

# On Mission

Youth Bible Studies

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*On  
Mission*

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**Credits:**

Compiled by Shelley Smith and Alan Huesing

Edited by Shelley Smith

Cover designed by David Oglesby

Contents designed by Natalie Kelly

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# Meet the Authors!

**Leola Floren** is a professional writer and newspaper columnist with wide experience in writing youth ministry aids, articles and curricula. She is a contributing editor of *With: The Magazine for Radical Christian Youth*. Leola currently resides in Farmington Hills, Mich.

**Tierce Green** has been a national conference speaker for youth and adults since 1980. He is also a singer, songwriter and worship leader. Fresh Bread Music, the publishing division of his ministry, has produced two top 10 youth musical dramas along with other collections of his music. He and his wife, Dana, live in Fort Worth, Texas.

**Alan Huesing** is Youth Mission Education strategist and national Challengers director at the North American Mission Board, SBC. He served for several years in the Philippines, Taiwan and China, as well as on staff as director of the International Education staff at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, Texas. He and his wife, Sheryl, have three children, Andrew, Jenna and Kyle.

**Allen James** has served in youth ministry for nine years. He, his wife, Nova, and their daughter, Abbie, currently live in Bradenton, Fla., where Allen serves as an associate pastor at the West Bradenton Baptist Church.

**Steven James** is a nationally known youth speaker and award-winning writer. He has written for dozens of youth magazines and publications, including *Guideposts 4 Teens*, *Breakaway*, *Living With Teenagers* and *Challengers Resources*. He also teaches junior and senior high courses in logic and Bible at a local Christian academy.

**Gary B. Jennings** is the manager of Collegiate Evangelism for the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga. He has a passion for writing and sharing stories on how students can experience the mission activity of God. Gary, his wife, Jean, and their four children currently reside in Cumming, Ga.

**Karen E. Jones** has been involved in “youth ministry” for the last 22 years, combining her years as a public middle school teacher and local church youth minister. Karen now serves as an assistant professor of Educational Ministries and associate director of the Link Institute for Faithful and Effective Youth Ministry at Huntington College, Huntington, Ind. She is a long-time writer for LifeWay’s youth discipleship materials, a regular contributor to *Challengers Resources*, serves as a writer and member of the advisory board for *Youthworker Journal*, and has just completed co-authoring her first book, reporting on a research study of Protestant Youth Ministers in America.

**Walter H. Norvell** is dean of the Weekend College at Dallas Baptist University, in Dallas, Texas. He has more than 20 years’ experience

in youth ministry, is a seasoned youth curriculum writer, and currently works as a Challengers leader at Wedgwood Baptist Church. He and his wife, Mary, have two sons, Jonathan and David.

**Brad Price** is art director of Price Graphic Design, a firm that produces promotional materials for local churches, Christian institutions and conventions. He is an instructor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and produces “YouthArt,” a national art service for youth ministers. Brad has also served as a youth minister, church planter and missionary. He and his wife, Suzie, have two sons, Matthew and Nathan.

**Rich Ratts** is senior pastor of Gorham Baptist Church in Jackson, Mich. He served as a full-time youth minister for 12 years and as a project coordinator for World Changers (hands-on mission projects for youth) for five years. In addition to being a regular columnist for the Jackson Citizen Patriot newspaper, Rich has also written for *Challengers Resources*, *Living With Teenagers* and *Youthworker Journal*. Rich, his wife, Nancy, and their two children, Nathaniel and Joshua, currently reside in Napoleon, Mich.

**Van Sanders** served as a church planting missionary for 12 years in the United States and Kenya prior to his appointment to the North American Mission Board in 2000. He and his wife, Beth, have three children: Anna, 16; Philip, 13; and David, 10. Van currently works in the Church Planting Group of NAMB and focuses on enlisting churches and church planters to start churches in North America.

**Allan Thompson** is in his 12th year as the Baptist Student Ministry director at East Texas Baptist University. For more than 26 years he has worked with youth and students around the world, including six years’ missionary service in Germany for the International Mission Board. His wife, Jana, teaches English as a Second Language to elementary students. They have two sons, Joel and Ryan.

**Bob Utley** is a world-renowned evangelist and Bible professor, currently on faculty at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, Texas. He is the founder and president of Bible Lessons International, a ministry that sends evangelistic materials and Bible study resources to most countries in the world. Bob has written for *Challengers Resources* and *On Mission Youth Strategies*. He is currently writing a series of commentaries on the entire Bible. Bob and his wife, Peggy, live on Caddo Lake in Uncertain, Texas. They have three grown children: Michelle, Jason and Jeremy.

# Introduction

**H**ow do you view the Bible? As a medicine chest to go to when you are spiritually sick? As a refrigerator to go to when you are spiritually hungry? Perhaps you use the Bible like a crystal ball to help you understand the future. All of these are good at times, but the Bible reveals that God's purpose is to form a people for Himself from all of the approximately 13,000 people groups of the world.

This series of 72 studies presents the Bible from the perspective of the *on mission* activity of God and His people. It's the account of how God is accomplishing His Mission—even today. Ever since man fell from fellowship with Him, God has been at work reconciling the world to Himself. And He has given to us, His people, the ministry and message of reconciliation (*2 Corinthians 5:18-20*). These studies will lead you to see God *on mission* throughout biblical history as well as in our world and through our lives today. By examining well-known Bible stories and major Bible characters, you will learn principles of how God works in and through His people (and others) to accomplish His mission. Questions in the study workbook will guide you to see your families, schools, churches and neighborhoods as mission fields. They will teach you how to go about being an effective tool that God can use to bring others to faith and relationship in Him. The Bible becomes, among other things, a guide to the *on mission* Christian.

## How Do I Use This Book?

These Bible studies are written for Christian teenagers—like you—and can be used in individual or group study. They are valuable biblical resources for

families, accountability cell groups, mission organizations and general church youth groups. But the observations written in this book are not the material to be studied. Their purpose is *to guide you to read and think carefully about the text in the Bible*. Reading someone's comments about God's Word is of little value compared to reading what He actually said.

So, get your Bible, a pencil and maybe a highlighter, and get set to dig deep into the meat and message God has for you today. You will need to set aside between 45 minutes to an hour for each study. The best way to approach the studies is first to pray and ask God to speak to you and teach you things from His Word that you've never seen before. Then open your Bible and read the text and *think* about it. Highlight or underline verses that speak clearly to you. Circle words with special meaning. Then complete the questions in the workbook.

Questions followed by a line blank can be answered in a few words or a short sentence. Questions followed by a blank space will require a longer sentence or short paragraph. As you answer the questions and read the writer's comments, you may need to take time to reread the Bible passages that relate to the particular study. Write your own comments and questions in the margins of your Bible and the pages of your workbook.

Our prayer is that these studies will lead you again and again into God's Word and into His presence because He will speak to you there. And from there He will send you out into *your* mission field to live out and share His mission and message.

## Bible Study 1 From the Beginning

BY ALAN HUESING

### Read Genesis 1-3.

In reading this familiar story, what was something you learned that you had never noticed before?

#### How did God create people?

Genesis 1:26-28 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:18, 20-23 \_\_\_\_\_

#### What changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God?

Genesis 2:25 and 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:17 and 3:3-4, 22b \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:5, 7, 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:8 \_\_\_\_\_

#### When Adam and Eve sinned, what did God do about it?

Genesis 3:8-9, 11, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:14-19, 23-24 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:21 \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n three short chapters, God tells us how He created the world and started the human race. He explains this past, present and future relationship with mankind and with each one of us. God prepared life and gave us good, clear directions for living it. He wants to come walk with us in the “cool of the day” so we can personally know and love Him. But we each have chosen to believe a lie and disobey Him. So, God, as the Righteous Judge, declares us guilty and allows the consequences of our sin to separate us from Him; and life becomes misery and death. But God loves His creation and has a plan to bring us back to Himself and to cover all our sin and guilt.

In this story we see God on a mission to redeem and reconcile the world to Himself. First, He went “looking for” Adam and Eve, although He knew exactly where they were. He asked why they were afraid and hiding, already knowing all about what they had done. He practically said, “Come now, let us reason together. ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18, NIV). Sin and Satan and man’s rebellion wrecked God’s perfect creation, but God had a plan and a promise.

Imagine Adam and Eve standing naked, guilty and terrified before the God and Creator of the universe, childishly draped with useless dried-up fig leaves. They watched as God revealed the only solution to the sin problem.

God Himself took the skin of the animal and made clothes to cover the shame and guilt of His two “children.”

In Genesis 3:15, who was God judging? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the “offspring (or seed) of the woman”? \_\_\_\_\_

What does “crush (or bruise) your head” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

What does “you will strike (or bruise) his heel” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

In Genesis 3:21, where did God get the skin or hide to make garments? \_\_\_\_\_

How are the clothes in Genesis 3:21 like those in Matthew 22:11-13? \_\_\_\_\_

How are the “clothes” in Genesis 3:7 like those in Isaiah 64:6? \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n the judgment in the Garden of Eden, God declared His mission plan in coded words. He promised a Messiah, a descendant of Eve, who would conquer Satan and rescue His creation. He also foretold that this Messiah would be assaulted by sin and death on the cross. His plan was Jesus, the Lamb of God, “slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8, NIV).

Imagine Adam and Eve standing naked, guilty and terrified before the God and Creator of the universe, childishly draped with useless dried-up fig leaves. They watched as God revealed the only solution to the sin problem. He called an innocent animal, perhaps a lamb, and killed it in front of all creation. Then God Himself took the skin of the animal and made clothes to cover the shame and guilt of His two “children.” In this He pictured the awful price of sin that His Son would pay. He instituted atoning sacrifice and declared that our righteousness and efforts to cover our guilt are like filthy rags or dried-up fig leaves. Only He can clothe us in “robes of righteousness” and only at the cost of the life of a perfect sacrifice.

How do you stand now with God? Are you “washed in the blood of the Lamb,” “dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne”? Have you considered the price Christ paid for you on the cross and the love of the Father who sent Him there to die? Have you accepted His awesome gift? If not, do it now! If you have, take time to thank Him for His incredible sacrificial love for you.

## Bible Study 2

# Noah: Obedient Builder

BY ALAN HUESING

### Read Genesis 5:28–9:29.

One of the most familiar Bible stories is about Noah and the ark. The story is not usually considered a mission story; it seems to be all about the judgment of God on a wicked society. But then, isn't that what the mission is all about—God providing a way of salvation in the face of impending judgment and doom, reconciling lost and condemned people before it's too late?

Exactly what was God's *mission* in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

What was Noah's role or assignment in this mission—besides his colossal construction project? What other jobs did God give Noah to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Peter call Noah? (2 Peter 2:5) \_\_\_\_\_

In this particular role, how successful was Noah? \_\_\_\_\_

How many people were saved from destruction? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did God choose to save them? \_\_\_\_\_

Notice how God uses His man or woman when He begins to do something in our world. When He wanted to raise up a Chosen People, He sent word to a 100-year-old man that it was time for his 90-year-old wife to have a baby. When He was ready to deliver His people from slavery, He commissioned an 80-year-old shepherd to do battle with Pharaoh. When a giant challenged His people to a dual, God sent a boy with a slingshot. When He was ready to send a Savior, He sent Gabriel with a message to a teenage girl. When He wanted the whole world to know Him, He gave you and me the gospel and told us to go and make disciples. And in this story, when God was planning to destroy the whole world and start over again, He gave His blueprints and plans for salvation to a 600-year-old man and his three sons.

