

Adult Sabbath School Lessons

January-March 1984



Some Were Obedient



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This Could Be a Most Important

PAGE FROM YOUR FUTURE

Available First Quarter, 1984

Actual Type Size

and. Since Jesus' death on the cross, the Christian church is spiritual. Jews are not saved as a nation, but as individual Christians.

QUESTION FOR THOUGHT: Is it important to know that Jesus died for the church today, and not a nation?

... or more than a thousand years ago, Christ was Israel's King, Protector, and Guide. When Israel refused to accept Jesus, they became

FURTHER STUDY: Romans 9 and 10

"It Is Finished"

Part 1—Israel's End

"They cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar." John 19:15.

It is not important to know who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. (See Matt. 26:24.) Jesus as the Lamb of God came to die for the sins of the whole world. Every Christian confesses that he or she brought Christ to Calvary. Christ was betrayed and denied by "Christian" apostles. The New Testament says that the Romans and Jews were responsible for Christ's death. But Jesus really died of a broken heart--broken by the sins of all people Jesus came to earth to die

When Pilate washed his hands and was innocent, what did he scream? Matt.

... of the things Jesus died for. Mark 15:38; and (3) Matt.

The cry, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15), and the death of Jesus brought the mission of Israel to an end. Since Jesus' death on the cross, the Christian church is spiritual. Jews are not saved as a nation, but as individual Christians.

A QUESTION FOR THOUGHT: Why is it important to know that Israel is the church today, and not a nation?

unprotected

1. When Jesus said, "It is finished," a hidden hand ripped open the temple veil. "And so your Temple will be abandoned and empty" (Matt. 23:38; TEV).

2. When Christ was resurrected (returned to life), other people were resurrected (see Eph. 4:8). They called Jesus their King. The Jewish leaders were shocked and speechless. What if they were to meet the risen Christ? Never again could they sleep peacefully. --The Desire of Ages, p. 785, paraphrased

3. Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. **What happened to Israel after the cross?** Rom. 11:11-26.

1 Sunday January

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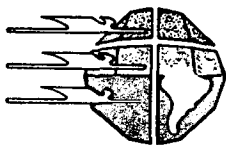
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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
South American Division
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Dear Sabbath School Members,

We are happy and thankful to God for being the object of attention and help of our Sabbath School members throughout the world one more time. God has blessed His church in South America. Our desire is to carry the sweet message of Jesus' soon return to the uttermost parts of the earth.

We have set as our objective for the world crusade of 1000 Days of Reaping to baptize by His Spirit at least 170,000 souls. Each congregation, family, and member is experiencing the thrill of winning souls. We hope to organize one new congregation and begin construction of one new chapel each day, thus reaching a total of 1000 new churches.

The Special Projects portion (25 percent) of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 31 will aid three specific programs--two in the Chile Union, and one in Brazil.

1. The construction of chapels in Chile. A phenomenal change is occurring in the religious life of that country. Evangelical churches are gaining much attention as they grow in size and number. This is the time to proclaim Bible truth with power and clarity. But we urgently need to construct chapels to house expanding congregations.
2. The construction of a secondary school in Antofagasta. Thanks to the dynamic evangelism of pastors and laymen, many congregations have sprung up in Antofagasta, the political, economic, and cultural center of northern Chile. The school presently operates with inadequate facilities under the Central Church.
3. The construction of Minas Gerais Academy. This new Brazilian boarding school will serve the youth of the Minas and South Minas missions. The first students arrived as soon as the property was acquired. They study and work under extremely trying conditions. The institutional master plan has already been approved and the campaign to raise materials and funds locally is well under way. Your prayers and offering will provide a much-needed boost toward the completion of this project.

The 700,000 Seventh-day Adventists in South America thank you for your vision and generosity through the years and wish you God's blessings as you continue to sacrifice for the completion of the eternal gospel.

Your brother in Jesus,


Joao Wolff
President

Introduction

Some Were Obedient

The object of this quarter's study of selected Bible characters is to discover the place of obedience in God's plan for the human race. The concept of obedience runs through the Sacred Pages. The fullness of God's blessing has been demonstrated in the lives of those who have dared to choose His will in an obedience born of faith. Obedience to God brought unimagined blessings. Partial or delayed obedience or outright refusal to obey always meant a deprivation of God's blessing.

To fear God and keep His commandments is declared to be "the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13) or "the duty of all men," as some versions render the text. Then surely it is of utmost importance that we understand God's will. We must likewise take stock of ourselves to demonstrate that our faith really does bear fruit in obedience.

In these lessons we will study the supreme authority of God. We will also look at the kind of authority that competes with our loyalty to God's authority. We will study the inspiring example of joyful obedience "even unto death" given in the life of our Saviour. We will devote time to learning how we might discover the will of God. Further, we shall study how God makes it possible for us to live obediently in an age marked by the permissiveness that spurns authority and subscribes to the "gospel" that circumstances determine what is right.

The Christian church at large is beginning to awaken to the disturbing fact that it has failed to preach obedience as a basic ingredient in Christian living. While the good seed has been neglected, tares have sprung up that confront us with frightful manifestations. Christian homes are disintegrating with alarming consequences for society. One evangelical writer confesses that "To escape the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience."—A. W. Tozer, *Paths to Power* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications), p. 23.

Our lessons this quarter bring us into contact with Bible characters who, far from misusing the grace of God, have found it to be a prompting and enabling factor in living to the glory of God.

However, others failed; and it appears that the Bible contains a great number of them. Their failure may be a warning to us. (See 1 Cor. 10:11, 12.)

Obedience to God is a positive Christian virtue. "Upon obedience depends life and happiness, health and joy, of men, women, and children. Obedience is for their well-being in this life and in the life to come."—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 162.

Surely this merits not only our study of obedience as a subject, but its application in our lives. In this way we will be able to prove in our own experience that trustful obedience is God's appointed way to fullness of blessing.



1

January 1-7
Adult Lesson

By What Authority?

MEMORY TEXT: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water” (Rev. 14:7).

Obedience scarcely can exist apart from authority. The world today is facing a crisis of authority. Parents, teachers, legal guardians, and governments find their authority questioned and openly defied. People do not like being regulated. They like to manage their own affairs.

Yet in every type of society there is some kind of authority, from parental to governmental. From the most primitive tribal structure to the most developed system of government, the matter of authority is vital. The unjust exercise of authority denies many individuals their basic human rights; but, in general, authority of some kind is accepted as normal and beneficial. For instance, there are laws of hygiene and health which we follow to our lasting benefit and ignore at our peril. Our traffic laws, although limiting our personal freedom, are absolutely necessary in regulating fast-flowing traffic, a fact readily recognized.

Architects and engineers obey laws of construction. Without such laws the buildings they are responsible for would be neither functional nor safe. Only by submitting to the laws of harmony is the composer able to give us symphonies to bless coming generations. Through adhering to the laws of perspective and design, and blending colors according to laws known only by the informed, the artist gives us paintings to grace our homes and galleries. It is only through strict adherence to the laws of aerodynamics that humans are able to enter space with planes and rockets.

Yet, in the area of morals, we are witnessing a global revolt against authority that threatens the survival of the Christian church. If God Himself is no longer feared why should lesser authorities be? The consequence is an unlimited permissiveness in social and moral terms. However, neither truth nor righteousness are the product of human reason alone. God has given us standards for our benefit—because He loves us. These have no limitations of time or place.

As we study the greatness of the authority that should govern and guide our lives, we also discover the means by which that authority can work in us, leading to such virtues as obedience, trust, patience, and peace.

Part 1—The Authority of God

“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever” (Rom. 11:36).

Not all have been willing to accept the sovereignty of God. Pharaoh challenged Moses, saying, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? . . . I know not the Lord” (Ex. 5:2). This challenge has been repeated through the ages. Sin has alienated humans from God. He who first challenged God’s authority in heaven has been instilling rebellion against authority into minds since the beginning, thus preventing people from truly knowing God. Yet, God “left not himself without witness” (Acts 14:17). Spread out across the universe is God’s evidence. His supreme authority is manifested in the following ways:

1. **In His power to create.** Before humans can work they must have materials and tools. God, however, began with nothing and created all things from nothing. This is beyond the human mind to comprehend, but we are called to “worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7). Heavenly beings cast their crowns before the Creator, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things” (Rev. 4:11). In one of his letters to Erasmus, Martin Luther complained: “Your thoughts of God are too human.” God said the same to Israel. (See Ps. 50:21.)

2. **Through His power to sustain.** No creature has of itself power to stay alive. Man and beast would both perish apart from God’s sustaining power. The amazing cycle of nature, with nourishment provided, is but one expression of how He is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). (See *Steps to Christ*, p. 85.)

3. **Through His ability to deliver.** “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). A declaration of divine authority preceded, in essence, every promise or proclamation recorded in the Scriptures. Through the miracles attending the Exodus, both Pharaoh and the Israelites learned to know who the Lord is and why He should be obeyed.

SEARCH AND LEARN

For background: Read *The Great Controversy*, pp. 436, 437.

List and summarize below biblical references that speak of or illustrate the three evidences of God’s authority discussed above.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Part 2—The Authority of Jesus

“They were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Luke 4:36).

Observe how the supreme authority of Jesus was:

1. **Proclaimed** already at His birth by angels to the shepherds: “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

2. **Claimed** by Jesus Himself at the end of His ministry: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13).

3. **Challenged** by the chief priests and elders of the people: “By what authority doest thou these things?” (Matt. 21:23).

Notice also how the authority of God was demonstrated through Jesus in the power given Him over the following:

1. **Nature** (Mark 4:37-41). From a “great storm” to a “great calm.” This power is evident over both a stormy sea and a stormy heart.

2. **Demons** (Mark 5:1-19). They were forced to yield to the greater authority manifested in Jesus. (See James 2:19.)

3. **Disease** (Mark 5:25-34). Note the response to the timid touch of faith.

4. **Death** (Mark 5:35-42). The ultimate evidence of God’s power is victory over death, the last enemy. (See 1 Cor. 15:25, 26.)

To raise the question of Jesus’ authority is to call to mind His all-important question, “Whom say ye that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). His authority and His person cannot be kept separate.

SEARCH AND LEARN

Look up the following Bible references to the authority of Jesus and note who was or will be involved and under what circumstances:

John 3:35 _____

John 7:46 _____

Phil. 2:9-11 _____

1 Peter 3:22 _____

Part 3—The Authority of the Holy Spirit

“When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

Without the work, power, and authority of the Holy Spirit there would be few believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The authority of the Third Person of the Godhead is manifested in His ability as follows:

1. To bring a person through deep sorrow for sin to a state of *repentance* (John 16:8). What neither clever oratory, logical persuasion, nor angry denunciation can effect, the authoritative voice of the Holy Spirit brings about. The Spirit can be resisted (Acts 7:51) but, when obeyed, helps us in our need (Rom. 8:26).

2. To bring a person into the family of God through the experience of the *new birth* (John 3:5, 6). The Spirit is at work wherever God is because He is God (Ps. 139:7).

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

3. To make us into *witnesses*. He transformed reticent, timid men of scant learning into witnesses who spoke with “boldness” (Acts 4:31).

“God can teach you more in one moment by His Holy Spirit than you could learn from the great men of the earth.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 119.

The disciples had been with Jesus for three years. They had spoken to Him and been instructed by Him after the resurrection. They possessed all the facts; yet Jesus told them that what they needed was the authority of the Holy Spirit in order to be His witnesses.

What can you learn from the way Philip was guided by the angel and the Spirit’s power to a seeker after truths that will be beneficial to your witness? Acts 8:26-31, 37-39.

From this instance we gain insights into the operation of the Spirit:

1. *Guides in service*. As Eliezer (Genesis 24), seeking the bride for Isaac, was Spirit-directed in his search (Gen. 24:27), so we can be guided as we go out in the search for Christ’s wedding guests.

2. *Dispenses gifts* to the church (1 Cor. 12:4-11). He cannot be dictated to. He distributes His gifts according to His sovereign will and in His own manner, but does respond to requests when He knows that it is best (James 1:5).

Part 4—The Authority of the Bible

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

There are many notable books on religious faith that influence the lives of multiplied millions. The Tripitaka of the Buddhists, the Koran of the Moslems, the Zend-Avesta of the Zoroastrians, the Five Kings of the Confucians, and the Granth of the Sikhs are leading ones. Yet to us as Christians “there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Bible alone answers our need for forgiveness and salvation.

Christian discipleship involves submitting to the authority of the Scriptures. The questions of reliability and adaptation are therefore of utmost importance. The enemies of God constantly try to undermine confidence in the Bible. Voltaire, over two centuries ago, declared, “In fifty years the Bible will be a forgotten book.” Providence would work so that the very house in Paris where that prediction was made became a storage place for Bibles! More subtle are the attempts of those who claim that, whereas the Bible contains the word of God, portions are of human origin. But Christ’s true followers accept that “all scripture is given by inspiration” (2 Tim. 3:16).

There is a Living Word—Christ. He spoke with authority. So also the Written Word—the Bible.

“To many the Bible is a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 474. Faulty conclusions drawn from critical methods of Bible study have shaken confidence in revelation as the communication of objective truth from God to man.

1. *The Scriptures themselves claim authority.* Phrases such as “The Lord said,” “the Lord spake,” and “the word of the Lord came” are reportedly used 3808 times in the Old Testament. The Word is of divine origin and is filled with the authority of the love of God.

2. *Jesus used them when tempted.* Using “the sword of the Spirit,” He countered every attack with “It is written.” (See Matt. 4:1-10.)

3. *He emphasized that to “search the scriptures” is to find testimony of Him (John 5:39).*

In what way did Jesus use the Scriptures with regard to Himself? Luke 24:27.

The apostle referred confidently to the Scriptures as “a . . . sure word of prophecy,” counseling us to “take heed” to it (2 Peter 1:19). (See also 1 Cor. 15:4; Acts 1:16.)

Part 5—The “Authority” of the Devil

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord. . . . For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, . . . but . . . against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:10-12).

Although many today deny the existence of Satan Jesus did not. He encountered the devil and warns against him. Satan boldly claims dominion over God’s creation. Notice some characteristics of his claimed authority:

1. **It is based on deceit.** He infringed on the rights of God. He wanted the power but not the character of God. (See the symbolism of Isa. 14:12-15.) When expelled from heaven he swept a host of deceived followers with him. (See Rev. 12:9.)
2. **It is far-reaching.** “The whole godless world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19, NEB). Jesus called him “the prince of this world” (John 14:30). The Bible reveals the behind-the-scenes activities of the evil one in masterminding a system of evil. Nevertheless, the cross of Jesus has placed limits on Satan’s power to deceive.
3. **It is contrary to the working of God.** With the help of a host of demons he backs up many of his claims by “signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9). The many blighted human lives, the victims of alcohol and narcotics, the countless broken homes, the hospital beds filled with humans ruined by self-inflicted damage based on the false promises of him who is “the father of lies” are evidence enough of his sway over God’s creatures. Pretending to be an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:44), he is a messenger of darkness.
4. **It threatens to “deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24).** Satan is attempting to gain authority over the followers of Christ by tempting them away from Him. Note, however, that “the form of the sentence in the Greek implies that it is actually impossible for Satan to deceive those who love and serve God with sincerity.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 501.
5. **It is soon to be terminated.** Jesus came “that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). The ministry of Paul and others with him turned people “from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). Christ saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18). In spite of his claims he knows that he is a defeated enemy.

Through the power of a greater authority, that of Christ, Satan is evicted from the hearts of believing men and finally from the world itself.

Consider Paul’s warning: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). His sly suggestions *infiltrate*, then *contaminate*, and finally *dominate*. Revelation 20 assures us of the final destruction of Satan and those who have sided with him.

In view of the above, Satan is pressing his claims more strongly than ever before. (See Rev. 12:12.) His time is short, but in the intensity of his onslaught, where does our safety lie? (See Rev. 12:11.)

Part 6—Divine Authority, Not Coercion

“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land” (Isa. 1:19).

Divine authority is not one of arbitrariness or despotism. On the contrary, it is One exhibiting love and concern for human beings who have lost their way and need to be helped back to a right relationship with God.

“It is Satan’s constant effort to misrepresent the character of God. . . . His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 569.

He who directs the heavenly bodies in their appointed paths with exactness deals tenderly with His “wandering stars” (Jude 13) in an attempt to get them back into His orbit. Note Isaiah revealing the Father heart of God, inviting His prodigals to return. (See Isa. 55:6, 7.)

Although the wrath of God will come on those who defy Him, who disregard His commandments, who have no concern for His glory, God, in hating the sin, loves the sinner.

“In Christ the cry of humanity reached the Father of infinite pity.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 363.

How does Jesus’ loving invitation demonstrate that to follow Him is a matter of choice, not compulsion? Matt. 11:28-30.

Christ’s yoke is not a chafing yoke of strained compliance. His yoke is lined with love. (Compare Jer. 31:3.) Christ’s commands are in our favor. Our submission will be our blessing. “Christ never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity.”—*Gospel Workers*, p. 117.

The symbol of the Holy Spirit, descending over Jesus at His baptism, was that of a dove, denoting the nature of the Spirit. Gently but authoritatively He reproves the human heart and woos us to yield to God’s will and God’s way. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

Man chooses to react in different ways to the divine authority of love. He can doubt it, ignore it, spurn it, run away from it, defy it—or believe in it, accept it, submit to it, and obey it. It is up to us to decide. We select our own destiny.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: Is there any aspect of divine authority which I doubt, ignore, spurn, run away from, or defy? What can I do this week to help others recognize God’s authority?



2

January 8-14
Adult Lesson

The Obedience of Christ

MEMORY TEXT: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California, claims to have the largest painting in the world. Measuring 196 feet by 45 feet, it is called *The Crucifixion* and shows the scene outside the walls of Jerusalem just before the central cross is placed in its hole in the rock of Calvary. A light breaks through the darkened skies, revealing the Saviour standing. He is soon to be nailed to the crude cross.

A recording gives the hushed audience a description of the climax of the greatest story ever told. While watching the Central Figure, one cannot avoid noticing both the interest and lack of concern shown by those in the picture who are passing by, or watching from their rooftop verandas, or clustering near the place of execution. They reveal all the human reactions to the story, wherever it is told, of Him who was "obedient unto death." What the Polish-born artist, Jan Styka, put on canvas, the Bible writers first gave us in their sacred and inspired pages.

This week we will study the obedience of Christ and the way Heaven designed for Him to pay the penalty of our disobedience and to bring us back as obedient sons and daughters of God.

Angels watching their suffering Lord must have wondered in amazement at the price Heaven paid for redeeming us. Yet the plan conceived "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), to bring us back to fellowship with God, entailed an awful cost. In a verse that is often quoted but never fully understood, the Bible tells it all: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

To appreciate anew the extent of what was involved in Christ's act of providing saving obedience, read the entire chapter of Isaiah 53.

As Christ was motivated by love to obey for our sakes, may we be motivated by a faith that works by love to obey for His sake.

Part 1—Man’s Problem—God’s Solution

“As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

The Problem

We humans find ourselves outside the gates of Paradise because our first parents failed to fulfill the one condition for remaining within—loving and continuing obedience to God. All that love could invent had been provided for our first parents. Having created them with freedom of choice, God asked them to demonstrate loyalty and affection. The only recorded limitation placed on them concerned the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that God wished to withhold in love. (See Gen. 3:2, 3.)

The devil presented temptations designed to create a feeling in the human couple of a lack of liberty. He also led them to question the goodness of law and God’s love. The first pair violated God’s will. By pressing their own will they dethroned God and enthroned themselves. By their own decision our first parents separated themselves from God. This is the effect of sin. (See Gen. 3:24; Isa. 59:2.)

Sin’s consequences would have been serious enough had they affected only Adam and Eve; but when they were expelled from Eden, the couple whom God had created, in effect, took the whole human race with them. Every individual born since that time has been born outside the gates of Paradise, but with some measure of inborn longing to get back. The disobedient couple also passed on to us their rebellious spirit. Note how this characteristic is expressed in Psalm 51:5 and Romans 5:12.

The Solution

Some have considered God unfair in allowing the results of one person’s failure to be passed on to all mankind. But God’s fairness is established in the remedy He provided to fully meet our need. Through His provision of love all can be restored to the image of God. As we share the defeat of the first Adam, we may share the victory of the second Adam, the perfectly Obedient One.

“Satan represents God’s law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. . . . Jesus was to unveil this deception. As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. . . . If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. Therefore Jesus was ‘in all points tempted like as we are.’ Heb. 4:15. He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us. As man, He met temptation, and overcame in the strength given Him from God. . . . He made plain to men the character of God’s law and the nature of His service. His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

Part 2—As One of Us

“He . . . emptied Himself, . . . being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8, NASB).

Christ’s obedience had its root in humility. Pride leads to self-will, humility to submission.

Christ had to learn to obey (Heb. 5:8). Jesus learned by experience what is involved in human obedience. “Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity. His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith.

“The obedience of Christ to His Father was the same obedience that is required of man. Man cannot overcome Satan’s temptations without divine power to combine with his instrumentality. So with Jesus Christ; He could lay hold of a divine power. He came not to our world to give the obedience of a lesser God to a greater, but as a man to obey God’s holy law; and in this way He is our example. . . .

“. . . The Lord Jesus has bridged the gulf that sin has made. He has connected earth with heaven, and finite man with infinite God. Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 929.

In the Gospels, the term “Son of God” is used 30 times and the term “Son of man” 77 times. In what way was Jesus’ obedience as a “Son of man” first expressed? Luke 2:51. (Compare NIV.)

