gained victory over his enemies, victory in his relationship with an irrational father, victory over his own ambition; but the tragedy of his life is that he died at the hand of an adversary he previously had defeated. He died in a defeat that was precipitated by a general who had broken his contact with God by his contact with the devil. Through this jungle of troubles Jonathan marched calmly, loyally, and lovingly to his death with sure reliance on the justice and mercy of his God.

Part 1—The King’s Eldest Son

“Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king” (1 Sam. 10:24).

In spite of warnings which had been given through the gift of prophecy concerning the difficulties and disadvantages of a monarchy (see Deut. 17:14-20 compared with 1 Sam. 8:11), the people continued to demand a king. God gave them their desire (1 Sam. 8:19-22). As the eldest son of Saul, Jonathan reasonably expected to succeed his father to the throne.

The Lord had not wished Israel to have a king. He Himself was their king and still was prepared to lead them to success. Why, then, did He accede to their request? 1 Sam. 8:6, 10-22; 11:14, 15; 12:13-15.

The Scriptures contain many stories in which God answers prayers as object lessons. (See, for example, Num. 11:4, 5, 13, 31-33.) On this occasion He allowed the most conspicuous Israelite to be made king so that, from a human level, people would know they had chosen the best man available.

Into what condition did the mental state of Saul eventually degenerate? 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:12; 28:5, 6.

As the inspired historian traces the events in Saul’s life, we watch the king march into insanity and devil possession. Having persistently rejected the Spirit of God, evil spirits were given free access to his mind (1 Sam. 16:13, 14). Saul refused to accept warning after warning from the prophet Samuel as well as appeals from his servants and from his son. He ignored obvious indications that the Lord was allowing circumstances to work against him and in favor of David, but he stubbornly continued in his own headstrong way.

In what tense circumstances is Jonathan introduced in the Scripture story? 1 Sam. 13:2.

Jonathan first appears on the pages of Scripture as second-in-command of the discouraged army of Israel, beset with foes and almost powerless to resist. But circumstances do not make a man; they reveal what he is.

Part 2—Gallant Military Adventures

“Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it” (1 Sam. 13:3).

The Philistines had planted their hated standard in Geba. It was a sign of the enemy’s authority, and the prince felt it to be an insult. Even though Jonathan’s act of valor at first encouraged Saul and Israel, their will to win was short-lived (1 Sam. 13:3-7).

As things degenerated from bad to worse, what aspects of his true character did Jonathan’s decision display? 1 Sam. 14:1-6.

This passage reveals that the country was rugged and conditions in Israel had deteriorated. Politically, only 600 men remained with the king. Religiously, Eli’s successor was a faltering priest, perhaps now at Nob. So preoccupied were the people that they did not miss the prince as he left with his armor-bearer.

How did Jonathan’s selection of his armor-bearer reveal the prince’s understanding of human nature? 1 Sam. 14:7-10.

Because Jonathan was a good judge of character, he had selected as his constant companion and armor-bearer a young man who feared the Lord and “was also a man of faith and prayer.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 623. Their choice of language gives a clear picture that both men lived close to the Lord.

What was the source of Jonathan’s strength, and what were the immediate and ultimate results of his attack? 1 Sam. 14:11-13.

Relying upon the Lord and ascribing glory to Him, Jonathan suggested a simple and bold plan. The two would expose themselves to the enemy sentinels. If commanded to stay where they were, they would leave; but if challenged to go up to the camp, they would understand that the Lord had granted them victory. A more striking instance of contempt toward opposing odds and of unmatched bravery is not found in Scripture. The Lord turned these two men into an irresistible force.

THINK IT THROUGH: What do you think were the traits in Jonathan’s character which God used to grant military victories to Israel? How may we cultivate them?

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 616, 623.

Part 3—Unjustly Doomed to Die

“Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies” (1 Sam. 14:24).

When the king realized that there was a great commotion among the Philistine soldiers and saw the enemy fleeing, he immediately rallied his little band. He had previously called for the ark but now impatiently dismissed the priest. In order to force the soldiers to fight without stopping, the king placed them under oath not to eat or drink.

Neither Jonathan nor his armorbearer were present when Saul had issued his curse (1 Sam. 14:17). As the wearying battle progressed, the soldiers and Jonathan passed a tree dripping with honey. Dipping the end of his spear into it, Jonathan ate some to ease the pangs of hunger. The soldiers, afraid of Saul’s curse, remained famished, later even eating raw flesh.