Take a close look at Noah's life. What does the word “walk” in Genesis 6:9 mean?

How do you think God communicated with Noah? \_\_\_\_\_

What complications did God's call place on his life? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were Noah's partners in completing his mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Like Noah, what we build is useless if we don't go out into our world and compel lost people to come in before God forever shuts the door.

How do you think Noah's prayer life was affected by his assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you think God helped Noah with his task? \_\_\_\_\_

After Noah and his family moved into the ark, how did he know when to close the door, shutting out all his neighbors and his other relatives? (Look out! It's a trick question.) \_\_\_\_\_

**W**hich task was more difficult for Noah: building the enormous floating zoo or preaching righteousness to his neighbors? Both were critically important. If he failed to preach, no one could respond to God's open invitation to enter the ark and be saved. But if he didn't finish the ark on time, no one would have a vehicle of salvation.

In some ways, we are "in the same boat" as Noah. God has given us a dual task. He has commissioned us to build structures, organizations and tools useful for carrying lost people to a relationship with Him through Christ. As surely as He led Noah to build the ark, God leads us to build groups, ministries and events in our churches, homes, neighborhoods and schools that serve as "vehicles" for the gospel. But, like Noah, what we build is useless if we don't go out into our world and compel lost people to come in before God forever shuts the door.

Now, apply to your own life all you can from Noah's *on mission* story:

What does God want you to "build" that can help carry lost people to Him? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you experience God speaking to you? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you expect Him to communicate with you today? \_\_\_\_\_

Who are your partners in completing the mission God has given you? \_\_\_\_\_

Although none of Noah's neighbors believed his message, he was successful in convincing his family. What about *your* family?

Is your family safe in Christ?  Yes  No

What kind of relationship do you have with each family member? Do they know that you walk with God?

Yes  No

Do you pray together with them?  Yes  No

Do they respect your relationship with God enough to accept a message that you deliver to them from God?

Yes  No

Which of your family members are your *on mission* partners in sharing Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Storm's coming. All aboard!

“By faith he made his home in the promised land” (HEBREWS 11:9, NIV).

### Bible Study 3

# Abraham: A Man Committed to the Plan

BY ALAN HUESING

**Read Genesis 11:27-16:16 and 21:1-7.**

**G**od made a covenant or series of promises with Abram that became the basis for his relationship with God as well as for the relationship between God and His Chosen People. This covenant is found in Genesis 12:1-3 and is repeated throughout Abram’s journey in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-7 and 12-16; 17:3-8 and 18:17-19.

**In this covenant, what did God promise Abram related to...**

his safety and protection? \_\_\_\_\_

his children and descendants? \_\_\_\_\_

the land of Canaan? \_\_\_\_\_

his effect on the rest of the people of the world? \_\_\_\_\_

**What was Abram’s responsibility in the covenant?**

Genesis 12:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 15:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 17:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 18:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 18:19 \_\_\_\_\_

**A**braham is a principal character of the Bible and of world history. Members of three major world religions now revere him as their great patriarch or father. Read the story of how he made a major move, had a name change, and literally became the father of many nations in Genesis 12-21. As you read, consider the role that Abraham played as God carried out His mission in the world.

In Genesis 11:27-32, we learn that Abram had grown up with his father and three brothers in their hometown of Ur in southern Babylonia. He was married but had no children yet when, for some reason, his father decided to move the family to the land of Canaan, more than 1,000 miles on the other side of the Arabian Desert. The family migrated north about 700 miles up the Mesopotamian Valley and settled in Haran where Abram’s father died. The family of immigrants was about halfway to Canaan when God issued a personal call to Abram.

God was clearly at work in Abram’s life, arranging circumstances in his family so that he was already moving toward the place where God wanted him. However, God wanted Abram to *know* and to *commit* himself to the plan. It was time for God to reveal Himself personally to Abram and to challenge him to know Him, to follow Him and to trust Him for everything.

**Why do you think God chose Abram (rather than someone else)?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Why did God change Abram's and Sarai's names in Genesis 17?

### How did God intend to “bless all the nations” through Abraham and his descendents?

One of the most difficult lessons for Abraham and his Jewish descendents to learn was that they were blessed by God so that He could use them as a channel of blessing to all the nations. They were to be a nation of priests and a light to all the nations.

As Christians, we have the same problem. It is so easy to think that we are His Chosen People as if we are somehow members of an exclusive club or clique when in reality we are chosen to be His partners commissioned to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Why God chose Abram—or you or me—to join Him in His mission is a mystery too difficult for any of us to understand. One thing is clear: We must each respond to His invitation and answer His call. And as we receive the blessings of knowing Him, we must still remember that Jesus is actually not our “personal savior.” He is the Savior of the whole world.

**In what way(s) is God's call to Abram similar to Jesus' call to His disciples in the New Testament? (*Matthew 4:19, Luke 9:23*)**

**In what ways do you see God working in your family history and situation to put you in a position to follow God's plan for your life?**

**What changes has He brought to your life?**

**What covenant or promises has God made to you?**

**In what specific ways do you think God intends to bless other people through you?**

Pray that God will make your life an eternal kind of blessing to other people as you follow Him.

One of the most difficult lessons for Abraham and his Jewish descendents to learn was that they were blessed by God so that He could use them as a channel of blessing to all the nations.

“Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes” (GENESIS 18:27, NIV).

## Bible Study 4

# Abraham: The Intercessor

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Genesis 18:16-33 and 19:1-29.

What did the Lord intend to do to the “cities of the plain”? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was Abraham concerned about God’s plans? \_\_\_\_\_

What approach did Abraham use to “negotiate” with God? (Genesis 18:25) \_\_\_\_\_

Was Abraham successful as an intercessor?  Yes  No

These chapters tell the story of the wickedness and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The names of these two ancient cities are still synonyms for the cesspool, stinkpot and garbage can of the worst of human behavior. Only about 400 years after God sent the Flood to destroy the inhabitants of the world because of their wickedness, He had to return to judge and punish this small pocket of civilization. He did not blast them off the face of the earth just to show that He’s the Boss or even to show us all that He really means business about purity. As the Great Creator and Omni-Scientist, He knew all about deadly diseases and other consequences that are bred by the perverted misuse of human sexuality. Recently the world has experienced the wildfire spread of an incurable virus unleashed by homosexuality and transmitted by promiscuity until both the innocent and the guilty of large populations are being destroyed.

In this ancient Genesis story, God, the Judge and Protector of His creation, was on His way to disinfect the neighborhood. When He stopped to visit Abraham and Sarah, He decided to tell Abraham what He was about to do to his neighbors down on the plains below (Genesis 18:17).

Why did God tell Abraham His plans?

Abraham immediately knew that his neighbors were in big trouble. He could have just sat down in his front yard on his mountain and waited for the fireworks. After all, they were wicked and deserved to get fried, and God had already passed judgment on them. “But Abraham remained standing before the Lord” (Genesis 18:22). He was thinking. Was he concerned about his nephew, Lot, who had foolishly moved to the cities of the plain and allowed his family to be influenced by their wicked neighbors? Or was Abraham concerned about

Abraham  
... used his  
friendship with  
God to plead for his  
neighbors and  
relatives.

all the men and women, boys and girls who lived and worked and played in the cities only a mile or so from his own tent home?

Abraham carefully but quickly stepped forward as an intercessor for his neighbors. An intercessor is one who steps between to mediate and plead someone's case. An intercessor throws himself in the path of judgment on someone else's behalf even though it may put himself at risk.

Consider several intercessors throughout the Bible:

**Who was the intercessor for the Israelites at Sinai? (Exodus 32:7-14)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who interceded for Nabal when he foolishly offended David? (1 Samuel 25)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who intercedes for us even now? (Hebrews 7:23-25)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notice how Abraham talked to God as he interceded for his neighbors. How did he appeal to the nature of God? (Genesis 18:25)**

**How persistent was Abraham? How many times did he negotiate with God?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Was his intercession effective? (At least his nephew and family were saved.)** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**braham is our example. He used his friendship with God to plead for his neighbors and relatives. He did not waste time or influence condemning them or complaining about them. He begged God to save them. *On mission* Christians intercede for the lost.

**Name five lost people you know who are facing the judgment of God.** \_\_\_\_\_

Will you intercede for them?

“Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son’ ” (GENESIS 22:8, NIV).

## Bible Study 5

# Abraham’s Sacrifice

BY CHAD BLAHA

**Read Genesis 22:1-19.**

**What did God tell Abraham to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Was God specific in His commandment to Abraham?**     Yes             No

**How did Abraham respond to God’s request?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Isaac respond to God’s request?** \_\_\_\_\_

Many of us are familiar with this story about Abraham and Isaac. As we read this passage in Genesis, a story of Abraham’s great faith and God’s provision unfolds.

As Christians we can relate to Abraham receiving a message from God. In fact, many of us have heard God calling us to one thing or another. What sets Abraham apart was his response. After years and years of desiring a child, Abraham and Sarah had become quite old when God blessed them with a son, Isaac. As his and Sarah’s only son, Isaac was Abraham’s most valuable “possession.”

**When God told Abraham to give up Isaac as a burnt offering, why did he obey?**

**How would you respond if God asked you for your most valuable possession?**

**T**he Bible tells us that Abraham got up early the next morning, saddled the donkey, got two of his servants and started cutting wood for the fire. He did not ask God to tell him which mountain they were going to. He did not ask God why He wanted Isaac, after He had just given them their only son. Nor did Abraham try to negotiate with God a sacrifice that would be less taxing on him. Instead he prepared to do just what God had commanded, and he did so quickly.

**What do you learn from Abraham’s response to God?**

**What prepared Abraham to receive this unusual assignment from God?**

## What was Abraham thinking? (*Hebrews 11:17-19*)

In what way was Abraham's obedience to God's command important in God's overall mission to redeem the world?

Now think about Isaac. What did he gain from this bizarre experience? What effect do you think it had on him to see his father's all-out obedience and experience God's dramatic, last-second angelic rescue?

How would Isaac's life have been different if his father had refused to obey God?

The Scripture tells us one question Isaac had. He asked his dad where the sacrificial lamb was. The verse that followed was more than a simple response to a simple question: "*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son*" is an answer to Isaac—and a prophecy for us.

This story is an illustration of God's greatest sacrifice for us. Just as Abraham was willing to give his only son, God also was willing to give His only Son. Just as Isaac was freed from death, so also Christ was freed from death (*Hebrews 11:17-19*). As *on mission* Christians, we know the mission of God is to reconcile the world to Himself. God's Word tells us that all of us are sinners (*Romans 3:23*) and as sinners we deserve death (*Romans 6:23*). But God has provided the Lamb. Jesus was our substitute. He stood in our place and was sacrificed for us. But He did not let death conquer Him; instead, He conquered death. Three days later He rose from the grave and was reunited with His Father also.

What difficult assignment has God given to you?

What will it cost you to obey?

What difference will your obedience make in God's mission to reach and rescue lost people?

Just as Abraham was willing to give his only son, God also was willing to give His only Son. Just as Isaac was freed from death, so also Christ was freed from death.

“... the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did”  
(GENESIS 39:23, NIV).