Looking through a knothole in a wooden fence, one can see the whole field behind it. Similarly, through just one text we have a view of the entire life of Jesus, “the silent years” of His youth and early adulthood. Christ’s obedience is seen in His youth. Jesus showed respect to His parents as their son, an example to any young person. Although His parents were poor and Joseph was only His stepfather—He obeyed them. He had laid aside divine powers and lived in some degree of dependence upon the guidance of other human wills. He who spoke worlds into existence (Col. 1:16) had to learn manual skills and labor for a living.

“Christ was the only sinless one who ever dwelt on earth; yet for nearly thirty years He lived among the wicked inhabitants of Nazareth. This fact is a rebuke to those who think themselves dependent upon place, fortune, or prosperity, in order to live a blameless life.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

Part 3—Approval and Temptation

“The heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16, 17).

No defeat marred Christ’s life, no transgression could be laid to His charge. In everything He sought to please His Father in heaven.

Jesus was obedient to His baptism.

The Sinless One was willing to be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). John’s baptism was for the repentant. Jesus had no need to repent. Yet in obedience to His Father’s will He took His place among sinners in order to set us an example.

Jesus was obedient in the wilderness temptation.

He was “led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matt. 4:1). (Read also verses 2-11.) This temptation took many forms:

He was tempted through physical conditions (verses 3, 4). To feel hunger is a God-given desire. To satisfy it in ways out of harmony with God’s will is sin. Jesus was challenged—as though He were a pretender to the Son of God—to meet His own need. He answered as the Son of man. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). I am here as a man, and as a man I must meet the temptation. He identified with us in temptation. (See Heb. 4:15.) “Christ was made the mark of every weapon of hell.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

Jesus preferred to go hungry and be within the will of God rather than to be satisfied and be outside that will. “He was in the wilderness in obedience to God, and He would not obtain food by following the suggestions of Satan. In the presence of the witnessing universe, He testified that it is a less calamity to suffer whatever may befall than to depart in any manner from the will of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 121.

Confronted with immeasurable urgings to take things into His own hands, Jesus refused to satisfy a normal need in an improper way.

He was tempted to use God’s power wrongly (verses 5-7). This instance shows that not all who quote Scripture are prompted by God. The devil here incites Jesus to do something dangerous in order to prove that God can be trusted. These temptations were real. Jesus could have yielded. “The tempter thought to take advantage of Christ’s humanity, and urge Him to presumption. But while Satan can solicit, he cannot compel to sin. He said to Jesus, ‘Cast thyself down,’ knowing that he could not cast Him down; for God would interpose to deliver Him. Unless Christ should consent to temptation, He could not be overcome.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 125.

Christ’s victory shows us the way to victory.

Part 4—Gift of Everything

**“All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me”
(Matt. 4:9).**

Just how this temptation was presented to Jesus is not stated, but “all the kingdoms of the world” (verse 8) were shown to Him. This temptation was aimed at the most sensitive area of Christ’s life—avoiding the cross. Satan offered Him a way to rule the world without going to Calvary if He would prostrate Himself before the evil one. The Father had always purposed for Jesus to be Ruler of *all nations*, but only through the sacrifice of Himself.

“Christ was tempted by Satan in a hundredfold severer manner than was Adam, and under circumstances in every way more trying. The deceiver presented himself as an angel of light, but Christ withstood his temptations.”—*My Life Today*, p. 323.

In the light of 1 Corinthians 10:13, why need we not feel forsaken if we know God?

Trusting God and choosing His will releases agencies for our help that we know little of.

Jesus was obedient when subsequently tempted “like as we are”:

To seek popularity (John 6:15). After feeding the 5000, He was tempted to put kingship above suffering—tempted to avoid the cross.

To yield to family ties (Matt. 12:46-50). How many have been tempted into disobedience on those grounds? “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (verse 50). The close bond between Christ and us is formed as we decide to join Him in doing the will of God.

To compromise to avoid rejection (John 6:60-65). He had experienced rejection from the very beginning (John 1:11). But He had come to save the whole world, and that only via Calvary (John 12:32).

To yield to a well-meaning friend (Matt. 16:21-23). There is no doubting Peter’s motive, but unwittingly he spoke for the tempter.

In what way was Peter’s suggestion on the mount of transfiguration a veiled temptation to Jesus? (See Matt. 17:1-4 and Luke 9:28-33.)

“Let us make three tabernacles.” Peter had never seen Jesus as He appeared there. With the inherent glory breaking through, Peter found it inconceivable that his Master should suffer shame and death. The glory, yes; the cross, no. Jesus knew that He was not to remain on *that* mountain. There was another, a hill where the cross would be placed. On that hill He would comply with His Father’s will for our sakes.

Part 5—"Not As I Will"

"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39).

In an hour when Judas was the only disciple that was awake, soon to betray his Master, Jesus was faced with a crucial decision. The bitter cup was offered to Him. The Bible speaks of two cups. The cup of *blessing* (Ps. 23:5; 116:13; 1 Cor. 10:16) and the cup of *fury and trembling* (Isa. 51:17, 22; Eze. 23:33).

To make reconciliation for our sin, the Son of God had to drink the cup of God's wrath that we might drink the cup of blessing through His merits. He recoiled at the bitterness of the dregs of that cup. As His human will was tempted to hold back, He dreaded even more to be disobedient to His Father. "He himself hath suffered being tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

"Every sin, every discord, every defiling lust that transgression had brought, was torture to His spirit."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 111. It was not anticipation of physical suffering, people's rejection, or the fact of death that caused His anguish. It was the bearing of the world's sin, the experience of the judgment on sin that weighed so heavily on His soul.

What significance do you see in the way the book of Hebrews describes a scene that must have looked strange to angelic eyes? Heb. 5:7, 8.

In Gethsemane Jesus had asked His disciples to watch and pray. They neither watched nor prayed. They slept. (See Matt. 26:38-41.) How often we fail to support in prayer those who are sorely tempted!

Three times Jesus asked to be spared the agony if possible. As He prayed in reverent fear, an angel appeared from heaven to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

"The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. He prayed not now for His disciples that their faith might not fail, but for His own tempted, agonized soul. The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 690.

The prayer "Not my will, but thine" became the key to our redemption. Having said this, Jesus moved on toward His victory.

THINK IT THROUGH: What would the prospects have been had Jesus refused to accept His Father's will at that moment?

FURTHER STUDY: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 689, 690.

Part 6—Obedient Unto Death

“About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

You and I and all other sinners are the sole answer to the question Jesus asked His Father. There were natural answers to why Peter and John and the other disciples had forsaken Him. They were full of human fear.

The cross demonstrates that the logical, irrevocable, and final outcome of sin is to be God-forsaken. Sin in its genius was rebellion, forsaking God. The harvest sin reaps is the result of our having forsaken God. That event is the essence of the real hell that the unrighteous will suffer at the time of the ultimate destruction. Jesus chose to take the full force of the penalty of disobedience. Jesus took all the enmity of sin upon Himself when He hung upon the cross.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: What can you learn from Paul’s explanation to the believers in Corinth about God’s solution to the sin problem that will lead you to want to obey Him? (See 2 Cor. 5:21.)

Meditation: “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we have no share. He suffered the death which is ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

The death of Christ would have been of no avail for the purpose of redemption had it not been preceded by a life of perfect obedience. Had it not been so, His death would have been nothing more than the tragic end of an ordinary life, ordinary because it conformed to the tendency of the centuries—that of sin.

Challenge: Should we ever speak of the tragedy of the cross? The fact of sin is tragic, but the cross was the triumph of love. It furnished the ultimate evidence of human disobedience contrasted with the obedience of Christ. The tragedy lies in the fact that many unrepentant people still spurn the offer of salvation wrought at the cross for them.

Illustration: The cross on the steeple of a church in South Africa was also the lightning conductor. As lightning struck, the cross led away its devastating force, and the church was saved. It illustrates how Christ took on Himself our disobedience, our rebellion, and our sin, in a meritorious act of redemption. (See Isa. 53:4, 5.) Christ thus “became the author [Greek, *cause*] of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). To Christ’s obedience we owe everything. We see in Him not only our Redeemer and Example but also the only true motivating force.



3

January 15-21
Adult Lesson

Discovering the Will of God

MEMORY TEXT: “Be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:9, 10).

For early believers in Paul’s day as well as for us, it was and is quite natural to ask the question, “How can I know God’s will?” This is, in fact, one of the most important questions anyone can ask, and it needs an answer.

At the outset it is encouraging for us to count in God’s eyes—that we are *significant*. He has a plan for us and is eager that we shall discover that plan for ourselves. He who guides the stars in their orbits wishes to guide us. The stars may only mechanically follow their appointed paths with no choices to make, but *we* can refuse to follow directions given.

People in all ages have tried to find guidance as to how to act in given situations. We may smile condescendingly at the people of earlier times and primitive cultures for their strange ways of seeking the will of their deities. We may shake our heads at someone twirling a feather attached with a string to a stick in order to discover the will of his god. But what about influential people who are reading astrological charts and consulting crystal balls or palm readers to discover what course to take? Questions of marriage, choice of career, important business transactions, and even political decisions are often based upon such strange superstitions. Some even try to seek counsel from the dead on how to live—a practice strongly condemned by the Lord. (See Isa. 8:19; Jer. 27:9, 10.)

Christian guidance comes on an entirely different level. Although there may be some oversimplified approaches to the question of guidance, there are principles involved that will help us to learn God’s will.

This week we will study how guidance can be obtained from the One who is called the “Wonderful Counselor” (Isa. 9:6, RSV).

Part 1—God is Willing

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17).

Because obedience involves doing God’s will, it seems not only reasonable but also imperative that God should reveal His will to those from whom He expects obedience. Paul encourages us to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). He also hopes that the members of the church in Colosse shall stand “perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12.)

Some find it difficult to believe that God would have a personal interest in them, much less have a plan for them or offer them personal guidance. (See Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15.) David expressed this feeling this way: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, . . . what is man, that thou art mindful of Him?” (Ps. 8:3, 4).

Yet the psalmist remembered that, “He healeth the broken in heart. . . . He telleth the number of the stars” (Ps. 147: 3, 4). Nothing is too great or too small for His concern.

“In the bewildering vastness of space and peering down the long vistas of time, it seems so pitifully naive to ask, ‘Does God care for *me*?’ . . .

“Who made vastness a standard of value? A baby is more than a mountain; a baby can *love*. A man is more than a star; a man can *think*. . . . Astronomy and geology may conspire to prove the utter insignificance of man, but man is still the astronomer and the geologist. . . . He is something more. He is a child of God. . . .

“We hold to God’s personal care not *in spite of* His greatness but *because of it*.”—W. E. Sangster, *God Does Guide Us* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), pp. 14, 15.

Why is there safety only in divine guidance? (See Jer. 10:23.)

The scope of God’s will is much wider than what may appear in any set of stated laws. We are part of His plan and His aim is our salvation. The unconverted do not live according to God’s will. His concern is to get them into the proper relationship to His will; “that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The guidance of God functions best only within the family of God.

Going a step farther, there is what some have called God’s general will, as expressed by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” We have thus made the important discovery that God’s will for us as individuals is, first, our conversion and, second, a sanctified life. However, we often wish to know what choice to make, what action to take in a given situation. What way is there of finding out?

Part 2—God of the Humble

“Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth” (Ps. 86:11).

There are unmistakable promises of guidance scattered throughout the Bible (See Ps. 32:8; Isa. 58:11; John 8:12.) Along with the expression of the psalmist’s earnest desire does there not come a wish for some special sign clearly indicating the way to take? One illustration of this desire was Gideon, who asked for a sign with the fleece (Judges 6:36-40).

Look up and list the examples of special guidance given in the texts that follow:

Ex. 3:2-10 _____

1 Sam. 3:4-10 _____

Acts 9:3-6 _____

God did at times strengthen faith and give direct guidance. But we should keep in mind that “God is very economical with His guidance, and He will not use the special supernatural ways of guiding us except in moments when we specially need them, for He desires to guide us along simple and definite lines which are clear in the Bible.”—Maurice A. P. Wood, *How Can I Know the Guidance of God* (London: Scripture Union, Islington booklet no. 8).

Guidance is not something unusual, reserved for some privileged believers. “The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally. . . . Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, *just what course to pursue*. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength. Power for obedience, for service, will be imparted to them as Christ has promised.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668. (Emphasis supplied.)

Summarize what the psalmist said about guidance coming through a surrendered will. Ps. 25:9.

“The true pupil, say of some great musician or painter, yields his master a *whole-hearted and unhesitating submission*. In practicing the scales or mixing colors, in the slow and patient study of the elements of his art, he knows that it is wisdom simply and fully to obey. It is this whole-hearted surrender to His guidance, this implicit submission to His authority, Christ asks.”—Andrew Murray, *The School of Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 46.

Note what the wise man, chastened by mistakes and eager for others to benefit from his experience, wrote in Proverbs 3:5, 6.

THINK IT THROUGH: Is just “trusting God” irresponsible?

Part 3—Guided by Scripture

“Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

There are some things concerning which those who believe in the Bible as the Word of God have no need to ask for guidance. For instance, it is plain that we do not have to ask God whether we should steal, lie, commit adultery, or murder. The answer clearly is outlined in the Ten Commandments and borne out time after time in the rest of the Bible. To ask God for guidance in such matters would be to presume that He was not serious when He gave us the Bible and the Ten Commandments.

Some say they have difficulty with things in the Bible that they do not understand. Peter Marshall used to say that people had difficulty with things they understood all too well but were unwilling to obey. Hypocrisy causes breakdowns in the divine guidance system.

The Bible is not a detailed map indicating every turn. It is written on a larger scale, giving the general direction to take. Neither is the Bible to be used as a superior form of divination, a book that falls open at a given page so that we can put our finger on a verse and know God’s will in that particular situation—although some have been directed by such means.

What is the significance to us today of the promise Jesus gave His disciples in John 16:13?

How widely does God’s guidance through the Scriptures apply in our situation? 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

Jesus said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures” (Matt. 22:29). Through the Bible we learn to know the *mind* of God, the principles along which He guides. When we understand principles we will avoid acting on whim or impulse. God will continue to guide us to the extent that we are obedient to His already revealed will. (See John 7:17.) God’s will is like a scroll, unrolled to the extent that we obey. God has not promised guidance far ahead, but “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Ps. 37:23). (See also Ps. 119:105.)

Guidance is provided by the many Bible biographies illustrating most of the crises we may encounter. God does not guide us in some personal way contrary to what the Bible says. Although He had direct communion with the Father, Jesus did not live independent of Scripture.

“The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His [God’s] will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrine, and the test of experience.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

Part 4—Guided by the Spirit

“Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21).

Even though His voice may not be audible, God speaks to us through the Spirit in the voice of inner convictions, making appeals to our will. God has given us a will; we can make choices. He does not crush our will or deprive us of our independence. God wishes us to choose to depend on Him as a child finds it wise to submit to the wider experience of his father.

In seeking guidance we must examine our motives. Do we sincerely wish to do *His* will; or do we, under guise of seeking it, desire to have our own plans condoned? Is our primary desire to “walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10)? Or is there a thought of personal advantage or praise? Do we really place Him first?

Illustration: Two sisters were seen walking toward a bicycle built for two riders. The one was blind, the other sighted. Approaching the vehicle, the blind girl groped for the back seat naturally. Would it not have seemed strange if she had insisted on sitting in front, steering, while her sighted sister had to satisfy herself with the back seat, helping to pedal them forward on a dangerous course? As it was, she left it to her sister to be in control and keep them on the road. Yet in spiritual matters, how often we insist on being our own guide, blind though we are! (See Rev. 3:17.) Conversion is *giving* God first place in our lives. Sanctification is allowing Him to *remain* foremost in our lives. The Christian life is one of God-dependence, not of self-dependence. The fully yielded are the fully guided. Sin in the life hinders guidance. (See Ps. 66:18.)

God guides through His Spirit. The Spirit has been sent as Christ’s personal representative to help and teach us. Yet there is a condition: “Whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:32). The Spirit is given for guidance and equipping when we are obeying. Whereas the greatest need of the sinner is to be saved, the greatest need of the believer is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 8:14; Eph. 5:18.)

The Holy Spirit never leads us contrary to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit in the child of God never contradicts Himself in the Word of God. Neither does He supersede the Bible. He complements it.

“Great reproach has been cast upon the work of the Holy Spirit by the errors of a class that, claiming its enlightenment, profess to have no further need of guidance from the word of God. They are governed by impressions which they regard as the views of God in the soul. But the spirit that controls them is not the Spirit of God. This following of impressions, to the neglect of the Scriptures, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. vii, viii.

FURTHER STUDY: *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 51, 53.

Part 5—Waiting for Guidance

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. . . . But let him ask in faith” (James 1:5, 6).

Only God knows what is involved in a decision. At times we may wish to do what King Hezekiah did. Disturbed by a letter he received, he took practical action. He “spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord” (2 Kings 19:14, 15).

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage,” the psalmist enjoins us (Ps. 27:14). Few have proved God’s faithfulness in a more tangible way than George Müller, who in the nineteenth century founded the world-renowned Bristol Orphan’s Home. At one time more than 2000 children were cared for. No public appeal was made. All support came in answer to prayer and a “waiting on the Lord.” He wrote the following testimony:

“I never remember in all my Christian course (a period now of 69 years and 4 months) that I ever sincerely and patiently sought to know the will of God by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the Word, without being directed clearly and rightly.”

Summarize David’s counsel on waiting for guidance as expressed in Psalm 37:5, 7.

God does not always indicate His will by opening doors. Sometimes His guidance is shown by closed ones. The apostle Paul planned on his second missionary journey to go to Asia Minor to preach in a new territory. The Spirit closed the door. Trying then to go north to the Black Sea, he was hindered by the Spirit “the Spirit of Jesus” (NIV) from proceeding. He had to go to Troas, where the vision of the need in Europe called him to Macedonia. He then went “with a straight course” with the message of Christ. (See Acts 16:6-9.)

How do you think Paul felt before he understood why the Holy Spirit “closed the door” on his plans? (circle one)

Frustrated

Blessed

Disappointed

Recognized God was leading

While waiting on God we are to seek all pertinent and helpful information. God has given us minds to use and faculties for reasoning.

“There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us. . . . God reveals His will to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings. . . .

“Another way . . . is through the appeals of the Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the heart. . . . If you are in doubt upon any subject you must first consult the Scriptures.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 512.

Part 6—Multiplied Joy

“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34).

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Jesus “must needs go through Samaria” (John 4:4), although others preferred another route. There was a need there, a woman to be saved, even if she did belong to the despised Samaritans. (See John 4:4, 7, 29.)

Reference was made in lesson 1 to Philip’s being guided—seemingly contrary to reason—to leave a successful soul-winning activity to go to a desert road (Acts 8:26-39). Promptly obeying, he found a seeker after truth. He approached him, won him for God, and baptized him.

Philip’s convert went back to Ethiopia to tell the good news. Could this be a fulfillment of the words, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Ps. 68:31)? Might many similarly rejoice if we were more sensitive to the promptings of God’s Spirit? (See *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 370, 371.)

Summary: How we should seek God’s will:

- Examine our motives.
- Yield ourselves entirely to God.
- Remove any known sin or selfish practice from our lives.
- Study the Bible to learn the mind of God.
- Practice what we already know to be His will.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to plant right convictions.
- Pray expectantly.
- Use the intellect and good sense the Lord has given us.
- Assess information gathered with sanctified judgment.
- Make decisions and move forward in faith.
- Believe in God’s overruling providence.

There is safety and joy in knowing that a loving Father guides His children. The psalmist sang of the Good Shepherd: “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3). Similarly we know that, wherever the finger of God points, the hand of God will make a way. “When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 363.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

1. Is there a special situation in my life that I need help from the Lord in meeting?
2. Am I willing to submit completely to God’s will in this situation?
3. Have I studied all pertinent Bible information that deals with this problem?
4. Have I prayed expectantly? Do I trust God to do what is best?



4

January 22-28
Adult Lesson

The Believer's Obedience

MEMORY TEXT: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" (Jer.7:23).

The Bible mentions at least six ways of relating or responding to truth apart from such negative ways as ignorance or hostility. In an ascending scale of appreciation they may be listed as follows:

- Knowledge of the truth 1 Tim. 2:4
- Testing to see if it is truth 1 Thess. 5:21
- Belief in the truth 2 Thess. 2:13
- Obedience to the truth 1 Peter 1:22
- Love of the truth 2 Thess. 2:10
- Rejoicing in the truth 1 Cor. 13:6

In a similar way there are varied stages in obedience. Whereas *knowledge* of God's will is of utmost importance, that knowledge by itself does not save. *Belief* in the rightness of placing God first in the life will, in itself, be of no value although it may prevent us from opposing the Lord. It is only with *obedience* that conduct is affected, yet it can be just a dutiful compliance, lacking the right motivation. It is only through *love* for God that we can truly obey Him. Naturally, we are completely incapable of this kind of love. Thus the miracle of the new-birth experience becomes imperative. Through a "renewing of [the] mind" (Rom. 12:2) we become disposed to obey.

"It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). He works in us, if we allow Him, not only to create the desire to do His will, but actually to do it by His enabling power. "I would rather obey than work miracles," Luther said. In fact, every heart disposed to obey the Lord is a miracle—it seems in all things to please the Lord. This is not the strained effort of legalism, but a *joyful* response to the goodness of God. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8). "The law is a real delight to one who has it in his heart, but it is a burden when it is only in the head."—Charles T. Everson, *Saved by Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, n.d.), p. 28.

This believer's obedience, described by Paul as an "obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16), is the theme of our study this week.