What did Jonathan’s reaction reveal concerning his understanding of the situation when he was informed of his father’s ban on eating and drinking? 1 Sam. 14:25-32, particularly verses 29, 30.

When Jonathan learned of the foolish command of his father, he placed no blame on the king, nor did he rail against his stupidity. He simply pointed out the results of the decree—distress to Israel, fatigue and hardship on the soldiers, and opportunity lost for a greater victory had Israel been well-nourished.

Hearing of Jonathan’s “illegal” act, what did Saul propose to do? 1 Sam. 14:37-44.

In what different ways did Jonathan and the soldiers react to the sentence of death against the prince? 1 Sam. 14:43-45.

Saul was soon made to realize the adverse effect of his earlier decision on Israel and on Jonathan. However, he determined that his authority should be maintained and Jonathan executed. But the soldiers, who knew who was the real victor of the day, rescued the prince.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do you think it was right for Jonathan to stand by meekly when he was unjustly condemned to death? Do you possess self-restraint which would enable you to do so in similar circumstances?

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 624, 625.

Part 4—Rival to his Throne

“Now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14).

The watershed in Saul’s life was his failure to carry out the divine mandate to annihilate the Amalekites and then his attempt to justify his conduct by lying. As the result, the rulership of Israel was taken from him and given to David. Though Jonathan was now no longer heir apparent, he upheld the Lord’s decision.

What was the attitude of Jonathan to David, his rival to the throne? 1 Sam. 18:1; 19:2; 20:17.

The story of Jonathan’s affection for David is among the most moving and beautiful in all literature. Jonathan had nothing material to gain by showing friendship to his rival. The more troubles and dangers multiplied around the head of David, the more Jonathan selflessly defended and befriended him.

How did Jonathan behave in response to his insane father’s attempt to kill David? 1 Sam. 19:4-7; 20:27-34.

Through the passing years Saul grew more and more demented. His hatred of David grew to be an obsession, never out of his mind. As Jonathan learned of the plots and counterplots which Saul drew up against David, he would always warn the distressed young man. As Jonathan shared this inside information, David survived in harmony with God’s plan.

Did Jonathan’s feelings toward David undergo any changes before the end of his life? 1 Sam. 18:3, 4 compared with 23:18; 2 Sam. 1:17-26.

For nearly 40 years Jonathan’s attitude toward David did not change, nor did his dedication to protect his friend’s life at any cost to himself falter. He knew that while David lived he had no chance to inherit the throne. But his submission to the divine decision was complete. Through the years Jonathan was torn between loyalty to his father and protection of David. On this cross of a divided loyalty he slew self and triumphed.

THINK IT THROUGH: In helping David to survive, Jonathan lessened his own prospects for later advancement to the throne. Did his decision justify him in depriving his heirs of the wealth and honor which might have been theirs?

part 5—Loyalty Until Death

“My father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me” (1 Sam. 20:2).

Jonathan’s love for justice and fair play led him to reveal to David the evil designs of his father. Here is a point of ethics for us to consider. How would God view the use Jonathan made of information received?

In light of Saul’s attitude, what was the significance of Jonathan’s gift of the symbols of his office to David? 1 Sam. 18:4; 20:30, 31.

Jonathan’s stripping himself of his princely robe, his sword of authority, and his girdle of power was a gesture of the surrender of his prospects of kingship to David. It seems that his every act reminds us of the sacrifice of self that marked the steps of Jesus when He was here.

Knowing that a change in dynasty might jeopardize his family, into what covenant relationship did Jonathan enter with David? 1 Sam. 18:3; 20:16, 17, 42.

History told the prince that with a change in dynasty from the house of Kish to the house of Jesse, the survivors of the family of Saul would be in danger of extermination. As he considered the future of his heirs, he therefore entered into a solemn covenant with David.

In the face of a special danger, how did Jonathan thwart his father’s diabolical plans? 1 Sam. 20:9, 12, 13, 41; 23:16-18.

In a secret rendezvous with David, the two friends set up a system of signals by which “all clear” or “beware” might be conveyed. Meanwhile Saul desperately sought ways of assassinating David, who was saved each time by Jonathan’s intervention. When Saul finally realized his son’s unchanging determination to protect his rival, he attempted to nail Jonathan to the wall with a spear. In spite of grave danger to himself, Jonathan continued to protect David to the utmost of his ability.