## Bible Study 6 Joseph: Preserver of Life

BY KAREN JONES

Read Genesis 37 and 39-41.

Why did Joseph's brothers sell him as a slave? (*Genesis 37:1-38*) \_\_\_\_\_

How did God protect and provide for Joseph, even through his slavery? (*Genesis 37:36; 39:1-6*) \_\_\_\_\_

Even when faced with temptation and falsely accused, Joseph honored God. How do we know this?

What evidence do we have that God still protected and provided for him during these difficult times? (*Genesis 37:7-23*) \_\_\_\_\_

Joseph's brothers were jealous of their father's love for him; and in their jealousy, they took drastic measures to get rid of him. God did not step in and stop their evil act, but He did provide a way for Joseph to be protected from harm. As a servant for one of Pharaoh's chief officials, Potiphar, Joseph was allowed to live in his master's house and was actually put in charge of everything he owned. God blessed Joseph during this time.

When Potiphar's wife became attracted to Joseph and tried to seduce him, he refused to disobey God or dishonor his master. It is very possible that if he had given in to the sexual temptation, Potiphar may not have discovered his betrayal. But God and Joseph would have known. His refusal to sin resulted in anger on the part of Potiphar's wife. He was falsely accused and punished for something that he did not do.

What gave Joseph the ability to withstand the temptation? \_\_\_\_\_

When was the last time you were in a situation where you were tempted to sin and you knew that you could probably do so without others knowing about it? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you respond? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

How does our sin—or our refusal to sin—affect our ability to be *on mission* with God?

How was Joseph let down by his fellow prisoners? (*Genesis 40*) \_\_\_\_\_

How did Joseph honor God in Pharaoh's presence? (*Genesis 41:1-40*)

How was he rewarded?

How did Joseph use his position to preserve life? (*Genesis 41:41-57*)

What evidence do we have that Joseph was not bitter with his life and that he gave the glory to God for his circumstances?

How do the names of his children reveal his relationship with God?

Even when he was treated unfairly, Joseph refused to become bitter and his faithfulness was eventually rewarded. It would have been less risk for Joseph to take the credit for his ability to interpret dreams. But because he was honest and gave God the credit for his abilities, he was rewarded with a position of importance. God used him to save the lives of thousands of people from starvation.

Joseph was a "good" person. He was a good son, a good slave, a good prisoner, a good advisor and a good leader. How did his "goodness" often get him into trouble?

Sometimes being *on mission* for God involves unexpected difficulties that we can't understand, even when we are "good." Others who are jealous of our position or abilities may resent us. We may be accused of things we haven't said or done and find ourselves going through horrible situations for no apparent reason. We may be tempted to think that life is unfair.

Describe a time when you had some of these thoughts or feelings.

We must quietly and confidently endure hardships, knowing that God will use our experiences for His purposes if we will allow Him to. God didn't cause the horrible circumstances in Joseph's life, but He allowed them to happen. And because of Joseph's faithfulness, God used them for His purposes.

What is the undeserved negative circumstance of your life right now? \_\_\_\_\_

How are you responding to it? \_\_\_\_\_

How could God be positioning you through it to serve Him? \_\_\_\_\_

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for ... the saving of many lives” (GENESIS 50:20, NIV).

## Bible Study 7 Joseph Forgives

BY KAREN JONES

Read Genesis 42-47 and 50:15-21.

How did Joseph meet his brothers again? (*Genesis 42:1-24*)

What evidence is there that he did not hate his brothers? (*Genesis 42:24; 45:5; 50:19-21*) \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Joseph responded to his brothers' request the way that he did? (*Genesis 42:25-38*)

Why do you think he put their money back in their sacks?

How do we know that Joseph felt love for his brothers, despite the way they had treated him? (*Genesis 43:1-34*)

**T**he story of Joseph's love and forgiveness for his brothers is one of the most touching scenes in the entire Bible. In many ways, the life of Joseph was a foreshadowing of the life of Christ. Joseph was betrayed for money; he was tempted but did not sin; he was falsely accused and punished; he came back from his adversity to a position of power and authority; his mission was to preserve life; and he unconditionally forgave those who had wronged him. He even appeared (to his father and brothers) to have been resurrected from the dead and glorified in a position of honor and supreme power.

How did Joseph show his forgiveness to his brothers? (*Genesis 45:1-24*)

How do we know that Joseph's actions were a positive witness to the pagan Egyptians?

### Why do you think he told his brothers not to quarrel on their way home?

Joseph did not let the treacherous acts of his brothers affect his own character. Even though their actions would appear unforgivable from a human standpoint, Joseph was able to forgive them. There is no evidence from Scripture that he ever plotted revenge against them. As a trusted official in Egypt, Joseph certainly could have had his brothers punished when he recognized them in Egypt. Forgiving your brother (or other family members) when they wrong you is sometimes very difficult.

### What are three effects of unforgiveness?

Matthew 5:23-24 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 6:14-15 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 2:5-8 \_\_\_\_\_

### What effect did forgiveness have on Joseph's credibility as a witness for his God?

Certainly Pharaoh must have known the circumstances of how Joseph came to be a slave in his country. What an example Joseph must have been for everyone who knew his story. Not only did Joseph live a moral life and give God credit for his wisdom; his life was actually controlled by God's love and grace.

What about your life? Are non-Christians able to see God's love and forgiveness in action through you? Do you allow the actions of others to sidetrack you from your mission, or are you able to see God at work through the circumstances of your life, regardless of whether or not they seem fair?

Who do you need to forgive today? \_\_\_\_\_

As you think about God's incredible forgiveness for all of your sins, ask Him to help you model this same quality of forgiveness for others.

Not only did Joseph live a moral life and give God credit for his wisdom; his life was actually controlled by God's love and grace.

# The Law in Moses' Hands

BY KAREN JONES

Read Exodus 1-2.

What circumstances caused the Egyptians to change their attitude toward the Israelites? (*Exodus 1:1-10*)

Why was this a bad time for Moses, a Hebrew baby boy, to be born? (*Exodus 1:15-22*)

What circumstances occurred to protect Moses when he was born? (*Exodus 2:1-10*)

**M**oses was definitely born in the wrong place at the wrong time, from a human point of view. As a Hebrew boy, he was feared by Pharaoh and condemned to death. God intervened and allowed Moses to live, though surely hundreds of other Hebrew boys were not protected from the wrath and fear of the Egyptians.

Why did God protect Moses?

Did Moses consider himself a Hebrew, as he was born, or an Egyptian, as he was adopted? How do we know? (*Exodus 2:11-13*)

What was the result of Moses' attempt to take the law into his own hands? (*Exodus 2:14-15*)

How did others view Moses' identity, as a Hebrew or as an Egyptian? \_\_\_\_\_

What reason do we have to believe that Moses was confused about his true identity? (*Exodus 2:20-22*)

“Who made you ruler and judge over us” (EXODUS 2:14, NIV)?

When Moses had the opportunity to set things straight, he took it. ... Thinking that no one would notice his sin, he took matters into his own hands.

**I**t must have been confusing for Moses to know that he was a Hebrew, yet live like Egyptian royalty. Even though he had the benefits of living in the palace, he never forgot his roots. His heart must have ached when he had to witness the mistreatment of his own people. Perhaps he even felt guilt over the fact that he had it so well, while they lived as slaves.

We can learn from Moses' example that taking the law into our hands is never a good idea.

When Moses had the opportunity to set things straight, he took it. He made a huge mistake. Thinking that no one would notice his sin, he took matters into his own hands. The belief that he had gotten away with his crime probably gave him confidence and made him feel like he had more authority than he actually did. Instead of relying on God to make the situation better, he attempted to make things better for everyone by setting himself up as the "lawman." Imagine his surprise and fear when he realized that his crime was known and he was a wanted criminal.

Moses responded to his predicament by running away to the Midian desert (*Exodus 2:14-15*). Isn't this a natural response—to hide out in order to avoid punishment? We can learn from Moses' example that taking the law into our hands is never a good idea.

This truth is made clear in Romans 12:17-19 (NIV): *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."*

When Moses ran to the land of Midian, he was mistaken for an Egyptian. When he married and had a son, he named him Gershom, which sounds like the Hebrew word for "an alien there." At that time, he must have felt like a man without a country, that he had ruined his life and would be forever useless to God and to his people.

**As a Christian in a largely non-Christian culture, in what ways do you sometimes feel out of place, like a foreigner? List several ways that you are different, perhaps even out of place, from the people around you.**

**Y**ou may believe that you will never fit in and that God will never be able to use you to reach the lost people around you. In times like this, do not be tempted as Moses was to develop your own system for correcting the evils in the world. Rely on God and trust Him to bring about justice and to use you in His time and in His way.

## Bible Study 9

# Moses: Recalled to Duty

BY KAREN JONES

**Read Exodus 3:1-4:20.**

**How did Moses respond when he realized God was speaking to him? (Exodus 3:4-6)**

**Name five objections Moses had to the mission God gave him.**

Exodus 3:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

**How did God reply to each of Moses' objections?**

Exodus 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 3:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:2-5 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 4:14-15 \_\_\_\_\_

**What three signs did God give Moses to convince the people that the message was really from Him? (Exodus 4:1-9)**

Moses had been gone for many years and surely felt that his life would end out on the far side of the desert, taking care of the sheep. No doubt the years had given him time to think about his past actions and they had mellowed his zeal for taking matters into his own hands. The idea that God would want to use him back in Egypt probably never crossed his mind. He was a has-been. At one time he thought he could help his fellow Israelites, but those days were over.

Have you ever felt that way? Maybe you were “on fire” for God in the past, but something you did, some careless action, brought you shame and you have felt like God could never use you again. This example from Moses' life should encourage you. Sometimes God wants us to spend some “desert time” to bring us to a place where He can really use us for His purposes.

Moses was curious about the burning bush, but only when God called his name did he realize that God was trying to get his attention. The years had also made Moses insecure. In his younger days, Moses would probably have been excited at the possibility of returning to Egypt as the conquering hero, finishing the job he wanted to do when he lived there before. Now, however, Moses was reluctant. He made excuses.

**Moses' reluctance was not entirely a bad thing, though. Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**E**ventually, though, the excuses became a problem. Moses was not really hearing what God was saying. It was not Moses who was responsible for freeing the Israelites; it was God who was going to bring the people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Moses was only called to be obedient and to do what God instructed him to do.

**Have you ever sensed that God wanted you to do something for Him, but you felt inadequate for the task? Describe the situation.**

**What are the positives of feeling inadequate?**

**When are those feelings negative?**

**T**hroughout the months following Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush, he underwent a dramatic change of personality and character. He changed from a fearful, self-conscious old man who could not imagine being useful to God into the powerful deliverer and leader of God's people.

What changed Moses? How did he gain the confidence required to stand up to Pharaoh and then organize and lead more than a million Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and across the desert? Moses was totally changed by spending time talking and listening to God. Moses' prayer life really began as he stood barefoot on holy ground in front of the blazing bush out in the desert. Then, in spite of all his doubts and fears, Moses obeyed God.

At each step along Moses' epic journey, he talked with God. Then he trusted and obeyed God and took the next step. More than 60 of his prayers (conversations with God) are recorded in the book of Exodus. In a matter of weeks, Moses' confidence had grown to the point that he was able to encourage the Hebrews even when they were trapped by the Egyptian army at the Red Sea.