Part 1—Divine Example

“Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

As we studied the obedience of Christ we found it to be complete, constant, substitutionary, and for our meritorious benefit. None other could have done it for us. “He became the author [Greek, *cause*] of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). From this it is evident that obedience to God, although not the means, is the fruit and evidence of salvation. (See Eccl. 12:13.) As the Obedient One Christ saves us as obedient ones. Christ’s heart is set upon obedience, whether in His suffering on earth or in His glory in heaven, whether in reference to Himself or to His followers. The proof of our attachment to Him is to be found in the daily surrender of the mind and will to God in obedience.

Christ taught us to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Thus He expressed His concern for the loving obedience of His people. The time will come when the inhabitants of earth, equally with those in heaven, will be in subjection to their Maker. Christ on earth lived His life in absolute obedience to His Father. God intends for us to do our best by His grace to imitate this Pattern. (See *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 549.)

The apostle Paul ascribes to Jesus dual titles. What is their significance? Titus 1:4. (see also 2 Peter 1:11.)

In the Christian’s experience Christ must be not only Saviour from sin but Lord of our lives. Many are more than willing to accept Christ as their Saviour, benefiting from His grace, but they hesitate to accept Him as Lord, to be directed by Him in daily living. We do not truly value Him as Saviour unless we honor Him as Lord.

Some Christians propose that faith in Christ for justification is all that is needed for salvation—that faith takes the place of obedience. That is not quite biblical teaching. Faith in Christ’s merits puts us where we are acceptable to God. It motivates us and brings us power to obey. Even though God, through Christ, has lifted the death penalty that hangs over us and has sent us forth into the “liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21), this liberty is not license. No one whose heart has been truly reached by the cross of Christ can so regard it.

Grace has no intention of sweeping away the claims of obedience. It puts us, rather, under the double claim of God’s authority and His mercy.

“Christ came to the earth, taking humanity and standing as man’s representative, to show in the controversy with Satan that man, as God created him, connected with the Father and the Son, could obey every divine requirement.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 926.

Part 2—The Natural Man

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

Because of inherited and cultivated tendencies to sin we are at enmity with the law of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Like the wooden balls used in outdoor bowling, which through a “bias,” a weighting, veer out of a straight course when rolled on the green, human nature cannot keep a true course. Sin has caused a “bias.”

“The reason man does not obey God’s law is because he is not disposed to do so. The child does not obey his parents unless he has the disposition to do so. Man does not love God and obey His commandments unless he has the disposition to do so. His faculties and his nature are so paralyzed by sin that they have lost their natural ability to obey God’s commandments or accept their authority.”—E. E. Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), pp. 218, 219.

With this outlook many try to find flaws in the moral law or have it done away with. Yet it has been estimated that legislators through the ages have enacted more than 32 million laws in an effort to regulate human conduct. These laws have had to be changed, amended, or repealed constantly to keep legislation up to date. Whereas some laws apply only to people who choose to accept them, the law of God is not optional.

What implication concerning the unchangeable nature of God’s law can be drawn from the word “perfect” (Hebrew, *without blemish*) in Psalm 19:7?

God never subjected His law to human approval. It is not for us just to take it or leave it. He gave it to us to obey. The highway of salvation is plain, but in the ditches on either side can be found the victims of two fallacies. On the one side are those who insist on salvation by works, which is unbiblical. On the other side are those who teach salvation without obedience, which equally is fallacious.

What practical application of God’s will can be drawn from Jesus’ parable in Matthew 21:28-31?

“No enlightened and judicious parent would accept mere feeling for obedience, and the mere assertion, I love you, for genuine love. Neither can we expect that God will accept our feeling, for obedience; or the simple declaration that we love him, for the love that we owe to him.”—Daniel T. Bourdeau, *Sanctification: or Living Holiness* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), p. 80.

Part 3—Legalism and Obedience

“Whosoever shall do and teach them [the commandments], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).

There is an immense difference between being under “the curse of the law” and under the *authority* of the law. We have escaped the former through the redemptive work of Christ, who “hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). Are we then to disregard the law itself? We are admonished to “look to Jesus.” We find that the commandments, God’s will, were so important to Him that it was declared of Him, “Thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). No one can take an indifferent attitude toward the law of God without grieving Christ.

“There are two errors against which the children of God—particularly those who have just come to trust in His grace—especially need to guard. The first . . . is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do, to bring themselves into harmony with God. He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law, is attempting an impossibility. All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin. It is the grace of Christ alone, through faith, that can make us holy.

“The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 59, 60.

Legalism is irreconcilable with Christianity in that it does away with the grace of God.

Summarize what Paul says in Romans 10:3 about the fallacy of legalism as an approach to salvation.

Obedience is *not* legalism, but seeking to find acceptance with God through good works *is*.

The question of the validity of the Ten Commandment law was settled incontestably at the cross when Christ died. If the law could have been set aside, then sin could have been set aside. As a consequence, there would be no “wages of sin” and no need of a Saviour. The moral law is as eternal as God Himself.

Thus it is not the law that has to be changed. Instead it is the human heart that must be transformed and rebellion done away with. That is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

FURTHER STUDY: *Steps to Christ*, “The Test of Discipleship,” pp. 60, 61.

Part 4—Divine Heart Transplant

“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Heb. 8:10).

The “old” covenant was not instituted as a substitute plan of salvation. God’s provisions for our salvation were instituted in the covenant of grace after the Fall in Eden, renewed in covenant form with Abraham, and called the “new” covenant because it was ratified at the cross. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 370. 371.) The purpose of the “old” covenant was to serve as an educational system to lead Israel to recognize their need of the “new” covenant. “They had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371. Only then would they be ready for God to write His law in their hearts rather than on tables of stone.

| The Covenants Compared | | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Covenant</i> | <i>Terms</i> | <i>Promise</i> | <i>Placement of law</i> |
| OLD (Ratified at Sinai) | Ex. 19:3-8; Ex. 24:1-12 | <i>People's</i> —“All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” | On tables of stone |
| NEW (EVER-LASTING) (Covenant of grace—ratified at cross) | Jer. 31:31-33 Heb. 8:10 | <i>God's</i> —“I will put my laws into their mind.” | “In their hearts” |

The world has marveled at the scientific advance that has made heart transplants possible. The problem that persists is that of rejection by the host system. The problem gradually is being overcome. Yet, at best, a secondhand organ is replacing the original one and only makes possible a comparatively brief lengthening of life expectancy. We can reject God’s offer to put His law in our minds and hearts, but, if we allow Him to do so, He will transform us that our old attitudes will be changed.

In what way does love for God become the true motivating force in a Christian’s life? 1 John 4:19; John 14:15.

Part 5—"The Hope of Glory"

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Here we have the secret. "Christ liveth in me," Paul exclaimed. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ makes Himself available to us. Jesus promised the disciples an experience which "the world" cannot possibly know (John 14:17). Paul refers to this as a "mystery" (Col. 1:27). Truly this is a mystery, explained only in the incarnation. The same Jesus who chose to become like one of us, yet without sin, offers to live in us through His Spirit, doing God's will in us now as He did then. In the same way that He obeyed *for* us, He will now obey *in* us—unto death. He counteracts the "bias" mentioned in part 2.

Christ, who did not refuse to be placed in a humble manger in Bethlehem, does not refuse to make His abode in any human heart yielded to Him. He brings His own glory with Him (Col. 1:27)—the glory of a life in harmony with that of the Eternal Father.

Illustration: A man well-known by the author lives such a serene and kind Christian life that he must be considered one of those who "adorn the doctrine of God" (Titus 2:10). When asked how he, who in his youth had been short-tempered and vindictive, looking to settle all arguments with his fists, was now so visibly different, he gave a simple answer. He explained humbly, "Every morning for many years I have prayed a simple prayer: Jesus my Lord, here I am, for you know how much I need You. Come into my being and possess me fully today. Use my hands, my feet, my mind, my all. Use my lips to speak as You do, my heart to love what You love. Take me where You wish, use me as You desire."

What application can you draw for your life from the way the writer to the Hebrews shows the constancy of Christ's life? Heb. 13:8.

"He [Christ] saves men, not in sin, but from sin; and those who love Him will show their love by obedience.

"All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.

"As Christ lived the law in humanity, so we may do if we will take hold of the Strong for strength."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

THINK IT THROUGH: What is the true significance of Revelation 3:20?

Part 6—All-sufficient Aid

“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

Identifying Himself with us in our need to be saved from sin's guilt, Christ also helps us overcome sin's power. As we rely on Christ to be our righteousness, we also depend on Him for our sanctification, as true obedience is sanctification. This cuts out self-complacency.

In what alone is the Christian to glory, and why is this so? 1 Cor. 1:31.

Over the baptismal pool in a church in Africa there hangs a double yoke. To the person going down in the waters of baptism it is an eloquent reminder of what it means to be a Christian—to “yoke up” with our Saviour. When we do there exists no laborious effort to establish one's own righteousness in legalistic and futile performance of the law, no lone struggle against sin. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29, 30).

What great balance of spiritual truth characterizes the people of God in the last day? Rev. 14:12.

Obedience, prompted by love, performed in faith and done in sincerity is obedience accepted by God, imperfect though it may be. Taken from another context, 2 Corinthians 8:12 can well apply. “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

- What have I learned about my relationship to God in this lesson? Is my obedience a joyful, happy experience? If not, what is missing?
- Have I become aware of particular sins in my life that need to be confessed to God? Am I willing to forsake them?
- How can I better follow the example Jesus has set?
- Are there promises of hope and comfort, in the materials I have studied this week, that I can claim?
- What challenges are there, and how can I improve my relationships at home? at school? at work? with others? with friends?
- What can I do to witness more effectively for Christ this coming week? To whom should I address my witness specifically?
- What additional study do I need to give to this topic? What is there that I need to pray about in a specific way?



5

January 29 to February 4
Adult Lesson

Abraham— The Friend of God

MEMORY TEXT: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8).

Three times in the Bible this man of faith is referred to as “the friend of God.” This distinction is given to no one else.

Abraham is held in profound reverence by three world religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam acclaim him in their spiritual ancestry. It has been noted that his name is mentioned in the Koran no less than 188 times. The biblical account tells us that God promised that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

As an example of ready obedience Abraham is without parallel. Although he did not know *where* he was to go, he was in no doubt as to *why*. God had instructed him. We often think of him as the ready graduate of the school of obedience. Yet in reality there was much for him to learn. In his years of training, and despite the initial step of faith described in the text, he sometimes failed. There were sad defections from God’s intentions. Because of slipping into self-reliance he had to learn the hard way to “wait on the Lord.” His anchor chain of trust was forged on the anvil of experience as those of few other men have been. In the end his faith proved equal to the most severe test that could come.

Among the Jews the greatest honor is to be called a true “son of Abraham.” In respect to Abraham’s being “the friend of God,” we should covet the same distinction. In studying Abraham’s experience we discover that in God’s school of obedience we each progress at our own speed.

With his special insight as a “friend of God,” Abraham saw the day of Christ. He “saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). He saw that it would not be in vain that “he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). He found that He is “faithful who . . . promised” (verse 11). As we follow Abraham’s example we will make the same discovery.

Abraham—The Friend of God

Part 1—The Call

“The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1).

As recorded in Acts 7:2, Stephen, soon to be martyred by his accusers, told how “the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran [Haran].” How God manifested Himself to Abram is not revealed. Peter Marshall put it that “God has a hundred ways of plucking at a man’s sleeve.”

To Abram the call was unmistakable and of great consequence. It was a call for separation, wrenching him from his native land, his people, and his family, and also from one of the most progressive societies of the ancient world.

It may be thought that Abram was called from some backward area of the earth. Archaeological discoveries have revealed, however, that what is believed to have been Ur of the Chaldees was a thriving commercial center, enjoying a highly developed material civilization. Private citizens of Ur at the time of Abram (around 2000 BC) lived in well-built two-story houses with accommodations for the family, servants, and guests. Behind many a house was a chapel in which the family god was worshiped. Clay tablets also reveal that they even grappled with mathematical problems that reveal surprising sophistication.

Apart from material prosperity, what other spiritual dangers did Abram face in his home country? Joshua 24:2.

“They served other gods.” Ur was the city of Nannar, the moon god. To him, “the exalted lord,” the whole town was dedicated. The stepped pyramid, the giant ziggurat, the moon god’s sanctuary, dominated the city. Written texts preserve about 5000 names of other Sumerian gods. It is likely that when the family moved out of Ur and along the Mesopotamian valley to Haran, they carried with them some form of moon worship. Archaeologists have uncovered in the ruins of that town evidence of a moon cult similar to the one in Ur. Possibly family reasons prevented Abram from making a complete break before his father’s death some 15 years later.

When called, Abram did not hesitate. (See Heb. 11:8.) (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.) Abram was promised that God would *show* him the country. When he arrived in Canaan, God promised to *give* it to him. (See Gen. 12:1-7.) Progression in obedience brings a widening of the promises.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 125-128; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 523.

Abraham—The Friend of God

Part 2—Ill-advised Deviation

“There was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land” (Gen. 12:10).

It is hard to accept the fact that Abraham should face trouble in the Land of Promise, but in the school of God tests come to all. God did not start with perfect material—faith and trust developed gradually. Our calamities are God’s opportunities, but lack of trust brings complications.

Note that Abraham did not look back to the country he had left as Israel did after leaving Egypt. Yet he did not always seek divine guidance, but took matters into his own hands. God promises, “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Ps. 25:9).

How would you apply Isaiah’s admonition not to depend on others besides God for help in our situation today? Isa. 31:1.

God allowed a famine to come to Canaan soon after Abraham entered it. This provided an additional trial of his faith and led him to decide to go to Egypt to find assistance.

How human Abraham was! In Genesis 12:11-16 we learn that in a moment of panic he adopted a doubtful method of delivering his wife from a position of real danger to her virtue and himself from danger to his life. The plan was as questionable as it was clever (and he would later try it again). (See Gen. 20:12.) His fears were not unfounded. An ancient papyrus document tells of a pharaoh in a later period who sent his army to take away a man’s wife and murder her husband. Referring to his wife as his sister was in a sense true, yet it conveyed the wrong impression. It has been said that “when a half truth is presented as the whole truth it becomes an untruth.” Not only the facts as presented, but the way they will be understood must decide how they can be used. There are no “white lies.” Christ’s followers will be transparently sincere.

What do you learn about God from the way He intervened to save His troubled servant? Gen. 12:17-20; Ps. 105:14, 15.

The fact that Abram came through the unfortunate incident materially better off in no way indicates that God sanctioned his behavior. Spiritually he had suffered great loss. In Sichem (later Shechem) and Bethel he had built altars to God’s glory. (See Gen. 12:7, 8.) As far as we know he built no altars in Egypt. There was no reason to go back. There were no new promises for him there.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129-131.

Abraham—The Friend of God

Part 3—"Things Below" and "Things Above"

"Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Abram left Egypt a wiser man and journeyed to Bethel. Because of his memories of his sad defeat, he may have wished to renew his dedication. His mind was on heavenly things. Traveling with him was his nephew Lot, a man of a different spirit. Could it be that Lot's presence in the camp lowered the spiritual tone of the household? The wrong attitude of one can harm the whole family. We must do no injustice to Lot. Yet it appears that in God's providence Abram, who had been separated from Ur and from Egypt, now had to be separated from Lot. The far-different attitude in spiritual matters so clearly shown by Lot's choice and later behavior must have constituted a threat to all that Abram tried to be. (See Gen. 18:19.)

What can we learn about motivation from Lot's response to a generous offer from Abraham? Gen. 13:10-13.

This is the tragedy of this man whose sights were set too low, who looked only to temporal advantages. Taken out of one center of idolatry, he chose to move closer to another. Abraham proved that it is possible to be rich and still be devoted to God. He lifted his eyes to eternal values. Lot's choice shows the danger in seeking material possessions. (See 1 Tim. 6:9, 10. See also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 133.)

God has sent His servants on missions to centers of wickedness and has preserved them unaffected, but Lot was not sent to Sodom. But its pull proved too strong. First he "pitched toward," then he "dwelt" in Sodom. Twenty years later he "sat at the gate" as one of the honored men of the city.

What experience in Abraham's friendship with God illustrates the truth of Psalm 25:14? (Compare Gen. 18:17.)

Note the boldness exhibited in Abraham's prayer of intercession for the doomed city in Genesis 18:22-32. Six times he pleaded for God's mercy in a remarkable bargaining session with the Lord. Yet the witness of Lot had been too weak. Sodom was destroyed and Lot fled, robbed of that for which he had risked his very soul. Lot then chose what he thought to be the best part of the land, but God showed Abram yet choicer parts.

SEARCH AND LEARN: Compare the wide-spreading love of God with the abundance of temporal blessing that can come to a "separated" soul. (See Eph. 3:14-21; Heb. 11:24-26; Matt. 16:24-28.)

Part 4—Running Ahead of God

Inherent in the promises made to Abraham at the time of his entry into Canaan was that a son would be given as heir to the then childless couple. The years passed with renewed promises about Abram's "seed" (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:5). "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Yet ten years of waiting must have seemed interminably long, and with Sarah now 75 years of age the couple took things into their own hands.

What would lead Sarah herself to offer her solution to having the promise fulfilled? (See Gen. 16:1-4, 15, 16.)

Where multiple wives were common, Sarah's suggestion was not unique, but for Abram to do so would be entirely out of harmony with the will of God. Through union with Hagar, a servant whom they may have brought back from Egypt, he would "help" God to fulfill His promises. He had not yet learned that what God "had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21).

Twelve years passed. God renewed His promises (Gen. 17:2), changed Abram's name to Abraham, repeated His promise of a son through Sarah, even naming him. A year later Isaac was born. But with joy came sorrow. The unselfish plan of Sarah backfired. Intolerable friction developed between the mothers. Ishmael and Isaac, both greatly loved by Abraham, could not remain under the same roof. (Compare Gal. 4:22, 28, 29.)

Why would God sanction the request made by Sarah? Gen. 21:10. (Read verses 8-14.)

This was not just a case of motherly jealousy. God used this experience to show Abraham and all believers after him that spiritual ends are never achieved through carnal means. Paul shows that Ishmael was born as a result of self-trust and self-accomplishment. He *had* to be expelled. Similarly, the legalistic spirit of self-trust, the "do-it-yourself" attitude, can be given no room in a life of faith—it has to be evicted. Attempted righteousness by works must give place to righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. (See Gal. 4:22-31.) We are saved by trusting. Afterward, along with the trusting, we put forth efforts to please God. With resolution but grief Abraham obeyed. Ishmael became a great nation as promised (Gen. 21:18), but a nation that strove against the lineal descendants of Abram through Isaac.

THINK IT THROUGH: How often have I allowed expediency to dictate my behavior?

Abraham—The Friend of God

Part 5—The Supreme Test

“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Gen. 22:2).

This was the eighth recorded occasion in which God spoke to Abraham. He had learned to distinguish the Lord’s voice, but this time he might have doubted it. Why this sudden command at the grove in Beer-sheba? Questions must have arisen in the patriarch’s mind.

Had not the taking of life been expressly forbidden? (See Gen. 9:6.) What about God’s promise? Was He working against His own plans? What purpose would this order serve? No reason had been given. How could he, Abraham, go against love itself? What would the inhabitants of the land say? He served a different God from theirs. Would his God make the same demands as the heathen gods, demanding the firstborn as atonement? The place chosen was three days away. Perhaps the order would be withdrawn.

“Abraham rose up early in the morning” to obey (Gen. 22:3). (See also Gen. 21:14.) Before, when he had risen early to send Ishmael away, he could see a reason. Then he still had Isaac on whom to pin his hopes. But now, who would be left? Abraham did not argue with God or plead for extended time.

“This great act of faith is penciled in the pages of sacred history to shine forth upon the world as an illustrious example to the end of time. Abraham did not plead that his old age should excuse him from obeying God.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 145. In yielding Isaac to God he apparently sacrificed the hopes of a lifetime.

What is the significance of the phrase “staggered not at the promise”?
Rom. 4:20.

At last Abraham believed completely (Heb. 11:17-19). (Faith may venture into things that seem contrary to reason, but faith counts with God.) Confidently he assured the servants that he and Isaac would return from the mountain (Gen. 22:5). Erecting the altar, placing what was dearest to him on the wood Isaac had carried, binding him with real cords (but also cords of love and affection), Abraham raised his knife to obey his Lord.

In a scene surpassed only by the one on Golgotha centuries later when the only-begotten Son of God was fastened to the wood He had Himself carried, Abraham demonstrated his love for God in complete obedience.

Abraham had stood the test. Now Heaven turned aside the commanded human sacrifice. A substitute sacrifice was provided by God—a ram caught in a bramble (See Gen. 22:12, 13.) At Calvary God would not spare Himself as He spared Abraham. *His* Son would die. The covenant with Abraham would be secure. (See Heb. 6:15.)

Part 6—Children of Faith

| HOW ABRAHAM RESPONDED IN FAITH—Heb. 11:8-19 | | |
|---|--|--|
| verse 8 | When called to go out to a place he did not know. | He obeyed. |
| verses 9, 10 | When called upon to sojourn in the Promised Land, a strange country. | He anticipated a place in God's city. |
| verses 17-19 | When he was commanded to offer up Isaac, the son of promise. | He took steps to do so, believing God was able to raise him from the dead. |

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: What characters do the “children of Abraham” possess? Are we included today? James 2:23; Gal. 3:7.

Faith, or trust, led Isaac to submit to God's will as his father had done. It will do the same in any true child of Abraham. God honors real faith—faith that is eager to obey.

How did Abraham and how should we relate faith to works? James 2: 21, 22.

“There are many who fail to understand the relation of faith and works. They say, ‘Only believe in Christ, and you are safe. You have nothing to do with keeping the law.’ But genuine faith will be manifest in obedience. Said Christ to the unbelieving Jews, ‘If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.’ John 8:39.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 153, 154.