THINK IT THROUGH: Did his knowledge of the hopelessness of his father’s cause ever provide Jonathan with a legitimate excuse to leave the king’s service?

FURTHER STUDY: 1 Sam. 20:1-4, 34; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 660.

Part 6—Triumphant in Defeat

“The Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul’s sons” (1 Sam. 31:1, 2).

In the battle Jonathan, loyal to the end, was slain by the side of his father.

Was it right for Jonathan to follow a leader/king/father who was obviously wrong and rejected by God? Rom. 13:2 compared with Dan. 4:17.

Saul was God’s anointed king of Israel. Jonathan owed him fealty to the end. When he realized that the Lord had deposed him and anointed his successor, Saul should forthwith have resigned and quietly gone into civilian life. But since he refused to abdicate, the Lord used Jonathan’s inside knowledge to protect the future king. Jonathan evidently felt he had to support “the powers that be.”

How did David express his feelings toward the memory of Jonathan? 2 Sam. 1:26, 27.

When he learned of Jonathan’s death, David gave way to his sorrow in one of the most moving dirges of all time (2 Sam. 1:17-27). He remembered the close bond of affection and respect which had bound him and Jonathan together in life, and he cherished the memory in death.

What was the significance of Jonathan’s last words to David? 1 Sam. 20:42.

Jonathan wishfully looked into the future and imagined his family upon a throne that was never to be. But he felt that David’s heirs might be hostile to the survivors of the erstwhile dynasty, and therefore he covenanted with his friend for perpetual protection. When he would not be there, he wished the unborn to be safe.

THINK IT THROUGH: What were the character qualities which molded the direction in life taken by Jonathan? Had Jonathan done right in his loyalty to David? How would Jonathan have fitted in as a disciple of Jesus?

FURTHER STUDY: Rom. 13:3-7; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 695, 696.

Lesson for 3rd quarter, 1983

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the third quarter of 1983 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is “Themes of Faith and Salvation.”

First Lesson

“SALVATION IS OF THE LORD”
Memory Text, Gal. 2:16

1. *In Search of Mankind* (Matt. 18:11)
2. *New Life in Christ* (John 3:1-10)
3. *Loved, but Lost* (Matt. 19:16)
4. *Upright but Confessing* (Dan. 9:4, 5)
5. *Accepted As We Are* (Matt. 22:10)
6. *Focus of the Week*

Second Lesson

FAITH AND SALVATION
Memory Text, Heb. 11:6

1. *Obedying in Faith* (Gen. 15:6)
2. “*Though He Slay Me*” (Job 1:1)
3. *Trusting in Adversity* (Heb. 11:24-27)
4. *Submissive to God* (Luke 1:18)
5. *Clinging to God* (Matt. 15:21, 22)
6. *Focus of the Week*