**What was his advice to them? (Exodus 14:13-14)**

**How does the Bible describe Moses' relationship with God? (Deuteronomy 34:10)**

**L**isten for God's voice. Just as He called Moses, He is calling you. Are you willing to obey and trust Him to accomplish the task? Or, will you make excuses, focusing on your human inadequacies? Will you make your prayer life a priority and allow God to reveal Himself to you, to guide you and to give you the confidence to serve Him faithfully?

The idea that God would want to use Moses back in Egypt probably never crossed his mind. He was a has-been.

“The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Exodus 33:11, NIV).

## Bible Study 10

# Moses: Israel’s Intercessory Lawyer

BY KAREN JONES

Read Exodus 19:1-25 and 24:12-18.

When they arrived at Mt. Sinai, how long had it been since the Hebrews left Egypt? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the mission God assigned to the Hebrews? (*Exodus 19:5-6*) \_\_\_\_\_

How did the people prepare to meet with God?

How did God appear to Moses and the people?

What promise did the people make before God? (*Exodus 19:8; 24:3*) \_\_\_\_\_

How did God give Moses the law? (*Exodus 24:12; 31:18*) \_\_\_\_\_

Now Moses found himself in a completely different role than deliverer or lawgiver, he became an advocate and an intercessor for the Israelites before God.

The ordeal of leaving Egypt and victory of crossing the Red Sea were in the past. The Hebrews had experienced God’s power and protection and now they became a nation—His nation.

They had arrived at their destination, the “mountain of God,” where they were to fulfill the purpose of their journey, to meet God and worship Him there. He called them by His name and ordained them to be a nation of priests. They promised to obey Him and to be His people forever.

Moses’ mission as deliverer and lawgiver appeared to be accomplished. He met face-to-face with God in a six-week tutorial course covering all the civil, dietary and religious laws for the new nation. God finally handed over the tablets of stone, written by His Own hand. Joshua, Moses’ successor, was watching and waiting halfway up the mountain. And the Hebrews, finally free of 400 years of slavery, were fully committed, consecrated and waiting patiently in the valley below. Or were they?

Read Exodus 32-34.

What were the people doing while Moses was on the mountain? \_\_\_\_\_

Even with God's protection, provision and presence so evident in their lives, the Israelites quickly forgot their promise of allegiance and began to worship pagan gods.

How did God react to their sin? \_\_\_\_\_

What evidence is there that Moses loved God's Chosen People? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Moses respond when he saw their sin? \_\_\_\_\_

What request did Moses have as he faced the journey to the Promised Land? (*Exodus 33:15-16*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the new covenant God made with the Israelites? \_\_\_\_\_

**E**ven with God's protection, provision and presence so evident in their lives, the Israelites quickly forgot their promise of allegiance and began to worship pagan gods. Their sin alienated them from their Deliverer and Provider, creating great distress for Moses. Imagine how he must have felt. His entire life he had harbored a desire to free his people from the chains of slavery. Despite his reliance in the past on himself instead of God, Moses had learned to trust God and allow Him to call all the shots. Now he found himself in a completely different role than deliverer or lawgiver, he became an advocate and an intercessor for the Israelites before God.

Have you ever experienced the disappointment of being let down by a friend or fellow Christian? Maybe you have helped someone understand the gospel, and that person committed his life to Christ, only to backslide and regress to his old habits and lifestyle. Or perhaps a Christian you respect really disappointed you.

**How did you respond? Did you act on your feelings of anger or disappointment? Did you excuse their behavior or confront it?** \_\_\_\_\_

**M**oses responded by pleading with God for forgiveness for his fellow Israelites. His love for them was so great that he even offered his own soul for their salvation. (*See Exodus 32:32.*) Continually, Moses reminded God that the Israelites were His Chosen People, regardless of their sin. It was Moses' friendship with God that caused Him to forgive the Israelites. (*See Exodus 33:17.*)

What is your relationship with God? Are you His friend? Do you act as an intercessor for others, asking God to show them His mercy, regardless of how they act toward Him? Will God respond favorably to your prayers, based on your friendship with Him?

Moses was willing to obediently accept God's mission, on the condition that God go with him on the journey. Do you ask God to make His presence known in your life? Are you satisfied to act in your own strength, or do you desperately want God's presence made known in your life?

Take time right now to express your deepest desires to God. Ask Him to give you a heart for others and a passion for Him. Commit to seek Him and His ways throughout your mission here on earth.

“May the LORD ... appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them” (NUMBERS 27:16-17, NIV).

## Bible Study 11

# Joshua: Captain in Training

BY CHAD BLAHA

**Read Exodus 17:8-16.**

This is a study of how God raised up a leader for His people. Joshua was a man who God thoroughly prepared for his mission. God knew all the skills that Joshua would need to return to the Promised Land and drive out the inhabitants. He knew that Joshua would need to be a spiritual leader as well as a military and governmental leader. Above all, he would have to depend on God to be his strength and guide.

**What responsibility was Joshua given in this experience?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did he learn about prayer and dependence on God (symbolized by raised hands)?**

**What was God's promise related to the Amalekites?** \_\_\_\_\_

Joshua was selected to lead the Israelites into battle, and he was allowed to be victorious. It was important that he learn very early that the battle is the Lord's and that following directions and depending on God is the way to lead. The prayer warriors on the mountain won the battle. We need to remember, like Joshua, that the battle is won or lost by our effectual, fervent prayers and the perseverance of our prayer warrior-partners.

**Read Exodus 24:12-18 and 32:1-35.**

**What was Joshua's role in the delivery of the Law?**

**Why do you think God sent him with Moses?**

**How long did it take God to give Moses his instructions (Exodus 25-31) and the inscribed Law?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Joshua learn about God when he and Moses went back to the camp?**

**What did he learn about the Israelites?**

**What did he learn about Moses and his leadership of God's people?**

Joshua would never forget what he experienced climbing Mt. Sinai in the shadow of his great mentor, waiting for weeks as Moses received the Law, and then returning to the camp to find that the people had strayed into sin and disaster. He learned that God meant for His people to be pure and that sometimes the leader of God's people must become their intercessor.

### Read Exodus 33:1-11.

How would you describe Joshua's relationship with Moses?

Why did they have this kind of relationship?

Who benefited from their relationship?

How do you think Moses felt about Joshua always being around?

Moses knew how to lead Israel. He depended on God's instruction and followed the commands God had given him. The Lord knew that Moses would not be able to lead Israel into the Promised Land, so He arranged for an aide and successor.

If we look at the situation from Moses' view, we may be reminded of an important responsibility all *on mission* Christians have. *On mission* Christians disciple new believers. Moses taught Joshua how to lead and how to follow. He showed him what it meant to be intimate with God and also how to lead the people according to God's command and will.

Who does God expect you to mentor at this time in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

If we look at the situation from Joshua's view, we may be reminded that we must be aligned with godly men and women who can lead us and walk with us in God's work. God uses mentors to sharpen and prepare young Christians for their mission. Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

Who are the mentors God is using at this time to sharpen you for His mission? \_\_\_\_\_

### Read Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

Who nominated Joshua to be the next leader of the Israelites? \_\_\_\_\_

Who commissioned him as the new leader? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened when Moses laid his hands on Joshua? \_\_\_\_\_

When Joshua took the responsibility as leader of God's people, he was ready. Not only was he ready, but the people accepted him, and he was called a man full of the spirit of wisdom. Pray about your mission and ministry. Pray that God will continue to equip you with the tools you need to complete the mission to which He has called you.

“We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it”  
(NUMBERS 13:30, NIV).

Bible Study 12

# Caleb: Faithful Spy

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Numbers 13-14.

What was the spies' assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

What did they find in the land? \_\_\_\_\_

What was Caleb's advice? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the report of the other spies? \_\_\_\_\_

God never forgets any of His promises. In the "fullness of time," He accomplishes His will.

God had promised Abraham and all of his descendants that He would give them the land of Canaan forever. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, He raised up Moses and uniquely prepared him to lead the nation back across the desert and into the Promised Land. He delivered them from the Egyptians by parting the Red Sea. At Mt. Sinai, He gave them the Law that would make them the most civilized, healthy and organized nation on earth. He gave them the knowledge, tools and leaders to worship Him, to know Him and to be reconciled to Him. He miraculously fed and gave water and protection to more than a million Hebrews on the march.

After a few short years, they came to the border of the land of Canaan. The 12 spies were given specific instructions about what kind of information and produce they were to collect. Their job did not include giving their opinion about the advisability of the conquest. God was as able as ever to deliver on His promises. Unfortunately, His people were just as unbelieving and foolish as they had always been.

What was the response of the people? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Caleb, Joshua and Moses react? \_\_\_\_\_

What did God decide to do with His rebellious people? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened to the 10 spies who brought a bad report? \_\_\_\_\_

When the people realized they had sinned, what did they try to do? (Numbers 14:40-44) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

It sometimes seems difficult to follow God when He leads you to a different place or responsibility. Change is hard. We want to hang on to our familiar past just like the Israelites longed for the food and security of Egypt. It seems incredibly stupid of them to so easily forget about their slavery. And how could they forget all

the ways God had provided everything they had needed step by step? But it's no less foolish when we balk and fear as God leads us out of our comfortable bondage and across the desert to the land of His new promises.

**Is God leading you to step out and follow Him to some new place or responsibility?**     Yes     No

**What "voices" are you listening to?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Right now as you think about how the Israelites threw away their opportunity to trust God, step out in faith and accomplish one of the greatest missions of all time, decide and record what you will do when He challenges you to "get up and move out."** \_\_\_\_\_

So, whatever happened to Caleb? It took another 40 years of wandering in the desert to prepare the people to trust God enough to follow Him into Canaan.

**What happened to all the unbelievers of the first generation? (Numbers 26:63-65)** \_\_\_\_\_

God was only beginning to use Caleb. Once again God chose him to represent his tribe as the Israelites looked across the Jordan River to the Promised Land.

**What assignment did God give him in Numbers 34:16-29?** \_\_\_\_\_

**G**od never forgets any of His promises. In the "fullness of time," He accomplishes His will. And He never forgets the faithfulness of the man who follows Him wholeheartedly. Caleb was *on mission* when the walls of Jericho fell (*Joshua 6*); when Ai burned (*Joshua 8*); at the "surrender" of the Gibeonites (*Joshua 9*); when the sun stood still, the five kings of the Amorites were destroyed and the southern kingdoms fell in one campaign (*Joshua 10*); and when the northern kings were totally defeated (*Joshua 11*). Caleb was the oldest (and probably toughest) of God's soldiers. When he was 85 years old, God gave him one more mission.

**Read Joshua 14:6-15.**

**What did Caleb ask for as his inheritance? (v. 12)** \_\_\_\_\_

**H**ebron was the land of the Anakites, the giants who had frightened the Israelites 45 years before (and the ancestors of Goliath, David's foe). Caleb led his clan up into the hill country, defeated those giants and took possession of their lands (*Joshua 15:13-14*).

God has preserved the record of Caleb as an example of God's faithfulness to anyone who will follow Him wholeheartedly.

## Bible Study 13 Captain Joshua

BY CHAD BLAHA

Read Joshua 1 and 3-5.