With Abraham, trust developed gradually. So it is with us. Before Mount Moriah, Abraham had failed God more than once, missing the blessing intended. But finally he could say with David, “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5).

Bible writers called Abraham “the Friend of God” (James 2:23). The testimony of God Himself was that “Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen. 26:5).

Jesus said, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). Living according to those words, we are not just “children of Abraham” but in the true spiritual sense children and friends of God.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 153; *The Great Controversy*, p. 472.



6

February 5-11
Adult Lesson

Moses— Met God Face to Face

MEMORY TEXT: “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11).

One of the attractions for art lovers and tourists alike in Rome is the muscular sculpture of Moses by Michelangelo in S. Pietro in Vincoli. The commanding figure exudes power, purposefulness, and authority—something befitting one of the greatest figures of history.

The artist could have chosen to depict Moses as he stood before Israel on Sinai, declaring the will of God to a disobedient people, or as he stood with God-given authority to tell Pharaoh “Let my people go” (Ex. 5:1).

Instead he chose to show him seated, pondering, as it is thought, the waywardness of the people that he had been called to lead from slavery to freedom. The sculptor chose gleaming marble to bring forth a work of reflection. God chose to form a man of humility and resolve from a humble family of slaves among an oppressed race. Like the Saviour Himself, he was born with a death decree over his head. Both Moses and the Lord were saved through God-fearing parents and heavenly agencies.

The founding of an Egyptian princess, Moses was raised at court and might have been destined for the ultimate honor of burial as a pharaoh in an ornate tomb. Yet the Lord not only appointed his place in death (Deut. 34:5, 6) but his place in life—the emancipator of his people.

Whatever his exploits, the most significant phrase given about him in the Bible is that “the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11). It will benefit us to study such a life. With no intention of giving his life story in detail, there is much in his experience from which to draw courage. The constancy of his example cannot fail to inspire. His life is neatly divided into three periods:

- 40 years at the court in Egypt
- 40 years as a shepherd in Midian
- 40 years leading the people of God

At the end of the *first* he felt he could do it all by himself. At the end of the *second* he felt he could do nothing by himself. At the end of the *third* he saw what God had done as he had yielded himself to be used. This is what God will do again. Moses found that the greatest question is not “Who am I?” but “Who is HE?”

Part 1—The Call

“Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

The call of God to Moses to deliver His people from slavery came to him late in life. For reasons to be studied, it could not be given earlier, although it might have been desirable.

The man, whose intellectual and moral greatness causes him to tower over most people in history, came from humble origins. This historian, philosopher, legislator, and emancipator of an enslaved nation attained to his high position of leadership by stages. Yet a large portion of his long life was a demonstration that trust and obedience are an effective formula in the most adverse circumstances.

He was born 64 years after the death of Joseph, under a pharaoh who “knew not Joseph” (Ex. 1:8) and likewise resented the very presence of the rapidly growing people of Israel. “The generation that had experienced the seven years of famine had died, and the descendants of Jacob’s sons were confronted with an entirely new situation, a native Egyptian population and a dynasty that hated the Israelites.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 497.

What had been the effect of Israel’s long sojourn in Egypt? Joshua 24:14; Eze. 20:6, 7.

The years in Egypt had brought not only physical slavery to Israel but a gradual enslavement to Egyptian deities. Even though the majority had turned from the true God, some had remained faithful. They had remembered God’s promise to Abraham. The 400 years of affliction would come to an end (Gen. 15:13, 16). A deliverer would rise up. (For an account of Moses’ birth and preservation from death, read Exodus 2:1-10.)

Moses’ mother, like so many other mothers, doubtless hoped that her son would be the awaited Deliverer. The providential protection of her son must have filled her with hope. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 243, 244.)

Not the outward pressure but the strength of the inward braces decide whether or not a boat shall withstand the onslaught of the waves. Surely Moses needed the “bracing” of that early home training in Egypt.

“Some of his education he received from the priests, and some from army commanders. Such was the training ordinarily given a royal prince.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 504. (See Acts 7:22.)

THINK IT THROUGH: How might world history have developed without Moses? (For the influence of other mothers see Matthew 14:8; 2 Chronicles 22:3.)

Moses—Met God Face to Face

Part 2—A Favored Man's Choice

“He . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, . . . esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:24-26).

Moses’ experience recorded in Hebrews 11 indicates that the extent of our faith is revealed in our choices. Notice the choices that Moses made that are cited as demonstrating his faith (Heb. 11:24-27):

1. Verse 24—Refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter
2. Verse 25—Chose to suffer affliction rather than to gain the treasures of Egypt.
3. Verse 26—Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than the riches of Egypt.
4. Verse 27—Chose to forsake Egypt in spite of the wrath of the king.

In obedience to divinely inspired inner promptings Moses exchanged the palace for a hut. Sumptuous meals now became course food; power and glory were exchanged for poverty and obscurity. Instead of prestige and honor from the elite, he would meet contempt and ignorance among the depraved. He made his decision when the “pleasures of sin” seemed the most fascinating.

“See how Moses weighed matters: in one scale he put the worst of religion—the reproaches of Christ, in the other scale the best of the world—the treasures of Egypt; and in his judgment, directed by faith, the worst of religion weighed down the best of the world.”—*Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House), comment on Heb. 11:26.

Moses might have rationalized by saying that he would set the people free after becoming a ruler. Instead he let the treasures and pleasure of Egypt go. God had another plan for Moses and he sensed it.

SEARCH AND LEARN:

Compare the following texts to determine how secular values are to be weighed against spiritual values:

Matt. 6:31-33 _____

Matt. 16:26 _____

Heb. 11:26 _____

What danger was there in the way Moses had started his work of freeing the people? Ex. 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-25.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 246, 247.

Moses—Met God Face to Face

Part 3—Doing Things God’s Way

“Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian” (Ex. 3:1).

Only that work which is done in God’s way, guided by His Spirit, is God’s work. Through the use of human strategy God’s cause is hindered rather than promoted. It would take Moses 40 years to become the man God could use. All that time Israel was chafing under the yoke of slavery. (See Ex. 2:23-25.)

What lay behind Moses’ response to God’s specific call to him at the burning bush? Ex. 3:10, 11.

Note the divine concern: “I know their sorrows. . . . I am come down to deliver them . . . and to bring them . . . unto a good land” (verses 7, 8)—the gospel message in embryo! God will do the work, but He will use a man. Like the fire in a bush that in itself was nothing, so Moses was to be used but not consumed. Any greatness in him would come from the divine indwelling. Feeling a genuine sense of insufficiency he could but answer the Lord as he did.

Pleading the lack of a message, of prestige, of authority, of eloquence or special adaptation (Ex. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), he nevertheless obeyed. The presence of the great “I AM THAT I AM” (3:14) gave him assurance.

“The divine command given to Moses found him self-distrustful, slow of speech, and timid. He was overwhelmed with a sense of incapability to be a mouthpiece for God to Israel. But having once accepted the work, he entered upon it with his whole heart, putting all his trust in the Lord. . . . God blessed his ready obedience, and he became eloquent, hopeful, self-possessed, and well fitted for the greatest work ever given to man.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255.

What meaning can we find in the way the Lord called attention to a simple piece of equipment? Ex. 4:2.

The same question can be asked of us. With Moses a simple shepherd’s rod was turned into “the rod of God” (Ex. 4:20). In the name of Almighty God, Moses used this rod to turn water into blood, to bring judgment on Egypt, to divide the Red Sea, and to make water spring from the rock. (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29.)

THINK IT THROUGH: What do I have “in my hand” for God to use in the line of manual work, in teaching, in healing, and in various types of evangelism?

Moses—Met God Face to Face

Part 4—Temptation to Compromise

“Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness” (Ex. 5:1).

Moses knew from experience the pride of Pharaoh’s court. More than human courage was needed, therefore, for such a daring approach. The defiant “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” (verse 2) echoes the cry of many carnal hearts. To Pharaoh it was soon to be answered in the plagues that were to strike land and people.

Enduring the bitterness of his own people as the taskmasters increased their burdens (Ex. 5:5-9), Moses clung to the promises of God and retained his courage. “I have remembered my covenant” (Ex. 6:5-8). (See 2 Peter 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:20.)

Summarize the proposal Pharaoh made when the plagues brought home to him the seriousness of defying God. Ex. 8:25.

(For an account of the plagues, consult Exodus, chapters 7 through 12.) Notice the temptations to compromise presented in Exodus 8:25, 28; 10:11, 24—all aimed at binding Israel to Egypt. Firm in his resolve, Moses pressed for a complete separation from Egypt. “If we wish to be adopted into the family of God, . . . we must come out from the world and stand as a peculiar people before the Lord, obeying His precepts and serving Him.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 110. (See also 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 Peter 2:9.)

Saved from the destroying angel by the symbolic Passover blood marking the doors to their homes, the Israelites were now urged by Pharaoh to leave Egypt. (See Ex. 12:13, 29-31.) Notice the place of obedience in the provision of safety “under the blood” in the Exodus and in the advent preparation today. (See Isa. 53:5-7; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:2; Rev. 12:11.) Israel as well as the Egyptians were guilty before God. Only as they obeyed in faith were they saved.

Use your imagination to measure the test of faith that came to Moses by the Red Sea when pursued by the Egyptians. Ex. 14:9, 13-15, 21, 22.

Wedged between impassable barriers—a range of mountains, a waste of sand, and the sea confronting them the Israelites envisioned a massacre by the pursuing Egyptian army.

Encouraged by the angel of God and the pillar of cloud (that to the Egyptians was dark and threatening but to the Israelites was bright and directing), they went forward. To the unconverted Christ is a threat of judgment and foreboding, and to God’s people the light of love. (See Ex. 14:19, 20.) (See also *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 290.)

Part 5—A Bold Request

“The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11).

It is recorded that Moses went up into the mountain seven times. These were solemn encounters. At the burning bush he was told, “Draw not nigh hither” (Ex. 3:5). At Sinai, Israel must not approach too closely to the mountain (Ex. 19:10-12), but Moses went up.

On Sinai he heard God declare His will. There he received the Ten Commandments written by God Himself on tables of stone—the will of God for all people in all ages. (See Ex. 20:1-17; 31:18). Twice he remained 40 days with God as the Lord communicated His will, revealing more of the divine plan of atonement through the sanctuary service. He was given laws of offering which would point to “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,” precepts that fell away when Christ cried out on the cross “It is finished.”

From the mountain Moses relayed God’s message, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.” And then the people responded, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). From the mountain he pleaded with God for His people when they had given way to idolatry (Ex. 32:11-14, 32) offering to be blotted out of the book of life himself to save them.

Could there be an element of presumption in the special request that Moses made of the Lord? Ex. 33:18.

Previously Moses had asked God to show him His way (verse 13). It is good to know God’s way, but better still to know *Him*. This was Paul’s earnest desire, “That I may know him” (Phil. 3:10). God answered the latter prayer. Jesus explains why. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: . . . and I will . . . manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). The password of those who enter into the inner circle of God’s friends is “obedience.” In the last two chapters of Exodus it is stated 18 times that Moses did “as the Lord commanded.”

Yet “there shall no man see me, and live,” God said (Ex. 33:20). Nevertheless, hidden in a “cleft of the rock,” Moses was allowed to see as much of God as a man can without being consumed. (See Ex. 33:19-23.)

Being in the presence of God did not leave Moses unaffected. No encounter with God does. Descending from the mountain, “Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone” (Ex. 33:19-29). A truly sanctified life is not conscious of its beauty. Something of the glory of God remained with Moses. Beholding Jesus, we, in the same manner, “are changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). In communion with God we find the secret of Moses’ wisdom, patience, and submission to God’s will.

Moses—Met God Face to Face

Part 6—When Patience Failed

“Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly” (Num. 20:11).

Time and again Moses had had to contend with a grumbling people (Deut. 9:24), not to mention the revolts against himself. Exhausted by their murmuring, the man who had tried to settle the first dispute by force (Ex. 2:12-14) patiently led Israel closer to the Land of Promise. He had welded the people into a nation. Sharing their disappointment when, through distrust, they were prevented from going into the land of their hopes (Num. 14:27-29), he had led them on the 42 stages of their journey (Numbers 33), he had constantly encouraged them to listen to God’s voice, remembering their covenant (Deut. 4:30, 31).

Now at Kadesh, as water was scarce, the disgruntled people chided Moses (Num. 20:2-5). Forty years earlier, at Rephidim, Moses had been told to strike the rock to provide water (Ex. 17:6). This time he was told only to speak. (See Num. 20:8.) In irritation and with the rebuke, “Must we fetch you water?” (verse 10)—reflecting personal anger rather than zeal for God—he struck the rock. But God would provide, not he. God described the grievousness of his sin—“Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel” (verse 12). The result was that he would not lead Israel into the Promised Land (verse 12). Another would take over before they passed over the Jordan.

In whose company do we finally find Moses, this man whom God did not fail to honor? Matt. 17:1-3. What hope does this offer us?

“Thus the prayer of Moses, uttered so many centuries before, was at last fulfilled. He stood upon the ‘goodly mountain,’ within the heritage of his people, bearing witness to Him in whom all the promises to Israel centered.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 479.

When God first called Moses, he asked, “Who am I?” The Scripture answers: He is the man “whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10).

THINK IT THROUGH: Why was Moses’ one-time sin considered so grievous? (Consult *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 418, for the spiritual significance; also 1 Corinthians 10:4.)

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

How can we apply Moses’ experience to our own lives in these areas?

1. Obedience?
2. Trust?
3. Mission?
4. Relationship with God?



7

February 12-18
Adult Lesson

Balaam— Unwillingly Obedient

MEMORY TEXT: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).

The church of God is not a museum of finished and idle products, but rather a workshop in which God is shaping various objects to His design.

So in the Scriptures we see how some, such as Abraham and Moses, yielded to the forming grace of God. Others, however, seemed bent on following their own inclinations, disregarding the tender teaching of God. The tragic story of Balaam is one such case. Endowed with special gifts, he misused them for personal gain. Contrary to God’s express will, he tried to find divine sanction for his own plans, prompted by human promises of honor and financial gain.

It appears that God, on various occasions, chooses to make known His will to persons who prove unworthy in character. In doing so God shows that vain and selfish planning on the part of humans does not change His ways and plans. In the struggle between his convictions and his corruptions, Balaam gave way to the latter. Mesmerized by earthly gain, he gave outward show of obedience to God while inwardly plotting his chosen way.

He disobeyed, although God put both ordinary and extraordinary obstacles in his downward path. No appeal to reason, no rebuke for his conduct could revive his conscience or check his downward progress. Persisting in the pursuit of a sinful purpose, he became an example of those whom “the god of this world hath blinded” (2 Cor. 4:4).

He tried to serve two masters, God and mammon. He looked for the best in both worlds and lost both.

In studying the positive side of obedience it will help us to give attention to the other side. Balaam’s life story may help us better to shape our own. Where increased wisdom and practice is the aim, added knowledge may be of interest.

To derive greatest benefit from this study, read the three chapters, Numbers 22 through 24, in one sitting.

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 1—Powerful Enticement

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23, 24).

Israel was encamped on the doorstep to Canaan. The 40 years of wandering in the desert were soon to end. After registering many victories, they were on the plains of Moab, on the east side of Jordan opposite Jericho. Learning of the defeat of the Amorites, Balak, the king of Moab, made an alliance with the Midianites. But the Moabites felt that they needed something more—someone to come and curse (or cast a spell as the original suggests) on the Israelites, thereby hoping to neutralize God’s power. They were unaware of God’s instruction to Israel not to harm Moab (Deut. 2:9). It is at this point that Balaam entered the scene.

Who was Balaam? Balaam seemed to be renowned as a prophet in Mesopotamia. He was also believed to possess magical powers through which he could bless or curse people (in Joshua 13:22 called “soothsayer”). He was acquainted with the God of Israel. Further, he knew the plan of God for His people. Yet he bartered God’s favor for that of man. Consequently, when his name is mentioned three times in the New Testament it is as a warning to others. (See 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14.)

What applications can be drawn from the mixed appeals the messengers used to entice Balaam to come to their aid?

When the adversary of Israel could not conquer them from without, he used the strategy of employing an “insider” for his purpose. Those who have once been effective workers for God are most sought after by Satan to be used against God’s people.

Notice the strength of the flattery used to secure Balaam’s interest. It is tantamount to crediting him with divine power—“He whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed” (Num. 22:6). Coming from a king whose messengers have traveled more than two weeks to obtain his services, it was more powerful still. But, “a man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet” (Prov. 29:5). Add to this the rich reward divination offered, and we see the extent of his temptation.

Balaam knew full well God’s blessing on His people (Lev. 26:6-12). But, attracted by the offer, he dallied with temptation. “If sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Prov. 1:10). Note how Jesus and Peter closed the door by uncompromising resistance when tempted. (See Matt. 4:8-10 and Acts 8:20, 21.) As to the source and progress of temptation, see James 1:14, 15.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 438, 439.

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 2—Bartering With Wickedness

“What men are these with thee?” (Num. 22:9).

God once asked Adam, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). Rather than being a query as to his location, it was designed to help him see where disobedience had taken him. Likewise, when God in mercy wished to make Balaam aware of his true position, He asked him a simple question. Balaam did not ask—as did Saul later on the Damascus road—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” God had to come to Balaam to ask him, “What are *you* doing?” We need to be aware that God takes note of our companions. They sometimes indicate, and always influence, our character.

With the finality of God’s word—“Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed” (Num. 22:12)—one would think the matter closed. Yet notice how Balaam softened God’s order in his reply to the delegation, leaving the door open for further offers (verse 13).

To what kind of enticements did Balak turn in further appealing to Balaam to come to curse Israel? Num. 22:16, 17.

More influential people, a more urgent message, greater material inducements—how cleverly the devil baits his hooks! Judas sold his Lord to the enemy for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15; 27:5). Balaam was ready to sell himself. Sin pays its wages, but “what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

Temptation grows in strength when we handle it gently. Note the battle between Balaam’s convictions and his desire. He claimed that not even a houseful of gold could induce him to go against God’s will (Num. 22:18), yet the messengers were urged to stay overnight that “I may know what the Lord will say unto me more” (verse 19).

Balaam joined those of whom it is said, “They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way” (Prov. 1:30, 31). God knew what was in Balaam’s mind when he wished to find out “what more” God would tell him. There is *nothing* more when duty has been clearly stated. God does not rob us of our power of choice. He allows us to show where our strongest love is. Balaam’s case is not unique. “There are thousands at the present day who are pursuing a similar course. They would have no difficulty in understanding their duty if it were in harmony with their inclinations. It is plainly set before them in the Bible. . . . With great apparent conscientiousness they pray long and earnestly for light.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 440, 441.

THINK IT THROUGH: How do we weigh God’s will against our own personal preferences in such matters as amusement or employment?

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 3—Divine Prevention

Many Christians allow themselves to be drawn into compromising associations. They do what they know to be contrary to God's will. Yet they intend, in the course of things, to be true to God. Such intentions usually fail. They act without God's blessing, and God is not satisfied with their partial obedience.

What course does God sometimes take when people reject His counsel? Ps. 81:11, 12.

Although permitting Balaam to do as he wished (Num. 22:20), God in no way excused his sin. He knew how pride and greed longed to be satisfied. Yet there was a divine restraint. No attempt to harm Israel would be permitted.

There is an urgency in sinning (as well as in obedience). Compare Balaam's early departure (verse 21) with those of Abraham and Moses which we have studied previously. (See Gen. 22:3; Ex. 34:4.) What differences in motivation and destination!

What do you learn from the extraordinary means God used to show His disapproval of Balaam's actions? Num. 22:22-28.

"The man who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord, who declared that his eyes were open, and he saw the 'vision of the Almighty,' was so blinded by covetousness and ambition that he could not discern the angel of God visible to his beast. 'The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' 2 Corinthians 4:4. How many are thus blinded! They rush on in forbidden paths, transgressing the divine law, and cannot discern that God and His angels are against them. Like Balaam they are angry at those who would prevent their ruin."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 440.

In striking the dumb animal, Balaam was adding "sin to sin" (Isa. 30:1). Disobedience makes the heart hard. God's creation "groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Rom. 8:22) because of human sins.

What further measure did God take to prevent what the apostle Peter calls "the madness of the prophet"? 2 Peter 2:15, 16. (See also Num. 22:26-31).

When we meet some straits in life it might be good for us to consider whether we are heading in the right direction. If ruined plans, sickness, or financial reverses lead us to pray like the psalmist (139:23, 24), then we have allowed them to serve us well.

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 4—Pointless Confession

**“I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me”
(Num. 22:34).**

Having seen the sword-bearing angel (verses 31-33) and having heard his denunciation of his action, Balaam recognized his danger but not his sin. He was afraid of the consequences of his disobedience but not of sin itself. His confession was faulty in what he did not say. It contained no regret, no sorrow, no deliberate turning back, and was therefore worthless. Compare the confession of the prodigal son (Luke 15:18-21). The revelation of God’s displeasure left Balaam’s character unaffected. As with the unconverted Augustine who prayed, “God make me pure and holy, but not now,” there was no sign of heart sorrow. “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation. . . . But the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

Note Balaam’s casual reference to God’s disapproval: “*if it displeases thee.*” Systematic resistance of conscience completely blinds people to the sinfulness of sin.

Any step Balaam subsequently took would be a downward step. But the Lord allowed him to pursue his chosen course.

Joyfully received by Balak, Balaam was promised high honor. A welcoming ceremony with sacrifices of thanksgiving to the gods of Moab for his safe arrival must have disturbed the now somewhat chastened prophet. And Balak “brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people” (Num. 22:41). Imagine a professed servant of God, ministering on the high places of idolatry!