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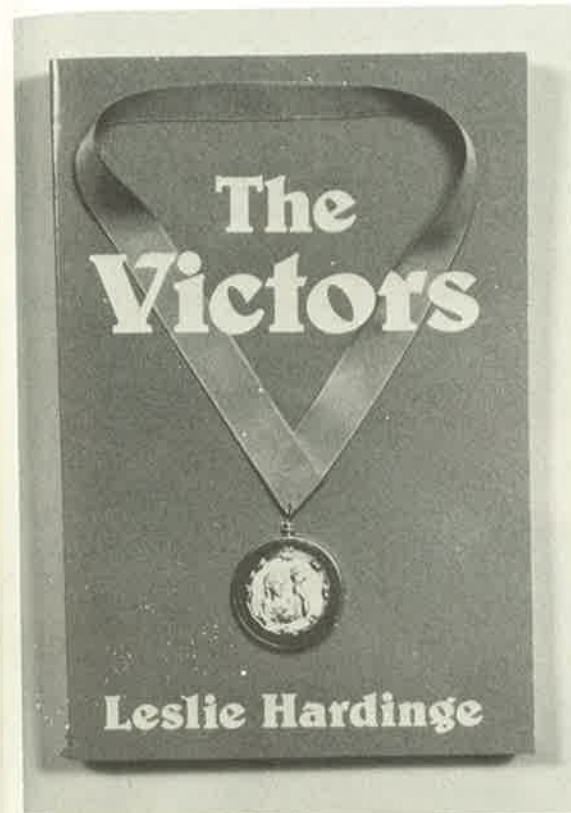
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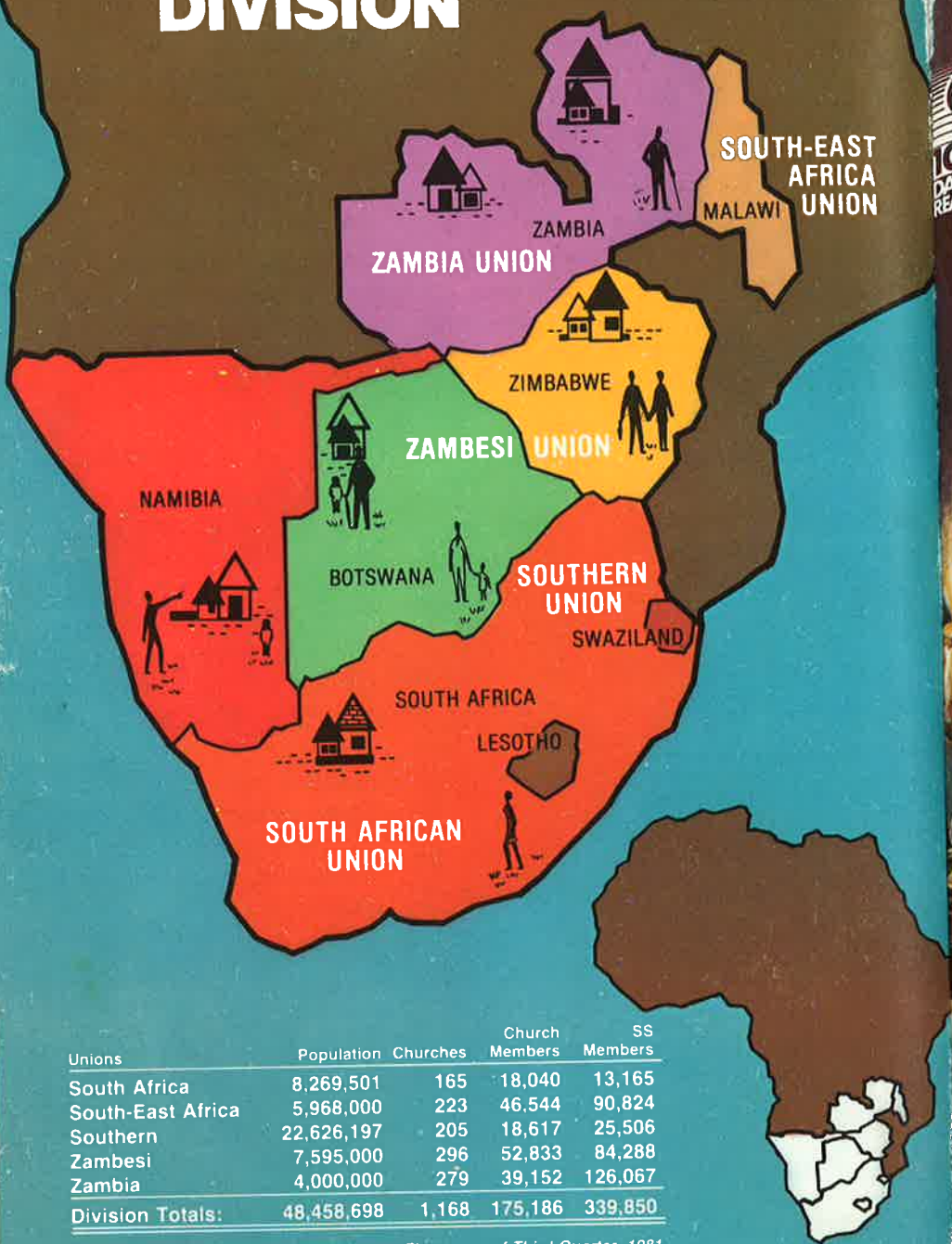
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Unions	Population	Churches	Church Members	SS Members
South Africa	8,269,501	165	18,040	13,165
South-East Africa	5,968,000	223	46,544	90,824
Southern	22,626,197	205	18,617	25,506
Zambesi	7,595,000	296	52,833	84,288
Zambia	4,000,000	279	39,152	126,067
Division Totals:	48,458,698	1,168	175,186	339,850

Figures as of Third Quarter, 1981