What did the Lord command Joshua to do? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Joshua respond to God's call? \_\_\_\_\_

How did the people respond to Joshua? \_\_\_\_\_

The nation of Israel, God's chosen people, had been wandering in the desert for 40 years and just as they reached the end of their journey their leader, Moses, died. Before he died, the Lord commissioned Joshua to take his place. Leading a million former slaves to conquer a land is no small mission. But when God called Joshua to lead Israel, he was ready. God did not call him to a mission that was too great for him to handle. In fact, the Lord had been preparing him for this mission all of his life. Joshua had been with Moses since he was a young man and had learned how to lead by following God.

What experiences had Joshua had that prepared him with skills and understandings necessary for his new job?

Can you look back in your life to a time when God called you to serve and you were only able to do so because of some knowledge or skill He had given you earlier? God desires that we serve Him. We must be prepared at all times. One of the traits of *on mission* Christians is that they train to serve. Being *on mission* with God often involves serving and meeting the needs of other people. Serving usefully and effectively requires skill, understanding and experience.

What are some ministries to which the Lord has called you?

How has He trained you to serve?

Whatever doubts or fears Joshua might have had at that moment were changed when the Lord decided to have a pep rally. In Joshua 1:6-9, God poured encouraging words and promises over Joshua. He told him to be strong and courageous because He was going to be with him as he led the people into the Promised Land. He also told him that he would be prosperous and successful. However, mixed with the words of encouragement are words of warning.

What are some of the things God warned Joshua about? \_\_\_\_\_

What are some warnings God has for us today?

What are some encouraging words He gives us?

What else did God do for Joshua? (*Joshua 3:7 and 4:14*)

Now that Joshua had the support of the people, he prepared to enter the Promised Land. However, for them to enter the land, they had to cross the Jordan River.

How did the priests show they had faith that God would make a way? \_\_\_\_\_

The ark of God's covenant went in front of the people as they crossed on dry ground. Perhaps this symbolized the Lord standing in the gap for us as we cross from our sinful ways into the promise of a new life in Christ.

Once in the land, Joshua had another lesson to learn about his position in the Lord's army.

Who did Joshua meet? (*Joshua 5:13-15*) \_\_\_\_\_

What message did Joshua receive? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Joshua do when he realized Who this commander was? (What would you do if you were standing on holy ground, in the very presence of God?) \_\_\_\_\_

**G**od had trained Joshua, commissioned him, warned him and made him successful in the eyes of the people he was responsible to serve and lead. Now God helped Joshua put his position in proper perspective. Joshua was about to lead the Israelites into their first battle in the campaign to regain the land. But he was not the leader of the nation or the army of Israel. He was only a servant.

Why was this "worship" experience important for Joshua before battle?

The Son of God is our leader. The battle is His. He does not fight for us. We exist to serve and worship Him. We must "see" Him in all things and realize that we are always in His holy presence.

# Bible Study 14 Operation Rahab

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Joshua 2 and 6.

What was the mission of the two Israeli spies in Jericho? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was in danger? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of danger? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Rahab help the spies? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Whose idea was it to rescue Rahab and her family? \_\_\_\_\_

**W**hen we read these chapters, we usually think about God helping the Israelites, His Chosen People, to conquer the walled city of Jericho. This battle was the Israelites' first victory in their conquest of the Promised Land. The people of Jericho thought they were safe within their huge city walls. But the Israelites trusted and obeyed God, so He performed a miracle and destroyed the wicked enemies of His people.

Now take a closer look, keeping in mind God's mission to reconcile the world to Himself and that His people were called to be a blessing to the nations. What was the spies' mission? Regardless of any current assignment in life, the mission of God's people is *always* to be an agent and tool of God's salvation. They were on a mission to save the prostitute Rahab. Who was in danger? Rahab, of course. The spies were never in danger—from God's point of view. How did she help them? By cooperating. And why? She answers in Joshua 2:8-11. Whose idea was this mission? God's.

It's a mystery why God chose to rescue Rahab, an enemy Gentile prostitute. But, it's also a mystery why He chooses any of us to save, adopt into His family and send on His mission.

**In the time of Noah, God provided an ark to save Noah, his family and "whosoever would come." What was the place of salvation in Jericho?** \_\_\_\_\_

What was the symbol that designated it as the place of safety? (*Joshua 2:18*) \_\_\_\_\_

What did it mean? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was the missionary to Jericho in the time between Joshua 2:21 and 6:20? \_\_\_\_\_

How many people were saved in this mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is not mentioned in Joshua 6:23 that Rahab listed in Joshua 2:13? \_\_\_\_\_

"And she tied the scarlet cord in the window" (Joshua 2:21, NIV).

**How many people could have been saved?** \_\_\_\_\_

**J**ericho was Rahab's city, her country, her whole world. To some people there, she was a traitor; to others, she was a deliverer. What she was to each depended on whether she had warned them of coming judgment and invited them to the place of safety. It depended on whether they believed her and trusted in the God of Israel.

Jericho knew about God and feared Him to the melting point. The leaders could have surrendered to Him, but they refused. So God penetrated their walls and their culture to provide a personal way of salvation. He provided an indigenous missionary with a message.

Perhaps the whole town could have been saved. There could have been red cords hanging out of every window, door and on the city gates; and the people of Jericho could have been singing "I Surrender All" when the Israelites came marching in. Everybody could have followed the directions in Joshua 2:18-19. On the other hand, Rahab could have told the "wrong person" at the "wrong time" in the "wrong way" about the plan of salvation, and she would have had her head cut off. ("Missionarying" is rarely without its risks.)

**What about you? In what way(s) are you like Rahab?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your Jericho?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What (who) is your "place" of salvation?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How much time do you have before the "walls come tumbling down"?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In what way(s) are you like the spies?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who is your "Rahab"?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How are you doing in your mission?**

It's a mystery why God chose to rescue Rahab, an enemy Gentile prostitute. But, it's also a mystery why He chooses any of us to save, adopt into His family and send on His mission.

**What place did the Israelites give to Rahab? (Joshua 6:23)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What place did God give her?**

Matthew 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 11:31 \_\_\_\_\_

**In your "world" right now, who is God's "Rahab"?** \_\_\_\_\_

# Bible Study 15 Gideon's Army

BY CHAD BLAHA

Read Judges 6-8.

What problems were the Israelites experiencing and why? (*Judges 6:1-10*)

What message and mission did the angel of the Lord deliver to Gideon?

Judges 6:12 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 6:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 6:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Why did God choose Gideon for this mission? (*Judges 6:13 and 15*) \_\_\_\_\_

**I**magine you are back in elementary school and it's time for recess. Today is your big day because the teacher picks you to be a team captain! As your turn comes to choose your team, you wonder who you should pick, what you should look for in a team member, and why you will choose one kid over another.

In this passage about Gideon, Israel was going through tough times. In fact, things were so bad that some of the Israelites were finally crying out to God for help. God heard their cry and looked over the land to find a team captain, someone to lead His people. Then the angel of the Lord came to Gideon and told him three important messages: *"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior"* (v. 12); *"Go ... and save Israel"* (v. 14); and *"You will strike down all the Midianites together"* (v. 16).

God did not wait for Gideon to become a spiritual role model, nor did He call on him because he had great influence among his peers. God told him to simply *"go in the strength you have"* (v. 14). But Gideon didn't recognize any strength in himself. He asked, *"How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest ... and I am the least of my family"* (v. 15).

God saw in Gideon two strengths that Gideon could not see in himself. First, Gideon was expecting God to deliver His people just as He had done before (v. 13). Second, because he was the "least" and the "weakest," Gideon would not (and could not) steal the glory that belongs to God when He finally delivered His people.

What was Gideon instructed to do first? (*Judges 6:25-26*)

Why was this so important?

Why did Gideon carry out this operation at night? \_\_\_\_\_

"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand"  
(JUDGES 6:14, NIV).

## When the mob came to kill Gideon, whose side was his father on and why?

The first mission God sent Gideon on involved some spiritual house cleaning (as usual). God *can* use us even if we are unsure, outnumbered or weak. But He *will not* use us if we harbor other gods in our lives.

**How many men responded to Gideon's call to fight the Midianites and Amalekites?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many left when God sent home the fearful?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did God reduce the army to only 300 men?**

## Why did God choose to use such a small and arbitrary group?

**G**od is not impressed with our attendance goals or records. The greatest lesson we can learn is that our God is *one* God. He alone is our strength and our deliverer. The greatest danger in battle is that we will claim to have won the victory. God ensured that His people would not worship an idol, a human leader or even a united effort against evil. God will not share His glory.

## How did God encourage Gideon for his mission?

Judges 6:20-22

Judges 6:36-40

Judges 7:9-15

**N**otice that Gideon never doubted God. He prepared an offering before the angel consumed it. He gathered an army before he put out the wool fleece. And he obeyed every instruction of God before he lay down to sleep the night of the battle. When God saw that Gideon had reasonable fear, He gave him reason to have courage.

God will choose you and your partners for His mission. He will give you the encouragement you need to carry through. You must give Him all the glory for the work He does through you.

God did not wait for Gideon to become a spiritual role model, nor did He call on him because he had great influence among his peers. God told him to simply "go in the strength you have" (v. 14).

“The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him” (JUDGES 13:24, NIV).

## Bible Study, 16 Samson's Weakness

BY WALTER NORVELL

Read Judges 13-16.

What was unusual about the circumstances around Samson's birth? \_\_\_\_\_

How do we know his parents were concerned about how to raise him? \_\_\_\_\_

What were Samson's strengths? \_\_\_\_\_

What were the weaknesses in his life? \_\_\_\_\_

How long did Samson lead the nation of Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

How did he die? \_\_\_\_\_

What change in his actions or attitudes would have most improved his effectiveness as God's man? \_\_\_\_\_

Samson lived during a time when God's people did not have an earthly king. Instead, God provided temporary leaders (judges) whom He blessed with wisdom and power. Samson was one of those leaders. From the moment his parents knew he was going to be born, they tried to learn from God how to raise their special son. However, Samson grew up and made his own decisions. Unfortunately, his life was mostly a tragic one. Despite how God had blessed him with all the tools he needed for his mission, he lived most of his life making poor choices and depending totally on self instead of God.

**What are some critical choices Samson made in his life?**

Judges 14:2-3 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 14:11-13;17 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:17 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:20 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:28 \_\_\_\_\_

**What did he do to break the specific commands (Judges 13:4-5, 14; Numbers 6) God had given him and his parents?**

Judges 14:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 14:10 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:19 \_\_\_\_\_

While Samson experienced success in accomplishing his mission of delivering Israel, he missed the joy and blessings that come from working with, walking with and knowing God.

**A**lthough Samson was strong enough to fight and kill men by the thousand, he was extremely weak around women. His entire story revolves around three foolish romances; each built on nothing but sensual pleasure, and each ending in anger, tragedy and death.

Throughout Samson's life, he acted on his own. He refused to accept advice from his parents. He never assembled or mobilized the armies of Israel and he even failed to consult with God.

**To whom did he give credit for his victories? (Judges 15:16)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What finally caused him to pray for God's help?**

Judges 15:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Judges 16:28 \_\_\_\_\_

The greatest tragedy of Samson's life is that he actually thought he could handle the enemy and complete his mission in his own strength.