Eager that Balaam should see the full extent of the threat to his people, Balak hoped a potent and speedy curse would result. Maybe he also thought that for the curse to take effect, Balaam must see the people.

**What purpose do you see in the instructions Balaam gave to the king?
Num. 23:1-3.**

While elaborate preparations were made by Balak, Balaam had his own special preparations, drawing aside at first to his secret enchantments (compare 24:1) in some solitary place. Notice the difference—Moses mounting Sinai (Ex. 19:3); Ezekiel meeting with God in the plain (Eze. 3:22); or Jesus Himself in the mountains (Luke 6:12). What Balaam’s real purpose was is not stated. Did he look for some secret formula to break through the protection shielding God’s people? He found none. Moving from hilltop to hilltop, he found that his lips were sealed to cursing but open to blessing. Neither on Atijath-Huzoth, on Pisgah, or on Peor could he find sanction to curse the people once blessed. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 5—Wishful Thinking

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (Num. 23:10).

In the sad story of the wayward prophet, several facts strike us. First, God still loved him. “God met Balaam” (Num. 23:4), the account states. Restraining love did not forsake him, but adds “grace upon grace.” Human faithlessness does not alter the faithfulness of God. He spreads out His hands of mercy “all the day unto a rebellious people” (Isa. 65:2). (See also Ps. 119:90; Lam. 3:23; Rev. 19:11.)

Second, Israel knew nothing of the battle going on to destroy them. “How little do the Israelites know of what is taking place so near them! How little do they know of the care of God, extended over them by day and by night! . . . If they could discern the wonderful power of God constantly exerted in their behalf, would not their hearts be filled with gratitude for His love, and with awe at the thought of His majesty and power?”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 444.

What do you think of the pious prayer Balaam uttered when his attempted curse was turned into a blessing? Num. 23:10.

A better prayer would have been, “Help me now to live the life of the righteous.” Overwhelmed at the sight of Israel safely encamped, entrusted with the unfailing promises of God, Balaam wished to have a death like theirs. He looked for the reward of the righteous but not for the character. Most people, even the worst, hope for a good end to life; but the Bible is serious in stating that “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). It is not enough to *wish* to be a child of God; we must *choose* to be. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 440.)

A third fact should also receive notice. As out of the same well there cannot come both sweet and bitter water, Balaam had to declare, “All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do” (Num. 23:26). Despite Balaam’s hypocrisy, the Spirit of God compelled him to declare the sure blessings of God. Within this sad story are some of the choicest pronouncements in Scripture. Hired to curse Israel, he was compelled to bless them three times in unsurpassed language. Looking back on God’s wondrous works for His people, Balaam exclaimed, “What hath God wrought!” (Num. 23:23).

When Samuel Morse sent the first telegram in history from Washington to Baltimore on May 24, 1844, he humbly used the same four words, a message that should go to the ends of the earth.

THINK IT THROUGH: Should not we determine to live in such blessed obedience to God that the people of the world will be influenced to join the people of God?

Balaam—Unwillingly Obedient

Part 6—Truth Cannot Be Hid

“I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17).

The star at Bethlehem led to the Star out of Jacob. (Matt. 2:9). “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah” (Gen. 49:10). “And [thou] shalt call his name Jesus. . . . And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). On Pisgah, Moses had looked into the Promised Land. On Peor, Balaam saw in vision what God has prepared for those that love Him. But Balaam was not one of them. Stubborn resistance to God’s will has inevitable consequences, and he should have known it. (See Rev. 2:5.)

Up to a point Balaam still had the opportunity to repent. Compelled to utter of Israel, “The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them” (Num. 23:21), he wished to be in that victorious crowd, but sin held him back. “Remember,” “repent,” and “do”—he did none of those things. If the story had ended there we would have been left to conjecture as to his end. Enmeshed in greed, he could not disentangle himself. (See Prov. 5:22.)

We note with a sense of solemn warning that although he was unsuccessful on the mountaintops, Balaam’s suggestion on the plains brought calamity to Israel. Num. 25:1-3; 31:16.

Balaam knew that the safety of Israel depended on their loyalty to God. The only way to conquer them was through enticing them away from Him. Whispering a carnal suggestion to Balak with a view to seducing Israel to immorality did what intended cursing could not. Enticed into the licentious worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, Israel separated itself from God. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 451.) Twenty-four thousand died in the plague as a result (Num. 25:9). (See Isa. 59:2.)

Balaam did not die the death of the righteous. In the war against Midian he was slain (Num. 31:8). Thus falls the curtain for a man who has been called the double-minded prophet.

The apostle Peter warns of “the way of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:15). Jude 11 tells of the “error of Balaam.” Revelation 2:14 cautions against “the doctrine of Balaam.” Knowing God’s will, he put selfish interests first. Going against clear duty, he disobeyed, trying to circumvent God’s will through a show of outward respect for His name.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS: What positive, practical lessons can you draw from the life of Balaam?



8

February 19-25
Adult Lesson

Jonah— Reluctantly Obedient

MEMORY TEXT: “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

The indirect endorsement of the story of Jonah by Jesus is enough for us to accept it literally for what it is, a remarkable revelation of God’s dealings with people and nations. (See Matt. 12:38-41.)

Jonah was a historical figure. The first and only mention of him elsewhere in the Old Testament is 2 Kings 14:25, where we hear of his delivering a comforting message to the king of Israel—an offer of mercy from God to His people. In that case the people did not repent. In our story he is entrusted with another task—an errand for God to a pagan nation that did repent.

The book of Jonah has been called “the first missionary journal.” It does not idealize, but reveals bluntly human failings and hardness of heart. It also reveals God’s compassion. It is an account of reluctant obedience, of a man going on God’s errand but not in God’s spirit. Many seem to have chosen to doubt the miracle of Jonah’s preservation in and escape from the belly of the large fish, but even they cannot doubt as to the wideness of God’s mercy to sinners and saints alike.

The book of Jonah also has been called the test book of the Bible, challenging our faith. What is our attitude to the man and the message? Of the Ninevites it is written that they believed. There is a message in this book for all ages and all generations.

The book of Jonah has been divided into the following outline:

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1:1-3 | Disobedience |
| 1:4-16 | Disaster |
| 1:17 to 2:10 | Deliverance |
| 3:1-10 | Decisions |
| 4:1-11 | Dialogue |

How would you divide it, and what titles would you give to your divisions?

Jonah—Reluctantly Obedient

Part 1—The Great Commission

“The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:1, 2).

Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet with whom Jesus directly compared Himself (Luke 11:30). This makes Jonah’s experience of special interest to us. It also gives credibility to an account that some consider to be legendary. As did Jesus, Jonah came from Galilee, tracing his origin to Gath-hepher, only an hour’s walk north from Nazareth. Few details are given about the prophet except the name of his father, who belonged to the tribe of Zebulun. Jonah ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.), a time of distress in Israel. Before long the people were to reap the harvest from the kings’ having done “evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 14:24).

Nineveh, on the eastern side of the river Tigris, founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:11, NIV) was the greatest city of that time and capital of the kingdom of Assyria. It is described as “an exceeding great city of three days’ journey” (Jonah 3:3) encircling an area of 1640 acres. Compared to Jerusalem, covering less than 90 acres, it was “exceeding great.” Nineveh took in four component cities with gardens, orchards, and even pastures and grain fields, which explains the mention of “much cattle” in the city (Jonah 4:11).

Nineveh also was a wicked city. Its people were noted for their inhumanity. Nahum exclaims, “Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery” (Nahum 3:1). Zephaniah adds, “This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me” (Zeph. 2:15). Jonah was called to minister to this cruel, deceitful, proud, carefree, and wicked city.

What is your understanding of why Jonah responded the way he did to the call of God? Jonah 1:3.

He knew the God of his fathers. He also knew the blessing of obedience, but he lacked the desire to minister to the cruel Assyrians. He fled. The biblical characters are not touched up by any artist. Their failures as well as their successes are presented just as they occurred.

It is serious to flee from God’s call. Life becomes complicated. It is costly to flee. Jonah thought it would be cheaper to pay than obey. It would cost him a lot more than the price of a ticket. God does not make it impossible for us to flee. Jonah had no accident on his way to Joppa. There was a convenient ship bound for a Phoenician city on the south coast of Spain. He was called to go eastward; he chose to go westward. It is easy to find favorable circumstances if we have resolved to follow our own course, even taking them as a sign of Heaven’s approval.

Jonah—Reluctantly Obedient

Part 2—The Retributive Storm

“How then shall they call on him whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14).

No moment in life is more serious than when one is face to face with a call from God. Here we may ask, Why did Jonah flee? Was it the size of the city—the hopelessness of trying to make an impact? City evangelism is a frightening prospect for many.

Was it personal fear of the reputation of the city that caused him to refuse? Was he fearful of how the people would treat him, an alien prophet proclaiming doom? Assyrian monuments reveal the dreadful cruelty with which they treated their captives. Was it national bigotry? Was it that he did not want Nineveh to be saved, thus causing a continuous threat to the favored position of Israel? Was it a limited view of God’s grace? Was not Nineveh, a heathen city, outside the saving care of God? (See Num. 14:2; Ps. 135:4.) It was at Joppa, the very place of Jonah’s departure, that Peter had to be given a special vision to convince him that *all* are included in God’s offer of salvation (Acts 10:28).

Whatever Jonah’s reason, it should have been overruled by God’s call. But Jonah disobeyed, and with disobedience comes added fear. Adam and Eve sinned and hid in fear (Gen. 3:8-10). Moses gave several excuses for not going before Pharaoh (Exodus 3 and 4). Jeremiah felt inadequate when called (Jer. 1:6-8). Isaiah felt unequipped (Isa. 6:5). Many may have wished to obey God’s call but have hesitated. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

What lesson can you draw from the simple means God used to deal with the fugitive from duty? Jonah 1:4-6.

All God’s creation must obey its Creator. God chooses His tools to fit the occasion. (See Ex. 14:21; Num. 11:31.) In Elijah’s time “the Lord was not in the wind” (1 Kings 19:11), but in Jonah’s case He was.

In mortal danger, the mariners called on their gods, threw out their spare supplies and cargo to save the ship, already in danger of being broken up. Jonah, hiding away in the hold, was “fast asleep and snoring” (Septuagint).

Consider the implications of the following:

1. It is exhausting to run away from God’s will.
2. Often humans must suffer for some one else’s disobedience.
3. A Gentile had to wake up Jonah. Are we asleep to the needs of the world around us, slumbering through our responsibility? (See Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 15:34.)

FURTHER STUDY: *Prophets and Kings*, p. 267.

Jonah—Reluctantly Obedient

Part 3—The Strange Provision

“They said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah” (Jonah 1:7).

“Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23), Moses had cautioned Israel, urging them to obey. If Jonah had purposely hidden away in the hold, he was now brought to full view. Prodded with questions as to origin, occupation, and purpose of journey, he told all. Before the confused mariners he told of his belief in the Creator-God who also made the sea. Shamefacedly he admitted to running away from duty and expressed his belief that the storm had been sent to fetch him back.

In view of his earlier weakness, how do you account for Jonah’s proposal at the height of the storm? Jonah 1:11, 12.

Jonah may have lacked courage to obey God’s will, but his physical and moral courage and his honest confession of guilt impressed the sailors. Even in his disobedience they still perceived him to be God’s prophet and servant. His willingness to make amends heightened their respect for him and his God. Note their spirit as they rowed hard, yet in vain, to bring them to shore rather than take Jonah up on his offer (verse 13). But finally “they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging” (Jonah 1:15).

Radical action, not prayer, was needed. Israel was once told to rid the camp of hidden sin (Joshua 7:1-12). What an object lesson on how the heart has to be cleansed from unwanted cargo to bring peace to the soul! (See Ps. 32:3-5; Prov. 28:13.) The effect of it all on the mariners—the storm, Jonah’s testimony, the sudden calm—was that they turned from idolatry to the living God. (See Jonah 1:16.)

How can we answer doubts about the strange provision God made to save His disobedient servant? Jonah 1:17.

Many have speculated as to the nature of the great fish mentioned. The Creator would have no trouble providing a fish to suit the purpose or in adapting and using one already in existence. It is not the nature of the creature used but the nature of God’s dealings with Jonah that is important. The prophet was cast into the water, not to be drowned, but to be taught. In the dark of the deep he saw God’s light. He who tried to get out of God’s sight on land feared to be out of it in the sea. (See Jonah 2:4.)

How many act in the same manner today—they wish to have nothing to do with God when things go well, but turn to Him in prayer when misfortune strikes.

Jonah—Reluctantly Obedient

Part 4—The Recommissioning of the Prophet

“The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jer. 18:4).

God did not reject Jonah or cast him aside. In the watery depths he became willing to be made over again and used anew. He would be given a second chance (Jonah 2:10). We humans present a pliable, but sometimes stubborn, media for God to work on. We humans are slow to accept the form God intends. This is not due to the imperfect skill of the Potter but to the resistance and stubbornness of the clay. But God starts again. Yielding to the operations of God’s grace, the recalcitrant one is “renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:23). So it happened with Jonah. Of him, and all of us, it can be said, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). God’s concern was not only with Nineveh but also with His fearful prophet.

When the call again came to Jonah, how did it compare with the first call, and what is significant about Jonah’s reaction? Jonah 3:1-3.

Repentance is best shown by obedience at the point from which we turned away before. This time Jonah did not hesitate. Disciplined by his experience, he decided to do as told. His attitude to Nineveh might not have changed, but his attitude to God certainly was different.

Notice what was to be the content of his preaching—that which the Lord had bidden him (Jonah 3:2). The reshaped vessel was to carry no self-chosen messages.

Make the following comparisons:

1. God’s word to Jeremiah (1:8)

2. Jesus’ declaration about Himself (John 7:16)

3. Paul’s basis for his statements to the church (1 Cor. 11:23)

Jonah was to go in God’s time and with God’s message. Nothing can give greater confidence. Promptly and unhesitatingly he obeyed.

Part 5—The Great Revival

“As Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. . . . The men of Nineve shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas” (Luke 11:30, 32).

Judgment was imminent. Jonah’s preaching was forceful and backed up by personal experience. He certainly could testify dramatically to the bitter effects of disobedience, the restoring grace of God, and the immutability of the Almighty.

Study: The parallel between Jonah’s preaching and the advent message:

1. *Its timeliness*, as prophecy is fulfilled. We are no timesetters, but evidence is mounting that “he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37).
2. *Its contents* (Rev. 14:6, 7; Acts 8:4, 5).
3. *Its support in personal experience* (1 John 1:1-3; Mark 5:19, 20).

“Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites” (Luke 11:30). It could be that the story of the sailors had preceded him or that Jonah’s appearance gave evidence of his ordeal. Now he appeared in person, returned from the grave, as it were. Another possibility is that his message was the “sign.”

All social classes were affected. From the king to the simplest worker the message of repentance took effect (Jonah 3:5-8). It was not fasting, or sackcloth, or crying, but *repentance!* “God saw their works, that they turned away from their evil way” (verse 10). This saved their city. God’s mercy becomes operative in those who pronounce judgment on themselves (verse 8). Revival, repentance, and reformation save an individual as they save a city.

In what way was Jonah a type of Christ? Matt. 12:40.

Jonah endured figuratively and finitely what Jesus had to go through in infinite reality. “Out of the belly of hell cried I,” he said (Jonah 2:2). In an infinitely more real manner Christ suffered the agony of complete separation from His Father, which is the basis of hell. “I am cast out of thy sight” (verse 4) finds a deeper significance in the words of Jesus, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

Jonah was delivered from his tomb. So with Christ, “whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). Jonah’s miraculous deliverance may have helped the Ninevites to believe. How much more the message of the resurrection is to help unbelievers come to faith (Acts 2:22-38). Ponder Hebrews 2:3: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

Jonah—Reluctantly Obedient

Part 6—Displeasure at God’s Graciousness

“It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” (Jonah 4:1).

The Bible presents things as they are. The last chapter of Jonah disappoints some readers, but Jonah’s prayer to God is most revealing. Had his stay in the city convinced him that the people had forfeited their right to divine favor? Was his mind so fixed on God’s righteousness that he forgot to think of His forbearance? Had he so soon forgotten his own deliverance?

Did Jonah resent having helped to save the capital of the enemy of his people? Could the reason be the fear of his own people’s rejection and of God’s turning to other nations with His favors? Or was it simply national exclusiveness? Notice how in New Testament times such resentment put the apostle Paul in mortal danger from his fellow Jews (Acts 22:21, 22).

Through a timely parable of the gourd that withered (Jonah 4:5-11) the Lord taught Jonah the lesson that Jesus conveyed in another parable: “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Matt. 18:32, 33).

Anger is often wounded pride, and “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). Like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:28), who could not rejoice at his brother’s return, Jonah sulked over the city’s repentance. But God, revealing His Father-heart of love, said to him now, Come away from your narrow booth and rejoice with Me that the city has been spared. Divine mercy saved you, and the same mercy saved them.

While the story of Jonah tells us something of the smallness of the prophet, it tells us much about the greatness of God. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). Thus in the end Jonah was helped to become a more mature follower of the Lord, who not only emphasized obedience, but also preached compassion. Jonah in his failure was given what all of us need in our failures—a second chance.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

1. What does the book of Jonah indicate to you about God’s willingness to accept you and patiently lead in your life?
2. How important is it for you to fill the place God has designed for you to fill?
3. What else can you learn from this story about mission and the urgency of service that has significance to the work God has given you to accomplish for Him?
4. Are there things in your life concerning which God is saying to you, “Doest thou well to be upset about this?”

FURTHER STUDY: *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 271-274.



9

February 26 to March 3
Adult Lesson

Saul—Nearly Obedient

MEMORY TEXT: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Two prominent Bible characters named Saul represent the little tribe of Benjamin. Saul of the Old Testament, first king of Israel, eager at first to do God’s will, ended up going his own way and losing his crown. Saul (Paul) of the New Testament, first known for his persecution of those eager to go God’s way (Acts 8:3), ended up knowing that through redeeming grace and faithfulness to God he had gained a crown (2 Tim. 4:8). Our study this week deals with the first of the two.

When anointed as the first elected ruler of the Hebrews, Saul’s humility was as impressive as his physical stature—he towered above the people. Disappointed that Israel would spurn a theocratic government for an earthly monarchy, God nevertheless helped them to a good beginning in their choice of a national leader. No one ever has been too small to serve God, but many have become too big.

Successful as a military commander (1 Sam. 14:47, 48), Saul was fighting a losing battle with himself, becoming more and more self-willed. Giving less room for the Spirit of God who had so markedly equipped him at the outset and taking matters in his own hands instead of waiting for the Lord, he became self-assertive and no longer acceptable to God. The Spirit of God left him. Then petty jealousy and hatred marked this man whose magnanimous spirit had so characterized his early years. No attempt is made in this study to trace events of Saul’s 40-year reign. Instead, the spotlight is turned on a few significant events which help us understand the importance of obedience in our relationship to God. Be it king or commoner, the same principle holds true. Obedience is better than sacrifice. He who partially obeys, disobeys.

Conscious of his failure, disobedient Saul of the Old Testament lamented; “I have played the fool” (1 Sam. 26:21). His namesake in the New Testament, obedient and triumphant and recognizing fully his dependence upon the Lord, exclaimed, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Part 1—A High Calling

“Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5).

The demand of the people of Israel was a heavy blow to Samuel, their long-time judge. With the triple responsibility of prophet, judge, and priest, he had helped his people to prosper. Yet he knew that Moses had foretold that Israel would look for someone to lead them in government and war (Deut. 17:14). They found a suitable excuse in the condition of Samuel’s sons to whom he had chosen to delegate some responsibility. (See 1 Sam. 8:1-5.)

Forgetting the way in which God had led them through Moses, Joshua, and the judges, Israel wanted to be like the surrounding peoples. Moses had assured them that if they allowed God to lead, it would be said of them: “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is so great, who hath God so nigh unto them” (Deut. 4:6, 7). (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 607.)

Samuel saw that this rejection included not only himself but God and His theocratic government. Spelling out to the people what it would involve (1 Sam. 8:11-18), he accepted sorrowfully God’s counsel to let them go ahead. “I gave thee a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hosea 13:11).

What quality of Saul’s particularly suited the fancy of the people, and what does it indicate about their ability to select a ruler? 1 Sam. 9:1, 2.

Through what seemed like providential guidance the prospective king was led by his servant from Gibeah to Ramah, to Samuel, who is four times referred to in the context as “a man of God” (1 Sam. 9:3-10). Notice how God prepared Samuel for his meeting with Saul (verses 15, 16).

Notice the three signs given to Saul to assure him of the prophet’s authority. (See 1 Sam. 10:2-7.) The first two strengthened his faith; the third turned him into “another man.” Advising him of a future meeting in Gilgal (verse 8), the prophet parted from Saul.

With a change of heart there was a change of company (verses 9, 10). The school of the prophets had held scant interest for him before. Now he felt right at home with them, giving rise to a surprising question (verse 11). Significantly, God worked on a larger scale to provide him needed support. “There went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched” (1 Sam. 10:26).

THINK IT THROUGH: What does it mean to have one’s heart “touched by God”?

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 603-607; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 249, 250.

Part 2—Splendid Prospects

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”
(Zech. 4:6).

There were many commendable qualities in Saul which held great promise for him in his new position.

- *Physical appearance:* His commanding stature is said to have been “higher than any of the people” (1 Sam. 9:2). He was a king after man’s heart, as David became king after God’s heart (Acts 13:22).

- *Humble disposition:* He spoke of coming from the smallest tribe and family (1 Sam. 9:21). He did not tell his uncle about his anointing as king (1 Sam. 10:14-16).

- *Considerate:* He was concerned about his father’s anxiety (1 Sam. 9:5).

- *Modest:* He hid himself when publicly sought (1 Sam 10:22).

- *Courageous:* when action was needed in battle (1 Sam. 11:11).

- *Forbearing* when he was despised and insulted by the sons of Belial (1 Sam. 10:27).

- *Spiritual:* He had the assurance that God was with him (1 Sam. 10:7). He was given “another heart” (verse 9)—the only man in the Old Testament of whom this was said. He was twice given the Holy Spirit (10:10; 11:6). He was surrounded by dedicated men (10:26). He was supported by the counsel and prayers of Samuel (1 Samuel 15). (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 610, 611.)

The Spirit of God came upon Saul suddenly when particularly needed. Compare his experience with those of Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (Judges 3:9, 10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:5, 6). In each case God provided the power needed.

Saul did not choose to be king, but now he would have to choose whether to be led by God or to follow his own counsel.

Formally handing over the people to their king, Samuel pleaded with them to obey the voice of the Lord (12:14) and not rebel at their peril. In a mighty demonstration of the Lord’s displeasure at their choice to be like other nations, the Lord let nature speak for Him. An out-of-season storm struck terror to their hearts, and they pleaded with Samuel to intercede for them (12:16-19). There are many who will not have Christ reign over them yet would be glad to have Him intercede for them before the wrath of God.

Samuel chastised the people for their sin but still loved them, promising them his constant support. (Compare Moses’ support of Joshua, in Deuteronomy 1:38, with Samuel’s cooperation with Saul.) “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way” (1 Sam. 12:23).

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 608, 609.

Part 3—A Sad Defection

“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him” (Ps. 37:5-7).

God intended to deliver Israel once for all from the Philistines through Saul (1 Sam. 9:16). A significant victory over the Ammonites caused Saul humbly to declare, “To day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel” (1 Sam. 11:13). Giving God the honor, he found it easy to disregard those who had previously slandered him (verse 12). With all things appearing to be going well, he overthrew one of the Philistine garrisons in Israel, but threat of retribution was immediate. Attempting to rally his troops, he found them melting away, hiding in caves, and fleeing over Jordan (1 Sam. 13:1-7). Samuel had told him to meet him in Gilgal. There the memorial of the crossing of Jordan was a reminder of the blessing that comes from trusting the Lord. (See Joshua 4:19-24.) “Seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do,” he had been told (1 Sam. 10:8).

**What was wrong with the way Saul took matters into his own hands?
1 Sam. 13:8-12.**

As did King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16), Saul offered sacrifices which only the priests were authorized to do (see Num. 18:1-7). In Uzziah’s case leprosy cut him off from the living. Saul’s disobedience cut him off from kingship.

“Upon anointing Saul king, Samuel had instructed him with respect to this occasion; he was to go to Gilgal and wait there till Samuel should come.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 510. The instruction was probably repeated. Saul remembered it well, as evidenced by his excuses. His predicament was real. Wishing to buoy the people’s spirits, he could have pointed them to earlier victories and to God’s promises. Distrust and a desire to impress the people may have prompted his action.

The sentence pronounced by Samuel shows the severity of the sin: “Thou hast done foolishly. . . . Thy kingdom shall not continue” (1 Sam. 13:13, 14). Note Saul’s later pronouncement against himself (26:21).

He had sent no message to Samuel, seemed boastfully pleased with what he had done, blamed Samuel for delay in coming, and thus aggravated his sin.

The sentence he received appears to be a hard one, but “disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, is a great provocation. . . .

“It is not sinning that ruins men, but sinning and not repenting.”—*Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 172, 173.

Part 4—A Crucial Test

“When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?” (1 Sam. 15:17).

“Saul had failed to bear the test of faith in the trying situation at Gilgal, and had brought dishonor upon the service of God; but his errors were not yet irretrievable, and the Lord would grant him another opportunity to learn the lesson of unquestioning faith in His word and obedience to His commands.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 627.

The fact that so much of the Bible account deals with Saul’s failures must of necessity give a somewhat slanted view of Saul. Little mention is made of his victories—how he consolidated Israel and practically freed the highland of central Israel from the Philistines. (See 1 Sam. 14:47-52.) He also raised a considerable family, among them Jonathan, one of the loveliest characters in the Bible. Yet as the intent in chronicling his life in the Scriptures seems to be more to teach than to record, the great lessons are brought home forcefully and with intent.

Troubled by many external enemies, Saul was his own worst enemy. God had once given him “another heart,” but this did not mean that he could not go back to his old way of life.

What do you think was the reason why Samuel gave a precise command to Saul to destroy all traces of the Amalekites? 1 Sam. 15:3.

Nations that sin are subject to the wages of sin. The Amalekites, a nomadic race inhabiting the desert region between Palestine and Egypt, had attracted the anger of God in their underhanded dealings with Israel at their exodus from Egypt. They stealthily “smote the hindmost” of them (Deut. 25:17-19).

Saul did not measure up to the hopes placed in him. Even though he won a military victory he suffered a great personal defeat. He smote the Amalekites but he “spared Agag . . . and all that was good” (1 Sam. 15:9). This was complete defiance of God’s express command. Boldly posing as having acted as instructed, Saul was asked a simple question by Samuel that revealed the true situation. (See 1 Sam. 15:13, 14.) Failing to convince the prophet, Saul—as did Aaron in making the golden calf (Ex. 32:22, 24)—blamed the people. Condemned by the sound of bleating sheep, he tried to cover up his disobedience by religious excuses. Boasting of one’s religiosity is often a cloak for inner guilt. “It is the devil’s cleverest device so to camouflage error that it passes for truth.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 524. Notice how Saul “had set up a monument for himself” on his way to Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:12, NEB), taking to himself the glory that belongs to God alone, who said, “My glory will I not give to another” (Isa. 42:8).

Part 5—A Guiding Principle

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:22, 23).

Here we find a most concise formula for a Christian’s life. There is no substitute for obedience. Partial obedience is disobedience. Sacrifice has its place. God’s own “have made a covenant . . . by sacrifice” (Ps. 50:5). (See also Ps. 51:17.) Yet sacrifice in the place of obedience is not acceptable. (See Hosea 6:6.) No oblation, outward devotion, religious activity, or Christian benevolence can take the place of humble, sincere, and conscientious obedience to God’s will (Micah 6:6-8).

“With the sin of Saul and its result before us, how many are pursuing a similar course. While they refuse to believe and obey some requirement of the Lord, they preserve in offering up to God their formal services of religion. There is no response of the Spirit of God to such service. No matter how zealous men may be in their observance of religious ceremonies, the Lord cannot accept them if they persist in willful violation of one of His commands.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 634.

What do you understand to be the reason for the verdict pronounced on Saul? 1 Sam. 15:23.

Faced with the severity of the sentence, Saul admitted, “I have sinned,” yet in his confession he provided an excuse (verse 24). (Compare Ps. 51:3, 4.) Also note how in confessing he was more concerned with his own reputation than with God’s honor. “Honour me now . . . before the elders of my people” (1 Sam. 15:30). In courtesy, Samuel complied. Confession without pain of guilt or change of mind is no confession. It is but a sorrow of the world. (See 2 Cor. 7:9-11.)

After Saul’s first failure at Gilgal there seems to have been room for repentance, with a reversal of the verdict, but at this stage the verdict became irreversible.

Samuel, in unutterable sadness and disappointed beyond words, “cried unto the Lord all night” (1 Sam. 15:11). “And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death” (verse 35). Worse still, “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul” (1 Sam. 16:14) and was replaced by a spirit of jealousy and suspicion, particularly aimed at David, his successor, who was anointed king in his stead (see 1 Sam. 23:14).

Through disobedience Saul lost his kingship, fellowship, and leadership. (See 1 Sam. 15:28, 35; 18:16.) Yet his rejection as king did not necessarily mean that he would be lost as an individual. He might still repent and be saved.

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 630, 631, 634, 635.

Part 6—A Hope That Failed

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isa. 55:6). (Read also verse 7.)

This suggests that there may be a time when God will not be found, when His patience is exhausted and His Spirit no longer strives with a hardened heart. (See Luke 13:24, 25.) Had Saul arrived at that place?

Dreading an attack by the Philistines, Saul needed counsel, but “when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Sam. 28:6).

“The Lord never turned away a soul that came to him in sincerity and humility. Why did He turn Saul away unanswered? The king had by his own act forfeited the benefits of all the methods of inquiring of God. He had rejected the counsel of Samuel the prophet; he had exiled David, the chosen of God; he had slain the priests of the Lord. Could he expect to be answered by God when he had cut off the channels of communication that Heaven had ordained? He had sinned away the Spirit of grace, and could he be answered by dreams and revelations from the Lord?”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 676.

Saul was like a man with many telephones in his office, who has cut all the wires, then wonders why he receives no messages.

How can you account for Saul’s final desperate attempt to find “guidance”? 1 Sam. 28:7.

At En-dor, eight miles from his encampment on Mount Gilboa, Saul looked for an answer from one of those whom he, on God’s direction, had tried to eradicate. (See 1 Sam. 28:3; Deut. 18:9-14.) Necromancy, or seeking contact with the dead, was expressly forbidden. Saul had neglected to ask Samuel’s counsel during his life. Now he tried to contact the prophet when he was dead. (See 1 Sam. 28:11-20.) There is nothing strange in a devil impersonating Samuel. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. (See 2 Cor. 11:14.) There is to be an increase of such manifestations in the last days. (See 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13, 14.)

The counsel was not the kind Samuel would have given. It was one of despair intended to drive to self-murder as in the case of Judas. (See Matt. 27:4, 5.) Such is the strategy of Satan. When tempting, he says, Why can’t you? Afterward he taunts, How could you? Scripture is clear in its judgment of Saul. (See 1 Chron. 10:13, 14.) Spiritualism is not of God. After Saul fell by his own hand in a battle on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 31:4), David three times lamented, “How are the mighty fallen.” (See 2 Sam. 1:19-27.)

PERSONAL APPLICATION: List the major concepts or ideals that you have learned from this study that you wish to apply to your life.



10

March 4-10
Adult Lesson

Josiah— Went Right Ahead

MEMORY TEXT: “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).

Of King Josiah it can well be said that he appeared “as a root out of dry ground.” Hardly has the soil of the soul been more barren—parched from a lack of the knowledge of God—than when he came to reign. Yet it yielded the boy-king who in his youth became the greatest reformer in Judah. The sixteenth ruler of the kingdom became the foremost in concern for a return of God’s people to reverence and obedience to His will.

“Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him” (2 Kings 23:25). With the example of wicked Manasseh, his grandfather (whose son Amon followed in his steps), Josiah chose to lead his people back to God. Manasseh, although taught by Hezekiah, led the people into grossest idolatry. Piety does not run in the blood. Commitment to God is not inherited; it must be personally chosen.

The Scripture outline of Josiah’s life is replete with evidences of holy devotion. This in spite of the record of how deeply God’s chosen people had fallen in their apostasy. Josiah’s work of reform comes to us in its ancient historical setting as a potent reminder of the need for separation from the world. Ellen White writes that the whole congregation entered “into a solemn covenant to keep the commandments of Jehovah. This is our work today. We must repent of the past evil of our doings, and seek God with all our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 31, 1888.

Sensing our need for reform, we do well to study the example of Josiah. With him, personal piety came first, zeal for others followed. His personal consecration encouraged others to yield to the will of God.

At his death, “all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah” (2 Chron. 35:24), attesting to the excellency of his character. In every home they mourned “as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). He was a man whose goal was the glory of God and who “turned not . . . to the right or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2). His obedience inspires, and his steadfastness is an example to us all.

Part 1—Dark Background

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccl. 12:1).

A light object shown against a dark background is strongly accentuated. So the bright example of God-fearing young King Josiah becomes strikingly impressive against the background of his idolatrous ancestry. His grandfather, King Manasseh, seduced Judah “to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:9).

Although a period of time spent in captivity led Manasseh to repent, he could not efface the effects of his evil influence. It is recorded of his son, Amon, that “he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did” (2 Kings 21:20). With the assassination of Amon after two years, his son Josiah stepped to the throne (640/639 BC).

What is so remarkable about the record of this young king? 2 Kings 22:1, 2.

Three hundred years earlier, Josiah had been mentioned by name at an altar in Bethel. While offering incense, King Jeroboam, “who made Israel to sin” and provided golden calves as idols, was rebuked. (See 1 Kings 12:28.) Told by a prophet of a coming reformer who on that very site would burn the bones of the pagan priests, King Jeroboam tried to silence the prophet. The altar fell to pieces, and the king was paralyzed. (See 1 Kings 13:2-5.) The prophecy given was to be fulfilled in young Josiah.

His task was an overwhelming one. He faced a land full of idolatry and corruption, with altars to Baal erected everywhere. Worship of heavenly bodies was openly practiced at the royal court. The temple was closed and in decay, replaced by altars built to the sun, the moon, and the stars. The law was forgotten or unknown. Of Manasseh it was further said that he “shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another” (2 Kings 21:16). Dissenting voices were silenced.

What fate had befallen some who at various times had declared God’s will? Heb. 11:36, 37.

Tradition tells us that the prophet Isaiah was one of the victims. He was sawn asunder early in the reign of Manasseh. Going contrary to God’s will had made Israel captive, “because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God” (2 Kings 18:12). (See *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 384, 385.)

Part 2—Youthful Devotion

“From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15).

At the top of the queen’s staircase in famous Windsor Castle in England stands a statue of King Edward VI. He is pointing with his scepter to a passage in the Bible he is holding. The portion is the opening verses of 2 Kings 22. The monarch wished to convey to his son the principles by which he should be guided if called to be king. Right conduct never ceases to inspire.

Such a privilege was not afforded Josiah. The book of the law was lost. Did the spoken instruction by his mother, Jedidah, exert the same kind of influence on him as Jochebed did on Moses or Eunice on Timothy? Did his training, his natural disposition (“thine heart was tender,” 2 Chron. 34:27) and the sovereign grace of God all converge to make him the man he became. God works miracles of grace when we allow him to. From a home filled with idols, God called Josiah. Let no parent today ever despair!

Also, there is encouragement for those who are forced to contend with adverse circumstances. Even when growing up with ungodly parents, serving in ungodly households, working with ungodly companions we still can be faithful.

Note that God sometimes calls very young persons. The boy Samuel was called rather than Eli, his guardian in the temple.

To what extent do we have evidence that Josiah’s faith matured in his youth? 2 Chron. 34:3.

He did not seek the gods of his paternal father, but the Lord of his spiritual ancestor, David, who had confessed, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee” (Ps. 63:1). Many of the most ardent Christians have been those who responded to the call of their Lord while young.

“Surrounded by profligate courtiers, opposed by unprincipled men, he was earnest, decided, persevering, and consistent. ‘He began to seek,’ continued and spent a whole life in setting things right through the length and breadth of his kingdom.”—*The Preachers Complete Homiletic Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 305.

“Those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17). As early fellowship with God in the day secures the blessing for the ensuing hours, so an early seeking after God in life ensures riches obtainable in no other way. Seeking after God, Josiah found Him.

THINK IT THROUGH: How can a person sense the call of God?

FURTHER STUDY: *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 383, 384.

Part 3—Courageous Purge

“In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images” (2 Chron. 34:3).

At 20 years of age Josiah launched a work of reformation unequaled in the history of Judah. Courage and perseverance were called for. The idolatry practiced for more than half a century was deep-rooted and widespread.

To grasp the immense task facing Josiah, read 2 Kings 23:4-14. Jeremiah, of Anathoth, a city some three miles from Jerusalem, began to prophesy one year after the great reformatory work began. (See Jer. 1:2.) The plot against the prophet’s life by the people of his own town indicates the strength of their resistance to reformation. (See Jer. 11:18-23.)

SEARCH AND LEARN

Using the references given, summarize the reformatory work done in dealing with each of the items in the following categories:

1. The temple (2 Kings 23:4) _____

2. Idolatrous priests (2 Kings 23:5) (See also 1 Kings 18:40.) _____

3. Graven image of the grove (Asherah, 2 Kings 23:6) _____

4. Horses and chariots used in processions (2 Kings 23:11) _____

5. Topeth (2 Kings 23:10) _____

6. Items regarding heavenly bodies (2 Kings 23:4, 5) _____

7. Jeroboam’s altar at Bethel (2 Kings 23:15, 16) (See also Ex. 32:20.) _____

Part 4—Restoration of Worship

“In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, . . . he sent Shaphan . . . to repair the house of the Lord his God” (2 Chron. 34:8).

For more than 200 years, since the reign of Joash (see 2 Chron. 24:1-14), no significant repair of the house of God had been attempted. Reformation has two sides: uprooting and replanting.

Any doctrine or practice contrary to the Word of God has no place in His church. Some of them may be deeply rooted through centuries of acceptance, but if not of the Lord’s planting, they must be uprooted. These self-sown ideas, blown in with some “wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), must be removed. Some examples are immortality of the soul, infant baptism, invocation of saints, a false sabbath, the worship of Mary, and righteousness by works. “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).

As Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel to obtain a blessing, so Josiah repaired the temple. (Notice the basis of Haggai’s appeal for the building of the second temple after the captivity, and the blessing Judah had been missing, Haggai 1:4-10.)

What lessons can you draw from the momentous discovery made during the restoration of the temple by Josiah? 2 Chron. 34:14.

God so blessed Josiah that large sums of money were brought for the repair of the temple. While this was being done the long-lost scrolls of the Word came to light. The act of reform undertaken by Josiah was the more noteworthy as it was executed without the help of the Holy Scriptures that had been just then recovered. Later the reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, and the pioneers of our own denomination had the Written Word of God for encouragement and guidance.

“It was the observance of the statutes recorded by Moses, especially those given in the book of the covenant, which forms a part of Deuteronomy, that had made the reign of Hezekiah so prosperous. But Manasseh had dared set aside these statutes; and during his reign the temple copy of the book of the law, through careless neglect, had become lost. Thus for many years the people generally were deprived of its instruction.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 392, 393. The discovery of the Word must have been to Josiah like a seal, sanctioning the work he had so boldly undertaken. “The entrance of thy words giveth light” (Ps. 119:130).

THINK IT THROUGH: What might be some doctrinal “seedlings,” not of God’s planting, that the being brought into God’s church today?

Part 5—Momentous Discovery

“That they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law” (Deut. 31:12).

In Josiah’s day as well as now, the Scriptures were to be used, understood, and obeyed. There seems to have been no provision for making copies until the time of the kings. The Israelite kings had been instructed to make a copy of the law “in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites” (Deut. 17:18). A public reading of the entire book of the law was presented every seventh year, at the Feast of Tabernacles. (See Deut. 31:10, 13.) It was a sad reflection upon the spiritual state of Judah that the Book of God had been lost and forgotten for so long.

Matthew Henry suggests that this might have been the only copy of the sacred writings in existence. Thus, humanly speaking—but for this discovery—we might never have heard of the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. Even though it was lying unnoticed during the night of apostasy, God brought it to light and demonstrated its life-changing power. We see here a parallel to the “discovery” of the Bible during the Protestant Reformation. Hidden beneath the dust of tradition, it was brought out as a light to all people.

How would you account for the reaction of the king to hearing the book read? 2 Chron. 34:19-21.

Although when the scroll was read others heard only Moses speaking, Josiah heard the voice of God. “Josiah did not say, ‘I knew nothing about this book. These are ancient precepts, and times have changed.’ . . .

“In Josiah’s day the Word of the Lord was as binding, and should have been as strictly enforced, as at the time it was spoken. And today it is as binding as it was then.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1133.

“Enquire of the Lord for me” (2 Chron. 34:21). Having acted on the light he had, Josiah now desired more light. Not content or self-satisfied with what he had done, he desired humbly what Balaam had expressed hypocritically, “that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more” (Num. 22:19). Appointed messengers would obtain the answer from Huldah, the prophetess, living in Jerusalem even though Jeremiah, the prophet, who was supporting the king in the work of reformation, lived in Anathoth in Benjamin (Jer. 1:1).

Huldah is the only example of a prophetess in Israel on a seemingly equal footing with the prophets. Miriam, Deborah, and Anna had, as holy women, certain gifts of song and prediction from God. (See Ex. 15:20; Judges 4:4, 5; Luke 2:36-38.)

To Josiah were disclosed the severity of God’s judgment upon Judah and the extent of God’s mercy. (See 1 Chron. 34:23-28.)

Part 6—Covenant of Loyalty

“The king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book” (2 Chron. 34:31).

Huldah’s answer found in 2 Chronicles 34:23-28 disturbed the king. The covenant made by Israel had been utterly violated, but Josiah eagerly hoped that if it were renewed it might still secure God’s favor for them. Summoning rulers and the people, he himself read to them from the Sacred Book. By breaking the covenant the people had forfeited the promised blessing. To receive it anew there must be a return to obedience. Leading the people by example, Josiah had them stand with him in dedication. (See 2 Kings 23:3.)

The king’s own repentance was deep and sincere, but how many shared his commitment? They had parted with the idols, but how many still clung secretly to them? Sin clings tenaciously. (See Heb. 12:1.) Exhortation or outward pressure will avail little if there is not an inner desire to put away unrighteousness and live for God.

Illustration: Winds may lash and storms unleash all their power against a tree, but dead leaves may still cling to the branch. Yet when the sap rises, in the stillness of a quiet day, those same leaves are pushed off to give place for new growth. So it is with true repentance. Love of God within gives place to nothing that is contrary to His will. Sin is not ripped away as much as it is *crowded* out. (See John 14:15; 1 John 5:3.)

Judging by Josiah’s example, what can special convocations called by spiritual leaders do for the people? 2 Chron. 35:1, 18.