**What did Samson say when he woke up, realized his hair was cut off and the Philistines were attacking him? (Judges 16:20)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why? (Judges 16:20)** \_\_\_\_\_

**S**amson lived life without regard to God's plan for him. He was sexually impure. He disregarded his parents' wisdom. He acted out of impulse and childish anger. He failed to develop relationships with godly friends for mutual growth and accountability. He also failed to follow God's instructions or acknowledge that God was the strength of his life. However, God was not restricted by Samson's actions.

**How did God use Samson to accomplish His purpose for His people?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Read Hebrews 11:32-34.**

**Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the Hall of Faith. It recalls all the great heroes of faith down through Israel's history. Among the many names included is Samson's. Why do you think he is included there?** \_\_\_\_\_

**E**ven though Samson finished his life in one final heroic act faithful to his mission, his real potential was unrealized. He had tried to be *on mission* for God without depending on God for wisdom and spiritual strength. While physical strength and talents have great advantages, it is spiritual strength that gives our physical abilities direction and purpose.

While Samson experienced success in accomplishing his mission of delivering Israel, he missed the joy and blessings that come from working with, walking with and knowing God.

**What is the source of strength in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you tap into that strength?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you avoid being *on mission* for God in your own power and wisdom?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study.17 Redeeming Ruth

BY WALTER NORVELL

Read Ruth 1-4.

Why did Elimelech and his family move to Moab? \_\_\_\_\_

In what way did God use this family as missionaries to Moab? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was Naomi so bitter when she returned to her hometown? \_\_\_\_\_

How were Naomi, Ruth and Boaz related when the story began? \_\_\_\_\_

What city was Naomi's ancestral home? \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes it seems that just when you think life can't get any harder, it does! Naomi must have felt that way. First her hometown was decimated by a famine. Her family uprooted and moved to a foreign country to survive. Her sons married women there. Soon, she was grieving over the deaths of her husband and both sons. Now she was an elderly widow living alone in a foreign land. To an Israelite, all these calamities would seem like judgment from God. Death, poverty and shame were seen as God's punishing this family for abandoning the land of promise and for intermarrying with heathens.

Naomi did have two loving daughters-in-law to support her in the land of Moab. But, returning to her homeland would likely be the best way to survive. One daughter-in-law decided to stay in Moab while the other insisted on returning with her to Bethlehem. Naomi returned as a bitter and defeated person, resigned to a life of poverty and shame.

What is the most bitter time you have experienced in life? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God used that time to change your life? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God used your hard times to change the lives of others around you? \_\_\_\_\_

The people of God had a law that required farmers to leave a little of their harvest in the fields so poor people without land could come gather enough food to survive. It wasn't welfare but a way for poor people to work with dignity for what they needed. It was an opportunity to minister to others. Ruth happened to go to the field of a man named Boaz who followed this practice. He spotted Ruth and was impressed by this young woman who worked hard to provide for herself and Naomi. But, more importantly, God was working to bring this foreigner from Moab into His family of faith.

Boaz was old enough to be Ruth’s father. Nothing in the story implies that Ruth was physically attractive in any way. In fact, as a poverty-stricken widow and a foreigner from Moab, she was despised by the Israelites. She had cultural, language, social, political and religious barriers between her and her new neighbors. But God used Boaz to redeem her and make her a respected member of the family of faith.

**Match the following verses with 10 things Boaz did for this poor woman who visited his fields looking for help:**

Ruth 2:5	Provided what she was looking for
Ruth 2:8	Protected her
Ruth 2:9	Noticed her
Ruth 2:9	Spoke kindly to her
Ruth 2:11	Fed her
Ruth 2:12	Invited her
Ruth 2:13	Gave her water
Ruth 2:14	Learned about her history and family
Ruth 2:15	Blessed her
Ruth 2:16	Defended her from embarrassment

**Naomi called Boaz a kinsman-redeemer. What was a kinsman-redeemer?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In what way did he illustrate what Jesus has done in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n Jewish law, when a married man died before having children, a relative was to marry his widow and have a child. That child was treated as the dead man’s child, inheriting all his property. This was a very unselfish practice because the second man would raise and care for the child and that child’s inheritance but receive no real benefit.

Boaz was one of two kinsman-redeemers related to Naomi and Ruth. Ruth showed Boaz that she was interested and available for marriage to him. He approached the other relative who did not want the responsibility of marrying her and raising a son. Ruth became Boaz’s wife and God brought her into His family. In fact, she became the great-grandmother of King David, the greatest king ever to rule in Israel.

In Matthew 1:5, we also see that Ruth was in the ancestral line of Jesus Himself. Naomi and Ruth were twice related to Boaz. Ruth became related to Boaz and Naomi by her faith as well. Naomi cared enough to direct her daughter-in-law to the God of Israel (the Great Redeemer) as well as to Boaz (her physical and material redeemer). Her effort had eternal results—not only in Ruth’s life but also in the coming of our Savior.

**Who in your family needs to be directed to Jesus?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can you be a spiritual kinsman-redeemer in your family?** \_\_\_\_\_

“You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have” (1 SAMUEL 8:5, NIV).

## Bible Study 18

# Samuel's Sons: Unworthy to Lead

BY WALTER NORVELL

Read 1 Samuel 2:11-36; 3-4 and 7:1-8:5.

Who was Eli? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were Eli's sons? \_\_\_\_\_

What were Eli's sons like? \_\_\_\_\_

What was Eli's relationship with Samuel? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were Samuel's sons? \_\_\_\_\_

What were Samuel's sons like? \_\_\_\_\_

How were Eli's sons and Samuel's sons similar? \_\_\_\_\_

Samuel was the son of Elkanah and Hannah. Hannah had been unable to have children, even though she longed for them. She prayed for a child and God answered her prayer with the birth of Samuel. In gratitude, she gave Samuel to Eli the priest to raise in the tabernacle serving God. His parents still loved and cared for him, visiting him every year. Hannah had promised her son to God, and she faithfully kept that promise.

Eli was a godly old man who faithfully served God. However, his own two sons who followed him into the priesthood lived wicked lives. They were sexually impure, selfish, and practiced corruption and graft in their official capacities as priests. While he tended the spiritual needs of the people well, Eli had been an ineffective spiritual leader to his own sons. He rebuked them, but it was too little, too late. God had had it with the harm they were doing to His people and His reputation. He took the priesthood away from them and they were killed.

Both Eli and Samuel had a vision for God's mission among His people, but they never developed an idea of the mission God had for their own families.

What do you think God's plan for Hophni and Phinehas would have been had they lived godly lives? How would their behavior and attitudes have been different? \_\_\_\_\_

When do you think a father's spiritual duties toward his children begin? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you think Hophni's and Phinehas' attitudes and behaviors influenced the people to whom Eli ministered? \_\_\_\_\_

No doubt Samuel learned many things from Eli. ... But, Samuel may have imitated Eli's greatest weakness as well.

**What should Samuel have learned from watching his mentor Eli?** \_\_\_\_\_

No doubt Samuel learned many things from Eli. Eli taught him to listen closely to God, to be constantly available to God, and to speak truthfully and boldly for God. After Eli's death, Samuel fully assumed Eli's priestly duties. But, Samuel may have imitated Eli's greatest weakness as well. His own sons, Joel and Abijah, seemed to have chosen the same lifestyle as Hophni and Phinehas had chosen. Even though grown children do make their own decisions (despite their upbringing), it seems Joel and Abijah did not receive the spiritual leadership they needed from their father.

**What sinful things did Joel and Abijah do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did the people respond to seeing Samuel's delinquent sons?** \_\_\_\_\_

The people looked to Samuel to be their leader, just as they had looked to Eli. Normally, their sons should have risen to succeed their fathers. However, seeing the corruption of Joel and Abijah caused the people to call for an earthly king. They had grown discontent with having God as their King and letting Him instruct human leaders to speak for Him. God wanted the nation of Israel to be a united people under His leadership.

Samuel's sons had encouraged the people to reject God by their ungodly behavior. In many cases, the lives of earthly spiritual leaders reflect upon God. When that reflection is negative, God's purpose for His people can suffer. Both Eli and Samuel had a vision for God's mission among His people, but they never developed an idea of the mission God had for their own families.

**What mission does God have for your current family?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What mission might God have in mind for your future family?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How will you ensure that your mission will be accomplished?** \_\_\_\_\_

“ ‘I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. ... He will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines’ ” (1 SAMUEL 9:16, NIV).

## Bible Study 19 Saul: First King

BY WALTER NORVELL

Read 1 Samuel 9:1-11:15.

Who are the two main characters in these chapters? \_\_\_\_\_

What does it mean that Saul was “an impressive young man without equal”? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Samuel know who to anoint as king? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Saul respond to being anointed as king?

God’s people rejected His leadership over them and demanded an earthly king. God was disappointed but gave them what they wanted. He worked through Samuel to identify and anoint the first king of Israel. Saul was the son of Kish in the tribe of Benjamin. He had the look and bearing of a king, head and shoulders taller than all others. He made a wonderful start as king but would not finish as well as he began (read about it in 1 Samuel 13-15). His excellent start is worthy of our attention.

Saul showed respect and humility toward all people. He obeyed his father’s instructions and set out to find the lost donkeys. He was actually about 30 years old at the time. He also had a good relationship with his servant, whose ideas and suggestions he respected and valued. Saul seemed to have good relations with everybody.

Why is having good relationships with others important to *on mission* Christians?

All *on mission* Christians desire and need a sense of God’s working in their lives. In this passage, God was working out many different details to show Saul what He wanted him to do and to be.

List ways that God was at work in Saul’s life.

1 Samuel 9:3 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 9:6 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 9:15-17 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 10:1 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 10:9 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 10:25 \_\_\_\_\_

Saul showed genuine humility even as Samuel surprised him with the news that God had selected him to be king.

How did Saul show humility? \_\_\_\_\_

What advantage does humility bring to the life of an *on mission* Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

Saul's first military victory showed his ability to lead boldly, to gather support and to strategize. Then he gave God credit for his victory.

Another quality in Saul's early life was his willingness to let God work in him. God literally "changed Saul's heart." Friends and family all saw a spiritual change in him that was so drastic people were asking, "What happened to Saul?"

**How has God changed your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who has noticed the change?** \_\_\_\_\_

**God blessed the new king with companions who were "valiant" and "whose hearts God had touched."**  
**What partners and companions has God given you to help you accomplish your mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

Another important gift God gives His man is boldness. When you know God's will and command, you must act with boldness.

**As the new king, how did Saul demonstrate boldness? (1 Samuel 11)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Saul's bold action affect God's purpose (1 Samuel 9:16), God's people and Saul's kingship?** \_\_\_\_\_

The opposite of boldness is fear. God constantly tells us not to fear because He is with us. Fear is sometimes confused with humility.

**Was Saul exhibiting fear or humility in 1 Samuel 10:19-24?** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**ll who attempt to obey God will find opposition from certain people around them. Saul went back home with new godly friends, but some troublemakers talked bad about him behind his back. After his first military victory, his supporters wanted to kill those who had bad-mouthed him. In both cases Saul offered no malice or anger toward his critics.

**How did Saul's positive reaction help him as king?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Should an *on mission* Christian expect criticism? Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

Saul's first military victory showed his ability to lead boldly, to gather support and to strategize. Then he gave God credit for his victory.

**What do you suppose would have happened if Saul had ...**

failed to attack the Ammonites? \_\_\_\_\_

taken credit for the victory? \_\_\_\_\_

put to death the Israelites who had not supported him? \_\_\_\_\_

Saul's first actions as king were godly, and we would do well to imitate him at this point in his life.