The chronological order of events in the effort of reform is not quite clear from the two accounts given. Yet the *when* is not so important; the *what* and *by what motivation* are significant.

The prophetess Huldah had foreseen that the apostasy of the people would bring them to drink the cup of wrath. (See 2 Chron. 34:23-25.) Despite Josiah’s best efforts, Judah did not turn to God “with their whole heart, but feignedly” (Jer. 3:10). Josiah was spared having to witness the fate of his people. (See 2 Chron. 34:26-28.) He was mortally wounded at Megiddo, bringing his life to an end (2 Chron. 35:23, 24).

Whatever the failure of Judah, the inspiring record of a young man with but *one* aim, the glory and honor of God remains. His life of ready obedience sets us an example. He went right ahead doing God’s will.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: Are there sins in my life that I need to let God “crowd out”? Am I willing to let God’s Spirit take control?



11

March 11-17
Adult Lesson

Samson— The Strong Weakling

MEMORY TEXT: “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil” (Prov. 4:26, 27).

Some people are notable for what they have done, others for what they failed to do. Samson belongs to the latter. Yet few have started out with greater promise or been so singularly equipped for their task as the muscular hero of Israel. His life was demonstrably a tragedy of unfulfilled potential.

It has often been shown that with God the weakest man is strong. In Samson’s case it becomes frighteningly clear that without God the strongest man is weak.

With Joseph, by comparison, a choice in early life set him on the road to blessing and prosperity. Four times it is stated of him in his youth that “God was with him.” Samson’s choice started him early on a downward course leading to the place where it is stated that “the Lord was departed from him” (Judges 16:20).

Samson has been described as a man with big muscles and small principles. Yet in early training he was favored above most. But even God-inspired instruction can be disregarded, passion be put before principle, and self-will before God’s will.

Samson presented his wedding guests with a riddle which they could not solve (Judges 14:12-14). He presents us with the riddle of his own life, hard to understand but finding its explanation in his refusal to let God direct. His constant exposure to temptation should have made him a man of watchfulness and prayer. Christ said, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). Samson slept, prayed not, and fell for temptation.

This is a story of the man that might have been. It also provides an insight into the work of the Holy Spirit. Had Samson allowed the Holy Spirit to use him unreservedly, he may have been one of Israel’s foremost leaders. He may not have lived in vain as a deliverer of Israel. If his story makes clear to us the need for consecration and a willingness to obey God, his life will have served a purpose.

Samson—The Strong Weakling

Part 1—Angelic Announcement

“The angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3).

Temptation comes to all people, and more strongly to those chosen for special tasks. Christ recognizes human weakness and provides divine help. Countless of His followers have proved the reality of Christ’s promise and lived victoriously. There is a “way to escape” (1 Cor. 10:13). Yet deliberate flaunting of the divine will in self-chosen paths carries with it no such promise. The story of Samson shows what happens when one insists on his own way, disregarding warning and relying on his own judgment.

The narrative included in this week’s study begins in Judges 13 and opens with the oft-repeated statement of Israel’s sinning and then being chastised by an enemy. Previously it was Moab and Midian (Judges 3:12; 6:1) and other nations; now it was the Philistines. (See also Heb. 12:6.)

A special manifestation of divine favor surrounded the birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-5). As was true of the births of Isaac, John the Baptist, and Jesus Himself, the birth of Samson was announced to a childless couple by an angel, showing the importance of the work. Notice that Manoah believed, whereas Zacharias asked for a sign (Luke 1:18).

The son to be born was to “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5), a work continued by Samuel, Saul and Jonathan, and completed by David.

It was the highest honor for any Israelite to be called as a savior of his people in a time of crisis. God had called people from many tribes, including, among others, Othniel from Judah, Ehud from Benjamin, Barak from Naphtali, and Gideon from Manasseh.

What may all parents learn from Manoah’s response? Judges 13:8.

At a second angelic visit the father posed the question all parents should ask of God: “How shall we order the child?” (verse 12). Notice that God’s first instruction was to the mother herself. Admittedly, Samson’s case was a special one. Yet it will profit us to note what general principles have been suggested as factors influencing the unborn child.

“The child will be affected for good or for evil by the habits of the mother. She must herself be controlled by principle and must practice temperance and self-denial, if she would seek the welfare of her child. . . .

“The effect of prenatal influences has been by many lightly regarded; but the instruction sent from heaven to those Hebrew parents, and twice repeated in the most explicit and solemn manner, shows how this matter is looked upon by our Creator.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 561.

Samson—The Strong Weakling

Part 2—Separated to God

“The child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death” (Judges 13:7).

A Nazarite or Nazirite was one separated and in a special way dedicated to God. Numbers 6:1-8 describes him (or her) as “holy unto the Lord” all the days of separation, whether for the more usual limited period, applying to Nazirites of days, or perpetual lifelong Nazirites by parental dedication. Samson belonged to the latter category, as did Samuel and John the Baptist. His long hair made him a “marked” man. Samson’s vow called for self-denial, or abstaining from sensual indulgence, and for purity. Called to deliver Israel, he must in the strictest manner be devoted to God and be an example of holiness. (See Isa. 52:11; 1 Tim. 5:22.)

Notice how, apart from the good spiritual legacy from his parents, Samson was specifically equipped for service. Judges 13:24, 25.

The camp of Dan was an encampment created by the armed 600 who formed a settlement. Located near Kirjath-Jearim, somewhat higher in the mountain that Zorah—mentioned later—it was well placed for their campaigns to acquire new territory. (See Judges 18:11, 12.) The patriots there told Samson of the cruel deeds of the enemy. One convincing evidence of the Lord’s blessing on Samson was the endowment of the power of the Holy Spirit, with inspiration for action and physical strength. Time and again he would be moved by the Spirit, yet there is an economy of divine power. He held in his hand the key to that power—obedience to God (Acts 5:32). The devil was intent on taking that key. A battle more intense than the one with the Philistines awaited him. (See Eph. 6:11.)

Give some specific reasons why there is personal need of each believer to have an infilling of the Holy Spirit. Eph. 3:16; 5:18.

How common is the test which first challenged Samson’s consecration? How can it be met? Judges 14:1, 2.

Samson’s first problem involved his emotions. Dominated by the fatality of desire, he went outside God’s will for him. (See Prov. 14:12.) His second problem was his attitude toward his parents. It was then customary for parents to transact the arrangements and pay the dowry for the bride. Samson’s infatuation outweighed his parents’ counsel and the express commandment of God. (See Deut. 7:3, 4.) He chose to disregard his parents. (See Prov. 1:7, 8.)

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 562, 563.

Samson—The Strong Weakling

Part 3—A Problem of Priorities

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

“Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time when he must execute his divine mission—the time above all others when he should have been true to God—Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel. He did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 563.

Passion is no safe guide to right action, and this unwise step taken by Samson would be followed by others of the same kind. Had Samson but realized it, an experience he had on his way to his bride-to-be could have served him as an object lesson. “Behold, a young lion roared against him” (Judges 14:5). With Spirit-induced power he tore it to pieces (verse 6). God could have helped him to tear that temptation to shreds, had he but seen it for what it was.

What can we learn from where Samson placed his priorities? Rom. 8: 5, 6.

Samson had a problem of priorities. He spent too much time on enemy territory and too little time with God. Something vital is missing in the account. There is no mention of prayer except twice in extreme crises. If praying had been a habit with him, Samson’s life would have taken another direction. In neglecting to nourish his spiritual nature, Samson allowed his carnal desires to dominate. (See Rom. 8:12, 13.)

“Some have a special tendency to pride, others to selfishness, some to ambition, other to avarice, some are prone to jealousy, . . . others to evil speaking, . . . excess of wine, other to impurity. . . . Satan, like a skillful angler, baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish.”—*Preachers Complete Homiletic Commentary*, pp. 487, 488.

“He [Samson] judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years” (Judges 15:20). He did not rule over all 12 tribes but most likely over his own limited area. Little is mentioned about that aspect. His “judging” seems not to have been of a judicial character, but more through his exploits as the champion of the people. This took him in close proximity to danger. To him, Christ would have said, Samson, Samson, “Satan hath desired to have you” (Luke 22:31). (See also Matt. 26:41; 1 Thess. 5:17.) Instead of dwelling on Samson’s wrong actions, it is well to consider ourselves, “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11).

Samson—The Strong Weakling

Part 4—Playing With Fire

“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Prov. 6:27).

When we view the faithlessness of Samson and his treatment of his Nazirite vow with a casualness amounting to contempt, we marvel at the faithfulness and patience of God. He had a plan for this “giant”; He loved him. The enemy’s intentions surely were clear to Samson. On a previous occasion his own people, in fear, had bound him and delivered him to enemy lines. Through the Spirit’s power he had then broken the cords, escaped, and inflicted heavy casualties among the Philistines. (See Judges 15:9-15.)

Betrayed perhaps by the very woman whose favors he sought, Samson’s visit to Gaza, the largest of the five Philistine centers, became known by the enemy. Sure of their prey, they waited until morning to capture the judge of Israel. But at midnight he broke down the city gate and took it with him (Judges 16:3). Artists love to depict Samson, in this display of superhuman strength, carrying the heavy weight. But they are unable to show the heavier burden of guilt that should have bent him low before God. (See Ps. 38:4; Isa. 53:4, 12.)

With his special gifts, Samson allowed conceit and presumption to set in. In the security of his own strength he forgot his high calling and the declared purpose of his life. God saved him out of his dilemma, but did not thereby condone his action.

Courage in doing right would have made Samson a hero for God. Presumption in doing wrong made him a fool, and “the prosperity of fools shall destroy them” (Prov. 1:32).

Summarize what the apostle Paul teaches us in Romans 2:3-11 about despising God’s goodness and long-suffering.

Not a secret charm but the power of God provided the way of escape for Samson. In temptation or distress, when walled in on every side, Christ will uproot the doorposts for us to take away the gates and will “make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). It is never necessary to give in to temptation, to sin.

As did Samson, many today misinterpret God’s forbearance and add sin to sin. The sin at Gaza, not repented of, led to the sin at Sorek. Like a seed in the soil or the runners of a ground cover, sin grows.

God had patience with Samson and tried to woo him back for 20 years. By noting people’s failure we often do not notice where they succeed. There must have been such occasions with Samson, but little is spoken of them. In Samson’s case it became evident that “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Samson—The Strong Weakling

Part 5—Dangerous Presumption

“It came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him” (Judges 16:4, 5).

List the eight events recorded about Samson from which we are given insights into his character and summarize their import:

Judges 14:1-4 _____

Judges 14:5-9 _____

Judges 14:10-20 _____

Judges 15:1-8 _____

Judges 15:9-20 _____

Judges 16:1-3 _____

Judges 16:4-22 _____

Judges 16:23-31 _____

Sadly, the events recorded in the Inspired Record fail to display to us the man of principle, purpose, and purity which his earthly upbringing and special endowment would lead us to expect him to be.

“Angels of God will preserve His people while they walk in the path of duty, but there is no assurance of such protection for those who deliberately venture upon Satan’s ground.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 198.

In the seventh event listed above, questioning Samson as to the secret of his strength, Delilah three times touched upon the real reason behind her wish to know. Perhaps it was done in jest, as a game, with Samson answering in the same mood. Yet it was a game with the highest stakes, and it was unworthy of a Spirit-endowed man so to trifle with his sacred gifts. (See Judges 16:5-14.)

Notice the record of the “liers in wait” in the inner chamber (verse 12). The devil’s helpers are always ready to exploit the weakness of any child of God who lowers his guard. (See God’s warning to Cain, Gen. 4:7.)

The frightening aspect of the revealing story is to discover how sin gradually and unnoticed comes closer to the heart with each temptation. Samson seemed like a moth that circles closer and closer to a burning flame until it finally is drawn in and consumed. This was to be Samson’s fate.

Samson—The Strong Weaking

Part 6—Agonizing Discovery

“It came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; that he told her all his heart. . . . I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man” (Judges 16:16, 17).

Had Samson recognized his separation from God and the enormity of his sin, he could have sprung up, retained his strength, and fulfilled God’s purpose for him. But—in terms of this temptation—he passed the point of no return. She “pressed him daily with her words.” The visit was not a brief or solitary occasion. (Compare Joseph in a similar situation [Gen. 39:10] and his reaction.)

Samson had accomplished his feats through God-given strength; now it was to be taken from him (Judges 16:18, 19). Acting on the information given, Delilah summoned his enemies, who robbed him of his power.

Gouging out his eyes, the enemy put Samson in brass fetters to grind in the prison mill at Gaza with no way of escape this time (verse 21). Disobedience may start as a thin cord, but soon it becomes brass manacles. Consider carefully the binding, blinding, and grinding effects of sin. Disobeying and trifling with sin once too often, Samson collected the wages of sin. It may have been deferred payment, but it came.

Consider the discoveries Samson made during his blindness:

1. *The height of his folly.* Self-assertive and wise in his own eyes, he had asked counsel of neither God nor man.
2. *The depths to which he fell.* The deliverer himself became captive. Disobedience not only breaks the commandment, it breaks the man. He lost his strength, his sight, his liberty, his dignity.
3. *The wideness of God’s mercy.* Called by Paul “the God of hope” (Rom. 15:13), He did not utterly forsake him.

“In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 566.

A return of strength followed a return to God. When Samson pulled down the pillars, the house roof fell on thousands of victims, of which he was one (Judges 16:29, 30). Like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42), Samson prayed to be remembered. Both had their prayers answered. Often unfaithful in life, Samson was counted among the faithful in death.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: It is easy to criticize Samson for his weaknesses and indulgences. But Satan always attacks us at our weakest points. Identify those points Satan might consider to be your weakest, then claim this promise: “None need be overcome. Man is not left alone to conquer the power of evil by his own feeble efforts. Help is at hand and will be given to every soul who really desires it.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 568.



12

March 18-24
Adult Lesson

Joshua— The Committed Captain

MEMORY TEXT: “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes
always, even unto the end” (Ps. 119:112).

When he led Israel through Jordan into Canaan, Joshua stepped onto territory where 38 years before he had spied out the land. Only he and Caleb, of the twelve sent out, believed that with God they could conquer the “giants” of the land. (See Num. 13:33.) Now the nation that was “led out” by Moses was to be “led in” by Joshua.

The name is significant. Joshua means “Yahweh is deliverance,” or “Yahweh is salvation.” (See *S.D.A. Bible Dictionary*, p. 622.) The name anticipates the work of our Redeemer. In type Joshua points to the work of Christ. From the wilderness of aimless wanderings He leads us into fellowship with Himself and into possession of all that is contained in His promises.

This week’s study is confined largely to two of the 24 chapters, namely, chapters 6 and 7. It will prove profitable to read them through at one sitting.

Joshua drew strength from three sources:

1. *He knew that he was chosen by God* (Deut. 34:9) and was determined to obey whatever God indicated for him to do. At times God’s ways seemed strange, but “he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded” (Joshua 11:15).

2. *He rested on God’s promises* (Joshua 1:3-5). To the extent that God wished to use him he was available, leaving the outcome to the Lord.

3. *He was guided by the Scriptures* (Joshua 1:8). He had been with Moses when God expressed His will on Sinai. He knew that those who obey the precepts have a right to the promises. It is important to know God’s will, but not enough. We must surrender to it and get on with it. Joshua did.

“When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment. He would not have us conjecture as to the success of our honest endeavors. Not once should we even think of failure. We are to cooperate with One who knows no failure.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 363.

Through total commitment Joshua progressed in possessing the Land of Promise. Through similar commitment we will advance. And “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (Joshua 13:1).

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 1—Conviction Declared

“If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

In this final appeal the great leader suggests to the people through his personal example the same kind of commitment that Moses—whose mantle of leadership he had inherited—had called for. (See Deut. 30:19, 20.) Moses had been denied the privilege of leading the people into Canaan; to Joshua it had been said, “Thou shalt cause them to inherit it,” and he did (Deut. 31:7). He had been with Moses at Mount Sinai when the law was given (Ex. 24:13) and knew well not only the blessing that follows submitting to the divine will, but also the sad effects of disobedience.

Joshua’s appeal was backed by a long life of total surrender to God, illustrated in an incident that took place at the time of the entry into Canaan 27 years earlier. Having been told to claim the land that had been promised to Abraham centuries earlier, Israel was about to possess it (Joshua 1:2-6).

Viewing Jericho, which had been described by the faithless spies as “great and walled up to heaven,” he recalled how fear had gripped the people. Distrust and rebellion had delayed the conquest by a generation. (See Deut. 1:28, 38-40.) Seeing a man with his sword drawn, Joshua challenged whether he were friend or foe. (See Joshua 5:13, 14.) The answer revealed Him to be the “captain of the host of the Lord.”

Instantly—in an act of reverence—Joshua asked, “What saith my lord unto his servant?” (Joshua 5:14). He has asked the right question. It revealed the quality of the man Joshua. He was firm in his decision to serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15). His surrender to obedience would secure Jericho, make whole armies flee, and see Canaan captured in seven years. It also makes Joshua a type of Jesus, whose name he shares. (See Acts 7:45 margin; Heb. 4:8, margin; see also *S.D.A. Bible Dictionary*, p. 622.)

In personal Christian experience victory is assured in a humble seeking of God’s guidance, and then in acting on His instruction. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

What is the significance of the expression “the host of the Lord” in Joshua 5:14?

Surrendering to the supreme Captain Himself, and ready to take orders from Him, Joshua secured the help of the unseen army that surrounds the throne of God. Jesus spoke of it in Gethsemane, Jacob saw a glimpse of it, and the servant of Elisha was shown a detachment of it in time of great need. (See Matt. 26:53; Gen. 32:1, 2; 2 Kings 6:16, 17; Heb. 1:13, 14.)

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 2—Orders From Headquarters

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30). (Read Joshua 6:1-5.)

One of the strangest orders ever given to a commander was given at Jericho—no trenches were to be dug, no battering rams to be drawn up to break through the gates, no ladders to scale the walls. Joshua’s reaction may have been one of surprise, but he complied immediately. We may wonder at God’s ways, but if we trust Him we will follow orders. The priests were to carry the ark around the beleaguered city, preceded by trumpeters sounding ram’s horns. (See verses 6-9.) A further inexplicable order had been given to the marching army not to make any noise. (See Joshua 6:10.)

What does the frequent mention of the ark in chapter 6 indicate?

The prominence given the ark suggests that God Himself—Immanuel, “God with us”—was to be the surety in their battle.

Marching daily around the city for a week, six days, then seven times on the seventh day, in full battle array, with but occasional blasts from the ram’s horns, must have seemed strange indeed. Not to utter a word—not even answering the jeers and taunts of the defenders, not to buoy each other up with songs of war—was a humbling experience. All praise was to go to God. (See Ps. 115:1.) Little by little the people were learning what it means to say that our “expectation is from him” (Ps. 62:5).

Note that the people were to march, not just to sit idly by, hoping for the miracle. We have our part to do; God attends to what we cannot do. (See John 11:39; Matt. 14:19.)

Noteworthy also is the way that Joshua’s trust affected the people. We read of no desertion, no mutiny, no grumbling. Although not a crack in the walls of Jericho could be observed, the procession continued.

Someone has said, “Every carnal heart is a Jericho shut up.” Hiding behind mighty walls of ignorance, prejudice, self-will, and indifference, there are many who should surrender to the Captain of the host. Those called to do battle for the Lord must not give up too soon their praying, witnessing, and preaching. As did Joshua, they must start conquering on their knees.

“God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 493.

FURTHER STUDY: *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 160, 161.

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 3—Preserving God's Part

“Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Joshua 3:5).

This summons had been given before the crossing of the swollen Jordan River into Canaan. They were to go forward in faith, but a faith rooted in sanctity of life. Joshua took the people out of the wilderness into the Promised Land. (See Deut. 6:23.) Christ leads us out of sin into fellowship with Himself by justification and sanctification (1 John 1:7).

“True . . . sanctification consists in the cheerful performance of daily duties in perfect obedience to the will of God.”—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 360.

God will “do wonders” among those who give undivided loyalty to Him. “The Lord of all the earth” stopped Jordan’s waters, making a highway for the people of Israel to pass over. The forbidding walls of Jericho crumbled as the people marched in faith as instructed. Step by step God demonstrated His power. Yet in this portion of the Bible we also see revealed, as in few other places, God’s demand for righteousness. To be tolerant of sin, to go back on our commitment, has fateful consequences.

Often the question is asked, Is God particular? With the emphasis today on “tolerance”—in itself a laudable quality—it is easy to adopt the same attitude about the will and precepts of the Lord, believing Him to be satisfied with *less* than He has expressed.

God had given Joshua precise orders for the capture of Jericho. Sparring only Rahab and her family, Israel was to destroy the entire city.

Notice how tumultuous victory is not a basis for carelessness in obedience. Joshua 6:18. (See the NEB.)

Drastic and dreadful as was the sentence against the inhabitants of Jericho, it seems to have been carried out to the letter. It was done not in any spirit of revenge but in accord with God’s expressed will. The idolatry of the Canaanites, practiced in lewd and degrading ways, would constitute a constant danger to Israel. God purposed to remove such influence completely. In his day Abraham was told that the promise of possessing the land would have to wait because “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). They were not yet ripe for ruin. Although the Sodomites had filled their measure rapidly and were dealt with by the Lord directly (Gen. 18:20; 19:24), the Amorites’ time for judgment did not come until Joshua’s forces arrived.

THINK IT THROUGH: Do we need to justify the actions of God to men? (Compare Gen. 18:25.)

FURTHER STUDY: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 488-491.

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 4—When Praying Is Wrong

“The Israelites defied the ban: Achan son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the forbidden things, and the Lord was angry with the Israelites” (Joshua 7:1, NEB).