**How well are you doing as a young *on mission* Christian?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you intend to keep on track as you grow in qualities and attitudes needed to live an *on mission* lifestyle?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study 20

# Samuel: Israel's Mentor

BY ALAN HUESING

Read 1 Samuel 12.

What was Samuel's position or job in Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the occasion for his speech to Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

What advice and warning did he give them? \_\_\_\_\_

How did God validate his speech to the people? \_\_\_\_\_

Israel had just entered a new chapter of her history. They had insulted God by demanding He give them a king to lead and protect them from their enemies (*1 Samuel 8*). Through Samuel, their priest and His prophet, God had warned them that a king would force taxes and military service on them and their sons and daughters. But they ignored His warnings and insisted on having a king like their neighboring countries. So, God told Samuel that if they wouldn't have it His way, He would have it theirs—and they would pay the consequences. He directed Samuel to anoint Saul, the son of Kish, as their king (*1 Samuel 9-10*).

Now that Israel was starting a new day as God's people, they needed to be mentored and led by God's man.

As the new king began his reign, Samuel was nearing the end of his ministry among the Israelites. His mission was almost complete. He had served and led them to follow and worship God ever since he was a small boy; first as Eli's helper in the tabernacle (*1 Samuel 1-3*) and then as their intercessor, judge and deliverer from the Philistines (*1 Samuel 7*). Now, in his farewell (retirement) speech, Samuel warned Israel of destruction to follow if they continued to disobey God. But he also gave them hope by telling them if they would repent and obey God with all their hearts, His hand would not be against them.

Then, to add an exclamation mark to his statements and burn all his words into their hearts and memories, he told them to stand still and see what God had to say. He called on God to send rain (it was the dry season), and God immediately answered with earth-shaking thunder and a downpour that drenched the people. They stood in awe of God and Samuel, realizing that they had offended them both. They confessed their sin and asked for forgiveness.

Their old priest reassured them that God still loved them as His people and would bless them again if they would return and serve Him faithfully with all their hearts. And he committed to pray for them and continue to be their spiritual mentor for the rest of his life.

What gave Samuel credibility to be Israel's mentor? (vv. 3-5) \_\_\_\_\_

It's not enough to lead people to faith in Christ; we must follow through by continuing to pray for them and by disciplining them.

What two promises did Samuel make to the people? (v. 23) \_\_\_\_\_

Who had been Samuel's mentor early in his life? (1 Samuel 3) \_\_\_\_\_

What had Samuel experienced that made him qualified to warn Israel? (1 Samuel 4) \_\_\_\_\_

A spiritual mentor must be a consistent example. He must be an example of what God can do in and through a person who commits and trusts his life to God's care and purpose. Samuel had earned the right to speak and to be heard by Israel. He had lived before and among them in such a way that no one could find fault with him. Now that Israel was starting a new day as God's people, they needed to be mentored and led by God's man. They needed his prayers on their behalf and his constant teaching.

New believers need mentors to follow. They need to be disciplined by other believers who are living their lives as faithful followers of Christ. It's not enough to lead people to faith in Christ; we must follow through by continuing to pray for them and by disciplining them. Samuel said that he would be sinning against the Lord if he failed to pray for the Israelites. The same is true now for Christians who bring others into God's family of faith. Spiritual babes can't be left out in the rain to fend for themselves. They have to be fed and cared for.

**What is the role of a spiritual mentor?**

Like Samuel, a mentor reminds young believers what God has done for them and others in the past. He points out their sin and warns them of the dangers of disobeying and failing to follow Christ. He holds them accountable for their actions, urges them to listen to God's voice, encourages them and prays for them constantly.

**Who has been your spiritual mentor?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who should you be mentoring and praying for daily?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study 21

# The Cliffs of Courage

BY STEVEN JAMES

Read 1 Samuel 13:15-14:23.

How many swords were left in the whole country of Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

Who had them? \_\_\_\_\_

Why didn't Jonathan tell his father about his mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Picture a movie preview of this story. ... You know, where that guy with the deep voice says something like: *“Their situation looked hopeless. ...”* (scene of thousands of Philistines on the cliffs surrounding 600 Israelites) *“Their weapons were gone. ...”* (close-up of the two swords) *“The enemy was closing in. ...”* (raiding parties sneaking toward the Israelite camp) *“Even the King was afraid. ...”* (Saul peering out of his tent) *“But two men refuse to give up. ...”* (zoom in on Jonathan and his buddy crossing the plain) *“Their courage is unstoppable ...”* (at the base of cliff, getting ready to climb) *“... and so is their God. ...”* (terrified Philistines fleeing as the earth quakes beneath their feet) *“Action!”* (Jonathan ninjaking his way through a dozen Philistines) *“Adventure!”* (Jonathan and his armor-bearer scaling the cliff) *“And tons of carnage!”* (all out battle with swords flashing, blood spewing, limbs flying) *“The Cliffs of Courage! The Bible as you’ve never see it before ... coming soon to a theater near you!”*

Sometimes you need to step up and take action; sometimes it's just as important to stand by the person who does.

Wow! Was taking on the entire Philistine outpost a foolish thing to do or a bold step of faith? \_\_\_\_\_

What assurance did Jonathan have that his mission would be successful? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the difference between Jonathan's confidence and the attitude of the Philistines? (1 Samuel 14:12) \_\_\_\_\_

The Philistines had surrounded the Israelites, intimidated them and gained tactical positioning. No one was stepping up to make anything happen. Israel was about to get defeated, but not because God wasn't *willing* to help them. He was. And not because God wasn't *able* to help them. He was. God was on their side! And Jonathan knew nothing could hinder God from victory.

So then, what was the problem? They were about to get defeated because they weren't willing to take action. The only thing that was holding them back from victory was their lack of faith. They were cowards. Then Jonathan decided to make something happen.

God was ready to send victory, but it took a step of faith to actually put feet to God's plan. Jonathan totally laid the outcome in God's hands, grabbed the only weapon he had, and set out to see what would happen.

**Who caused the panic that shot through the Philistine camp?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who was responsible for the victory, Jonathan or God? How do you know?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When did Saul and the other men join the battle?** \_\_\_\_\_

**B**y the way, don't overlook Jonathan's armor-bearer. He followed instructions, stood by his friend, fought by his side when the going got tough, and finished the job Jonathan started. Sometimes you need to step up and take action; sometimes it's just as important to stand by the person who does.

**Which are you the most like: Jonathan, the armor-bearer, the Philistines or the Israelite army?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What kinds of battles are you involved in?**

**What weapons do you have at your disposal?**

**What's holding you back from stepping up and making something happen?**

**S**ometimes evil is all around and there just doesn't seem to be any leadership, and you know you have in your hand one of the few swords around. It may be time to grab a buddy, do a little strategizing, ask God for courage and permission, and take off to start a battle. Go out on a limb and trust God for an earthquake. Others will come out of hiding and join the battle.

Will you do it? Will you lay it all on the line and make something happen this week?

# No Substitute for Obedience

BY STEVEN JAMES

Read 1 Samuel 15.

What was Saul's mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Did he obey it?  Yes  No

How many times did Saul claim he had obeyed God before he finally admitted his sin? \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n the Old Testament, God sometimes used His people to carry out judgment on those who had rejected Him. In this story, God decreed that the Amalekites were to be wiped out (check out the background in Exodus 17:14). And Saul was the one to do it.

So, Saul was given a clear mission by God. It was simple. It was direct. God told him to completely destroy the Amalekites and all their stuff. Period. Take no prisoners. Take no plunder. Nothing. Nada. Zip.

The total destruction thing may not make a lot of sense to us, and it didn't make a whole lot of sense to King Saul. Yet, Saul knew *what* God wanted, even if he didn't understand *why* God wanted him to do it. But still, he thought, "Why don't I just go ahead and keep the best animals and maybe let the enemy king live so I can show him off. I mean, surely God wouldn't want me to waste all this good stuff! We can even use some of it to make sacrifices to Him. That'll make Him happy." Saul had lots of reasons for not obeying God—good-sounding reasons. But to God, they were all excuses.

What verse gives the first hint that Saul was not willing to obey God? \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 9 says a lot about Saul and his men. What two insights about them can you draw from this verse?

What did God understand Saul's disobedience to mean? (v. 11) \_\_\_\_\_

Did Saul give God the credit for his victory, or did he take credit himself? (v. 12) \_\_\_\_\_

**N**otice the contrast in this story between Saul and Samuel. Samuel stood up for God; Saul stood up for himself. Samuel was troubled by disobedience; Saul wasn't. Samuel cried out to God all night when he heard Saul turned away from God; Saul was busy setting up a monument in his own honor. And most of all, Samuel was committed to total obedience, while Saul was content to obey as long as it seemed to make sense.

This story is really about how two different people responded to God's command. Saul had a mission, and so did Samuel.

How would you describe Samuel's mission?

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 SAMUEL 15:22, NIV).

## What are three things he did to fulfill it?

Samuel was still the judge, priest and prophet of Israel. Since the king had failed, Samuel was sent by God to not only complete the mission of judgment on the Amalekites, but also to hold Saul accountable for his failure to obey.

If we won't be *on mission* as assigned, God will assign our mission to someone else.

Saul appeared to repent, but he still wasn't willing to obey. Was Saul genuinely repenting? It may look like it, but Samuel refused to extend the assurance of God's forgiveness to him. And Samuel had to kill the Amalekite king! Saul's repentance was all a show. Somehow, he had become more concerned about what others thought of him than what God thought. He wanted to "save face" and look good to others even when he knew he was wrong.

Sometimes we don't understand God's prompting in our lives. "Why would You want me to do that, God? It seems wasteful. I'll do this thing over here instead. It makes more sense to me. I'll even sacrifice something to You afterward."

But all God wants is obedience. If we won't be *on mission* as assigned, God will assign our mission to someone else. There is no substitute for obedience.

Are you willing to obey God no matter what He asks you to do?

Saul knew what God wanted, even if he didn't understand why God wanted him to do it.

## Bible Study 23

# David: Defender of the Faith

BY STEVEN JAMES

Read 1 Samuel 17.

How did the Israelites respond to Goliath’s threats? (vv. 11,24) \_\_\_\_\_

How many times a day did Goliath take his stand? How many days in a row? So, how many total times did he mock Israel and their God? (v. 16) \_\_\_\_\_

Whom does Goliath refer to the Israelites as servants of? \_\_\_\_\_

Is that significant? (v. 8) \_\_\_\_\_

**I**t wasn’t unusual in biblical times for two armies to choose representative warriors to fight it out instead of engaging in all out battle. However, it wasn’t exactly normal to have a guy as huge and unstoppable as Goliath. The Israelites were terrified.

When Jesse sent David to the front lines, he thought his sons were in the midst of a battle. They were standing on the sidelines shaking in their boots. For over a month they shouted a war cry; but at the first sight of Goliath, they retreated with their tails between their legs. Then, along came David.

What was David’s motivation in fighting the giant?

What was David’s weapon? (v. 45) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did David run to attack the giant?

**D**avid’s original mission was to deliver supplies and messages to his older brothers. But when he arrived on the scene, he was responsive to the real mission God had in mind for him. Very often we start out on a mission that doesn’t seem too glamorous or important, but when we trust and obey, God plops us into the real battle!