Achan’s disobedience may seem a small thing when it comes to the destruction of a city, but it meant an immediate reversal of the fortunes of Israel. In attempting to capture the little town of Ai they were beaten back with discouraging losses. Flushed with recent success in the overthrow of Jericho, the Israelites now found themselves in full retreat (Joshua 7:2-5). Had all the army attacked Ai, the result would have been the same. Doing God’s work is no guarantee for having God’s help. Something basic was wrong.

Ignorant of the reason and eager to discover the cause, Joshua prostrated himself before the ark of the covenant and began a dialogue with God. Contrite for some possible fault on his part, Joshua, who possessed passions similar to ours, expressed concern about the entire venture. Yet more than anything else he was anxious about the honor of the name of God, now sadly tarnished (Joshua 7:6-9). (See also Ps. 29:1, 2; 66:1-4.)

What are the implications of God’s diagnosis of Israel’s failure? Joshua 7:10, 11.

Sin was the cause, and sin is no trifling matter. “It was a time for prompt and decided action, and not for despair and lamentation.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 494.

Illustration: At one of our African hospitals suddenly no water flowed from the faucets. The work was severely hampered, and all asked for an explanation. The water level in the tower was high, and no damage could be seen. Laboriously digging to find the obstruction, the workmen eventually found a soft-drink bottle inexplicably and firmly wedged into the main pipe. A small thing it may seem, yet it halted the work in the hospital.

One person’s sin can delay the progress of an entire group. There may be a “stoppage” in the pipeline of divine power which has to be dislodged. (See Joshua 7:12.) “Up, sanctify the people. . . . There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee” (verse 13). At times it is not even right to pray! That is if it delays obedience. In Israel’s case disobedience had “limited the Holy One” (Ps. 78:41). God is particular.

Observe this regarding prayer: Unforgiven sin limits its influence. Prayer will not be refused or denied, but will receive divine attention only when it addresses the petitioner’s unforgiven sin. To humble oneself because of adversity is useless if it is not a humbling of oneself because of the sin.

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 5—Covering Transgression

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

Without God’s forgiveness there would be no hope for any one of us. Yet, forgiveness is offered on certain conditions. God does not save us *in* our sins, but *from* our sins. (See Matt. 1:21; 1 John 1:9.) Repentance necessitates reform. Not only our ways but our minds need changing. This is made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20), but not as a cover for sin or to make confession needless.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Achan covered his wedge of gold with soil and his sin with silence. Notice the involvement of Israel in Achan’s disobedience. The verdict was not “Achan has sinned,” but “Israel has sinned.” In the same way that a drop of ink discolors a whole glass of water, many innocent people may be affected when wrongdoing is not dealt with promptly. “None of us liveth to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

Illustration: One man secretly drilling in a boat’s hull endangers not only himself but all the occupants. “Achan’s sin brought disaster upon the whole nation. For one man’s sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away. The influence most to be feared by the church is not that of open opposers, infidels, and blasphemers, but of inconsistent professors of Christ. These are the ones that keep back the blessing of the God of Israel and bring weakness upon His people.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 497.

It is sobering to reflect on some of the effects of sin:

- It separates us from the favor of God.
- It robs us of the blessing of God.
- It blinds us to the will of God.
- It weakens us in our service for God.
- It causes suffering to those eager for the honor of God.

“God was not to be charged with the humiliating defeat. He had not deserted them; they had disobeyed. Had God continued to fight for His people, He would have been sanctioning sin and encouraging its continuance.”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 209.

What method was to be used to expose the guilty one, and for what possible reasons? Joshua 7:14.

As the identity of the guilty one was narrowing down, the transgressor would be given a chance to confess his sin and ask for pardon. In addition, the people watching could check their own standing before God.

Joshua—The Committed Captain

Part 6—Grace and Justice

“Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him” (Joshua 7:19).

“My son”—how much God-like compassion is displayed in those words! Joshua could have rebuked him sternly, called him a traitor, rebel, thief, or fool, and felt justified in doing so. He could have threatened and adjured him to make a full confession. Instead he reminds us of Jesus addressing Judas in the act of betraying Him: “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” (Matt. 26:50). Joshua spoke to Achan as though he were his own erring son.

Another reason why Israel was instructed to cast lots was that “God would manifest the guilt in a manner which should bring conviction to every individual in the camp. It is a beautiful feature in Divine justice that the Lord never rests, as He might rest, in His own unerring assurance of right; He is concerned, also, to satisfy every feeling of enquiry and doubt in the minds of those whom He judges. The issues of the Judgment Day will represent not only the mind of Jesus Christ, the Judge; they will express the unwavering conviction of the lost, the undivided feeling of the redeemed, and the confident assent of the universe.”—*The Preachers Complete Homiletic Commentary*, p. 149.

In admitting his sin, Achan acknowledged it to be primarily against a holy God. (See Joshua 7:20, 21.) (Compare Ps. 51:4; Luke 15:21.)

Bringing out the evidences of his guilt, Achan “laid them out before the Lord” (Joshua 7:23), indicative of how to deal with unconfessed sins. If done voluntarily and with contrition, the unforgiving grace of God will deal with them according to His great mercy. Yet Achan held back until proved guilty, and he had to suffer the consequences of his disobedience (verses 24-26).

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

When sin is cleared out of the camp, what promise showing the completeness of the divine pardon can we expect to apply today, and how does it apply? Joshua 8:1.

“I have given it to you. Go ahead and occupy the land,” God says. Likewise, if we have done all that God has told us then we can expect all that God has promised us.

Is there some unsundered area in my life—some attitude, bigotry, temper, pride, or association—that needs to be uncovered? (Read Ps. 139:23, 24; 2 Cor. 13:5.)

FURTHER STUDY: *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 268, 269.



13

March 25-31
Adult Lesson

Obedience— Key to Fullness of Blessing

MEMORY TEXT: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

Jesus declared that He had come that we “might have life, and . . . have it more abundantly” (John 10:10) or “in all its fullness” (NEB). God intends that all shall experience that fullness. Paul spoke of the “fulness of blessing” (Rom. 15:29) which he experienced and hoped to convey to others. Constantly being in God’s will and obeying God’s promptings releases an abundance of power and peace available in no other way. Obedience is its own reward.

Touching on the same principle, Ellen White writes: “The glorious possibilities set before Israel could be realized only through obedience to God’s commandments. The same elevation of character, the same fullness of blessing—blessing on mind and soul and body, blessing on house and field, blessing for this life and for the life to come—is possible for us only through obedience.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 305.

Throughout the quarter we have reviewed the lives of a number of people, observing their reaction to God’s declared will in varied life situations. Yet we must keep in mind that obedience is not a single act now and then, not even a number of them, as good as that may be. For Christ obedience was a life principle, and so it should be with us. He said, “I came . . . not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38).

It is reported that in the ropes used by the British navy there runs a red cord. This makes it easy for the marine authorities to identify what belongs to them. Whatever the size, whether a thick hawser or a thin rope, a short piece or a long one, the same identifying mark is there. So with a true child of God. Whatever situation he encounters, no matter whether he be young in the faith or a longtime Christian, his true identification is the red cord of loving obedience that shows that he is God’s own.

This concluding study of four biblical life situations aims to show how fully God rewards trusting compliance with His will. Unhesitating, loving, joyful obedience to “whatsoever he saith unto you” is the hallmark of the people of God. And fullness of blessing comes not merely *for* doing but *in* doing the will of our loving Lord.

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 1—Wedding With a Problem

“Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, . . . unto him be glory in the church” (Eph. 3:20, 21).

The Bible provides many instances that illustrate how the goodness of God exceeds the expectations of man. At the very outset of His ministry Jesus gave evidence of this in an incident which is illustrative of a much larger principle. It happened at a recurring event in any household, giving an insight into how God works.

Why did Jesus go to the wedding at Cana? John 2:1, 2.

Jesus chose to identify Himself with ordinary people, thereby recognizing the needs of all classes. His whole mission would bring happiness to mankind. The incident in Cana shows what happens when Jesus is invited to heart or home.

The festive occasion was marred by an acute embarrassment. “The wine gave out, so Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no wine left’ ” (verse 3, NEB). The marriage celebrations usually lasted several days. The reason for the shortage is not given. Had Jesus and His five newly chosen disciples—of whom one was from Cana (John 21:2)—attracted a following, increasing the number of guests? Was the host family in too humble circumstances to provide adequately?

Although Jesus’ answer to Mary’s hinted request for His help may seem a little strange to us, what did Jesus intend? John 2:4.

The answer is illuminative. From this time forward Jesus’ relationship to Mary was changed.

“For thirty years He had been to her a loving and obedient son, and His love was unchanged; but He must now go about His Father’s work. As Son of the Most High, and Saviour of the world, no earthly ties must hold Him from His mission, or influence His conduct. He must stand free to do the will of God. This lesson is also for us. The claims of God are paramount even to the ties of human relationship.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 147. (See also Luke 2:51.)

This response also removes any suggestion that the mother of Jesus should have any place in interceding with her Son for us. Some venerate her as the queen of heaven—as though co-redeemer with Christ—invoking her help. This has no biblical foundation. Christ is our Advocate with the Father, but Mary was never appointed to be our advocate with the Son. (See 1 Tim. 2:5.) Free and open access to the Father is provided through Jesus (John 14:6).

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 2—Confident Suggestion

“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).

Mary’s words contain the key to limitless blessings. They were given to the unnamed servants who were volunteer assistants at the feast and not slaves in the household. God’s servants in every age have benefited from heeding the instruction given on this occasion.

The six large waterpots the servants filled at Christ’s bidding were there by no prearranged plan but were simply for the traditional observance of purification practiced by the Jews. (See John 2:6; Mark 7:3.)

What is the significance of John’s statement that “they filled them up to the brim”? John 2:7.

Jesus’ order must have seemed incomprehensibly strange. Perhaps what had occurred at the Jordan (Mark 1:10, 11) had made the servants aware of the authority of Jesus. The large stone jars—giving an idea of the size of the gathering—were all filled, and the account states “to the brim.” This little note by John is as important as it is provocative. The response was not under protest or with doubt. In the act of filling, the measure of the blessing was decided. Similarly, to the extent that we are prepared when we understand God’s instruction to do “whatsoever He saith” will we decide the measure of God’s benediction on our lives.

The history of God’s people gives ample evidence of how men and women have given “to the brim” of their capacity and love to God, to the blessing both of themselves and mankind. The widow mentioned in 2 Kings 4:1-7 discovered that in carrying out the Lord’s injunction she was rewarded in proportion to her faith. Note also the liberality of the poor Macedonian churches. “Going to the limit of their resources, . . . they begged us most insistently, . . . to be allowed to share” in helping the others (2 Cor. 8:3, 4, NEB). They filled it “to the brim.”

SEARCH AND LEARN:

There was deep symbolism in Christ’s gift to the wedding feast. See what meaning you can assign to the symbols that follow, then check your answers against *The Desire of Ages*, pages 148, 149, or a Bible commentary:

1. Water— _____
2. Wine— _____
3. Human hands bringing water, but Christ alone changing it— _____

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 3—More Than Enough

“Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, he knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew)” (John 2:8, 9).

When was the water turned into wine? Did it occur in the jars or in the distribution? (See Mark 6:41.) We may be left to speculate, but the important thing to note is that the miracle occurred upon the doing of the Master’s will. This has relevance for us and is all we need to know. It is significant to note that whereas the steward of the feast did not know from whence the wine came, those who had acted on Christ’s word knew. There was no magic performance, not even a word spoken to effect the change. Surely He who made the grape could make the juice. He willed it and it occurred.

The fact that Jesus turned water into wine demonstrates that He might have turned stones into bread (Matt. 4:4), but although He was ready to minister to others He refused to work a miracle to satisfy His own needs.

“Every miracle of our Lord served a definite purpose; He never exercised divine power to satisfy idle curiosity or to demonstrate the possession of ability to do so (DA 730), or to benefit Himself (DA 729). ‘His wonderful works were all for the good of others’ (DA 119).”—*S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 209.

Jesus asked of the servants no more than they could do. He did the rest. The “whatsoever” (John 2:5) may apply differently from person to person. We can comply equally whether we are children or adults, whether we are in humble circumstances or more richly endowed. We are to do as God tells us and all that God tells us.

In this age of declining values and qualities, what might we appreciate about the *quality* of the provision made? John 2:10.

It is easy to lose the important point of this lesson in a discussion of the nature of the drink provided. Nevertheless, we should note that divinity never contradicts itself. Would He, who in his Word states that “wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging” (Prov. 20:1) provide anything harmful?

“The wine which Christ provided for the feast, and that which He gave to the disciples as a symbol of His own blood, was the pure juice of the grape.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 149.

There is a lesson in the symbol. Jesus can change the very *quality* of our lives, our homes, and our churches. He can make that which is insipid and colorless into something sweet and invigorating. (See John 10:10.)

We will now study three instances that show how obedience proves the key to blessing in the three areas of salvation, provision, and service.

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 4—Effective Salvation

“Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper” (2 Kings 5:1).

The train of events recorded in 2 Kings 5 was set in motion by a faithful servant girl. Taken captive in a marauding expedition, this Hebrew maid had not abandoned her faith while living in a strange land.

A man in high social position with political influence, Naaman was a man of substance, a military hero, and a man of courage. Humanly speaking, his role in life was to be coveted, but not the lowliest soldier would exchange places with him. Stricken with leprosy, he was no better than “one dead” (Num. 12:12).

The confident witness of the unnamed servant girl (2 Kings 5:2, 3) led Naaman to journey to Samaria to the prophet. He did not travel incognito or without gifts to the prophet-healer to be consulted. He expected preferential treatment, worthy of his station in life.

What can we learn about human status and its effect upon God’s action as we consider how Naaman was received and the instruction he was given? 2 Kings 5:9, 10.

Enraged at the apparent slight, Naaman refused to obey the instruction given (2 Kings 5:11, 12). With punctured pride he prepared to return home. Humanly speaking, the clearer waters of the rivers Abana and Pharpar with their sources in the mountains might have looked much better than the discolored waters of the Jordan. Naaman thought of prescribing his own cure. But natural man is a poor judge of God’s methods of salvation. “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8), says the Lord. The conditions of the gospel can cause resentment. Its very simplicity tempts many to reject it. To many it is not sufficiently intellectual or philosophical. As he had to descend from the highlands into the Jordan valley, Naaman also had to descend from arrogance and pride to that humility which is ready to obey. Salvation is not available by proxy—he went himself. Nobody can believe, repent, or be baptized for anyone else. Naaman was cleansed in doing God’s will—not only healed, but converted. Rejoicing in his cure, he returned home—like the leper healed by Jesus—“to give glory to God” (Luke 17:18).

THINK IT THROUGH: Am I prone to substitute something else for God’s plan of salvation?

FURTHER STUDY: *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 244-249; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 473.

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 5—Adequate Provision

“In the morning, then shall ye see the glory of the Lord” (Ex. 16:7).

Many miracles attended the Exodus from Egypt, the desert wanderings, and the entrance into Canaan. The parting of the Red Sea, guidance through the pillar of fire, the water from the rock at Meribah, the passing through Jordan—all told of God’s unvarying concern for His people. Yet the daily provision of manna for a whole nation must have been more impressive still, teaching them to rely heavily on God. (Read Ex. 16:4-7, 12-31.)

While providing for Israel physically, there also was a spiritual aim to the gift of manna. Each morning the ground was covered with a substance. “The taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (verse 31). It had to be gathered early each day and just enough for the day. Hoarding for future use was no help, as the manna would spoil (Ex. 16:19, 20). (Compare Ps. 63:1; Prov. 8:17; Matt. 6:11.) “Sustained by ‘the corn of heaven,’ they were daily taught that, having God’s promise, they were as secure from want as if surrounded by fields of waving grain on the fertile plains of Canaan.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 297.

What purpose lay behind the providential provision for the Sabbath day? Ex. 16:23-26, 29.

Gathering a double portion the day before with nothing spoiling, reminded the people of the sanctity of the Sabbath instituted in Eden. (See Gen. 2:3.) This occurred *before* the giving of the fourth commandment contained in the law of God (Ex. 20:8-11). Moses and the Israelites knew of it; otherwise, the double portion referred to in Exodus 16:5 would have had no significance. Some, trying to find manna on the Sabbath, found none (verse 27). Without God in our efforts we labor in vain. The preparation-day miracle regarding the double portion occurred more than 2000 times from the Exodus until the manna ceased 40 years later upon Israel’s arrival in Canaan (Joshua 5:12). It served as a forceful reminder of the sanctity of the Sabbath of the Lord.

Illustration: A father of three young children, studying the Bible, discovered the truth about the sanctity of the Sabbath. Faced with losing his employment if he stepped out in obedience, he came across the text in Hebrews 9:4. Seeing the connection, he exclaimed: “If the manna was placed in the ark with the commandments, it must mean that if we dare to obey, God will provide.” This became decisive. His subsequent experience often gave him occasion to testify to the faithfulness of God.

THINK IT THROUGH: Does my Sabbath observance demonstrate my trust in God?

Obedience—Key to Fullness of Blessing

Part 6—Operative in Service

We conclude this lesson and this quarter by noting an instance of great encouragement to anyone serving the Lord. In this instance, doing what Christ had said resulted in a blessing too large to handle.

Jesus was preaching from Simon Peter's boat to a crowd gathered on the shore of Lake Genesaret. His fame had secured a good audience as "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29).

In the narrative unfolded in Luke 5:1-11 what potential for dialogue lay in the Carpenter's request addressed to a fisherman? At the end of His discourse, what did Jesus ask of Peter, and what soul-experience led Peter to reply as he did to Jesus?

Despite the objections, the fatigue, and the onlookers, Peter answered, "At thy word I will." This response is the very essence of obedience.

Many like the disciples have become weary of working with scanty results. Pastors, missionaries, teachers, and lay people have labored long with little "catch" to shake out of their nets. Observing a fisherman taking his catch from a net colored silver by the fish in it, an onlooker asked him, "Is it not hard work to pull up the heavy net from the water with all that fish in it?" His weather-beaten face turning serious, the fisherman replied, "The heaviest nets are the empty ones."

Christ in His human form said, "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30). To the disciples He declared, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Cooperating with Jesus, they succeeded beyond their fondest hopes. "When they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake" (Luke 5:6). (See Isa. 55:11; Ps. 126:5.) When we cooperate fully with Jesus we can expect our nets to be full.

Overwhelmed, Peter fell down at the feet of Jesus, from whom he felt he deserved to be separated—yet did not wish to be. Instead, right there he sensed his call to service—to be a fisher of human souls. He and his companions "forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:11). God wonderfully responds as we obey joyfully "whatsoever he saith" (John 2:5).

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS:

Think back through the quarter's lessons on obedience and the Bible biographies that have illustrated the principles involved. Then make the following applications:

1. What have I learned about Christ and my personal relationship to Him? What can I share with others?
2. What examples have appealed to me most, and what actions can I take by God's grace that will enable me to live up to the ideals illustrated?
3. What areas of disobedience and sin have been revealed in my life? Have I confessed and forsaken them?

Lesson for 2nd quarter, 1984

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the first quarter of 1984 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of this series is "Knowing That We Know God."

First Lesson

KNOWING THAT GOD EXISTS

Memory Text, Heb. 11:6

1. *God (Gen. 1:1)*
2. *Testimony From "Intuition" (John 1:9)*
3. *Testimony From Scripture (John 5:39)*
4. *Testimony From Reason (Job 38:28, 29)*
5. *God's Nature and Character (1 John 4:16)*
6. *One God in Three (Deut. 6:4)*

Second Lesson

KNOWING HOW TO KNOW GOD

Memory Text, John 14:4, 5

1. *Search, Research, or Revelation (Job 11:7)*
2. *General Revelation (Rom. 1:20)*
3. *Special Revelation (Num. 12:6)*
4. *A Place for Reasoning-1 (1 Peter 3:15)*
5. *A Place for Reasoning-2 (Eccl. 7:29)*
6. *Belief and Knowledge (John 20:29)*

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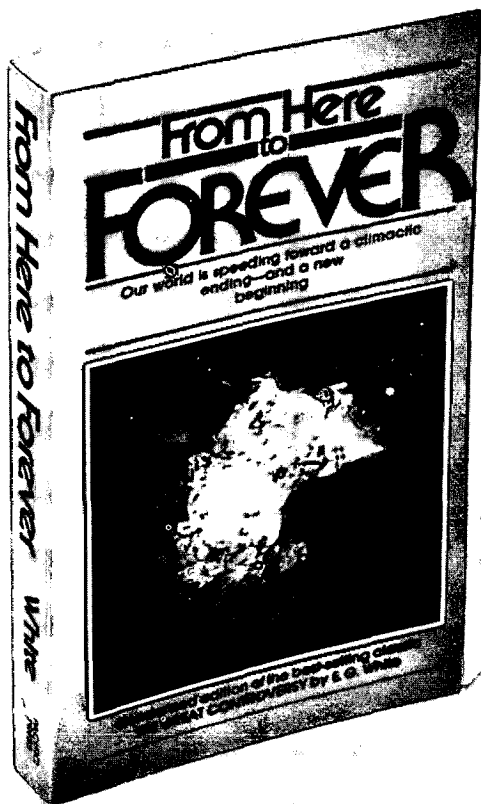
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| East Brazil | 53,137,300 | 337 | 104,843 | 129,098 |
| Inca | 32,444,946 | 338 | 141,087 | 166,345 |
| North Brazil | 17,078,106 | 108 | 62,970 | 68,902 |
| South Brazil | 53,057,669 | 510 | 161,417 | 156,244 |
| | 200,922,885 | 1,708 | 556,733 | 601,866 |

Figures as of September, 1982