David was prepared. Remember, he took his sling with him to deliver those cheese sandwiches! The giant came at David with weapons; David went toward him with total reliance on God. David even promised to cut off the giant’s head before he even had a sword! Notice David didn’t have blind faith. He didn’t trust in God despite the evidence but because of it. He had assurance that because God

David didn’t have blind faith. He didn’t trust in God *despite* the evidence but *because* of it.

Very often we start out on a mission that doesn't seem too glamorous or important, but when we trust and obey, God pllops us into the real battle!

had given him victories in the past over the lion and the bear, God would give him victory once again. And faith overcame.

We can take confidence in God's power, past victories and almighty strength, too. It's easy to stand on the sidelines and hope someone else will step up to face the giant. It's another thing altogether to have the kind of faith that runs toward a problem armed only with sticks and stones and trust in God!

**What are some giants that you are facing in battle?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why are those giants so intimidating?**

**What do you need to take with you in battle against the giants in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**N**ow remember, David didn't take just one stone into his battle with Goliath. He took five. He knew that even though God was faithful to deliver him, he might miss the giant the first time. Or the second. Or the third. Or the fourth. But that didn't stop him from carrying out his mission. He had an unshakable faith and an all-powerful God on his side.

Are you eager to take on giants just because you want to defend God's honor? Do you sling first and think about where you can find a sword later? Are you prepared for battle?

**When was the last time you volunteered for a mission that involved a giant?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What will you do next time?** \_\_\_\_\_

“I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him” (1 SAMUEL 16:18, NIV).

## Bible Study 24

# David: King Without a Throne

BY STEVEN JAMES

Read 1 Samuel 16; 18-20; 22:1-2 and 26:1-25.

The key verse to the left lists six characteristics of David. What are they?

What evidence in the text can you find that David was truly “a man after God’s own heart”? List three things in the space provided.

What evidence can you find that Saul was *not* a man after God’s own heart? List three things in the space provided.

Even as a boy, David’s relationship with God was developing as he watched his father’s sheep in the hills around Bethlehem. What specific skills or understandings did God give David as a young shepherd that equipped him for his mission in life?

Psalm 23

1 Samuel 16:23

1 Samuel 17:32-37

David was a great leader. Everyone he met recognized his integrity and faithfulness to God. They respected him for it and they willingly followed him. But this honor and devotion for David made King Saul jealous. He wanted more recognition and when he didn’t get it, he decided to get rid of David.

Saul tried everything he could think of—lies, job transfers, manipulation, suicide missions, even throwing spears at him in the living room. Finally he'd had enough. He abandoned all responsibilities as leader of his country and became obsessed with finding and killing David.

So David fled. But look carefully. It wasn't because he was a coward; it was because he trusted God and respected Saul's office so much that he refused to fight him! David wouldn't take any action without confirmation that it was God's will. Even when God caused Saul and his men to fall into a deep sleep, David refused to harm the king or let anyone else do so. He figured that God had promised to make him the next king so until God removed Saul, he should just hang loose and be patient.

**What does the word "twice" in 1 Samuel 18:11 tell you about David?** \_\_\_\_\_

**For what two reasons did Saul pursue David? (1 Samuel 18:8-9, 12)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why was the friendship between Jonathan and David so unusual?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does it tell you about David?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does it tell you about Jonathan?** \_\_\_\_\_

**W**hat made David a better king than Saul? First, he chose to follow God and be devoted to the Lord. He worshiped and talked with Him all the time. And when he sinned, he confessed it and accepted God's forgiveness. Scripture tells us that David's heart was fully devoted to God. That's why 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22 call him "a man after God's own heart."

Second, David was more concerned with pleasing God than pleasing men. He refused to take things into his own hands but trusted God's timing and plan instead.

Third, David was bold, fearless and courageous. He was unashamed of his reliance on God, and he was ready to defend the Lord's name and honor no matter what the cost.

Finally, David was gifted at developing friendships and partnerships. Take his friendship with Jonathan, for example. It would have been natural for David to see Jonathan as a rival to the throne (since King Saul was his father); but instead of fighting him, he honored, respected and befriended Jonathan.

The characteristics that made David a strong leader can serve us well today. Worship. Faith. Integrity. Courage. Devotion. Loyalty. As we pursue these traits, we'll grow in our ability to lead others and be *on mission* for the Lord.

**Which of these areas need the most work in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What changes will you make to grow the character trait(s) in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ Nathan replied, ‘The LORD has taken away your sin.’” (2 SAMUEL 12:13, NIV).

## Bible Study 25

# Nathan's Special Delivery

BY STEVEN JAMES

**Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17 and 11:1-12:25.**

**I**n these chapters, Nathan, the prophet, had three different messages to deliver to the king. Each was from God and each was a very personal message.

**In Chapter 7, you find four distinct promises that God made to David. What were they?**

**Were the promises conditional on David's behavior, or unconditional?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What's the significance of that?**

**Would you consider Nathan's first message good news or bad news?** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**he first message came in response to David's request to build a temple or palace for the Lord. Nathan began by letting David know that God was pleased with the plan but had different timing in mind. David's son would build the temple, not David. Then, Nathan delivered the message of God's promises to David and his descendants.

Nathan's second message came on the heels of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba. King David had allowed lust to cloud his judgment. He stole another man's wife and then tried everything he could to cover up his deed. He didn't even stop when it came to arranging her husband's death so he could marry her. It's as if he thought, "Sweep it all under the carpet. Cover my tracks. No one will ever be the wiser."

He might have been able to keep his sin a secret from others, but God knew about it and He was not pleased.

So God sent Nathan back to David to confront him with his sin. David had failed God and violated the trust of his office and position as king. As a result, he would face a terrible judgment.

This was not a pleasant message to deliver to someone who had the power to make you a head shorter if he got angry with you. But Nathan didn't balk. He stepped right up to the plate and delivered.

**How would you describe Nathan's second message? (2 Samuel 12:1-12)**

**What technique or method did Nathan use for getting across this message of sin and judgment?**

**Was it effective?**    Yes    No

**W**hen David was confronted with his sin, he immediately repented and confessed. That took guts. But once he'd admitted his sin, he was ready for the third message—the assurance of forgiveness and restoration. Yes, there were still negative consequences for David's rebellion, but God had completely forgiven his sin.

As witnesses to lost people, we're responsible for delivering the gospel message to others. That means sharing both the good news and the bad news, like Nathan did. And, we must rely on God to supply us with an effective delivery technique, especially when we fear the message will not be accepted.

The good news is that God has an eternal and abundant purpose and plan for life. His plan is unconditional and intended for all people. But there's also some bad news—sin and judgment separate us from His blessings. But finally comes the best message of all about God's love, forgiveness and our debt being paid.

**What part of the message is toughest for you to deliver? Why?**

**What are three things you can learn from Nathan?**

**God spoke directly to Nathan and told him what to say. How does God speak to us today?**

**How can we be better listeners?**

**W**e can learn from Nathan about delivering God's messages. He was bold and tactful, purposeful and responsive. We need to grow in our skill and willingness to deliver appropriate presentations of the gospel.

**What steps will you take to learn or review the gospel message and to deliver it to someone who needs to hear it?**

# Bible Study 26 Elijah's Showdown

BY BRAD PRICE

Read 1 Kings 18:1-40.

Who was Elijah? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Elijah tell Ahab that was going to happen? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was Jezebel killing? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was hiding prophets from Jezebel? \_\_\_\_\_

Ahab was the king of Israel and he had done evil in the sight of the Lord. He was worse than all the kings before him. He set up an altar for Baal, a wooden image in direct violation of God's commandment to not make any idols. Because of Ahab's idolatry, Elijah, a prophet of God, prophesied that there would be a drought in the land. After three years, God told Elijah to go before King Ahab and prophesy that God would send rain again.

Jezebel, Ahab's queen, was killing the prophets of God, but Ahab's servant Obadiah was hiding prophets from Jezebel and feeding them. During this time, the people of Israel began doubting the Lord and worshiping Baal. Elijah decided it was time for a showdown.

How many prophets did Baal have? \_\_\_\_\_

Who came to the showdown at Mt. Carmel? \_\_\_\_\_

Was Elijah correct in what he said in verse 22?     Yes     No

What happened when the 450 prophets shouted, "Oh, Baal, hear us"? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Elijah do to the altar to remind the people who they were? (vv. 30-37)

When the fire of the Lord consumed Elijah's sacrifice, what did the people say? \_\_\_\_\_

The people of Israel had moved so far away from God that only something spectacular would reignite their faith in God. So, Elijah made them come to a decision. In verse 21, he asks, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (NIV).

Elijah knew that God would answer his prayer. He was confident because he knew Israel's history and he personally had seen God work before. The surest way to face doubts when they come is to have a past history

The surest way to face doubts when they come is to have a past history of answered prayer.

"How long will you waver between two opinions?" (1 KINGS 18:21, NIV)?

Elijah was able to accomplish his mission only as he faced Ahab and put God to the test. ... Only as we go out into the world can we lead others to follow our God and encourage other Christians along the way.

of answered prayer. The more a Christian prays and steps out in faith, the more that Christian sees God answer prayer. And the more a Christian sees God answer prayer, the stronger that person's faith becomes.

While Elijah was facing the prophets of Baal alone, where were the other prophets of God? Were they hidden so deep in the caves (v. 4) that they were unaware they were needed as mentors to God's people? Had Obadiah actually done God's people a disservice by "protecting" the true prophets from the wicked queen? Was God unable to protect them as He protected Elijah? Would they have drifted into idolatry if they had had spiritual leadership in these dark days when it was difficult to stand up for God?

**What tough circumstances do you face that make you want to hide?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When was the last time you, like Obadiah, tried to shield Christian friends from persecution?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can persecution advance the cause of Christ?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When was the last time God increased your faith by answering your prayer?** \_\_\_\_\_

**E**lijah was able to accomplish his mission only as he faced Ahab and put God to the test. As Christians with a mission to fulfill, we are ineffective if we stay huddled together in our own groups. Only as we go out into the world can we lead others to follow our God and encourage other Christians along the way.

Faith, the Bible says, comes from hearing about what God has done. We can tell everyone what Jesus did on the cross. We can also tell people what God is doing in our lives right now. When God answers prayer, we should tell others about that. When God does something miraculous, we should tell others so that their faith in God can be stronger.

**What steps will you take to put God to the test among people who need to know Him?** \_\_\_\_\_

# Elijah and Mission Fatigue

BY BRAD PRICE

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18.

What signs of depression did Elijah exhibit in this chapter of his life? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was Elijah depressed? \_\_\_\_\_

When was the last time you had difficulty maintaining the excitement of a spiritual experience or commitment? \_\_\_\_\_

In what situations do you feel that you are the only Christian around? \_\_\_\_\_

The mighty prophet Elijah felt just the way that you sometimes feel. In this chapter, Elijah found himself alone, hungry and hiding from an evil woman named Jezebel who wanted to kill him. The strange thing is that Elijah had just had a mountaintop experience on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:1-40). He had just experienced one of the greatest spiritual victories of all time. You would think that Elijah would be stronger than ever and ready to face up to Jezebel or anybody else.

But Elijah was exhausted. He had worked hard and was tired of running away and starving. He had physically and emotionally run out of gas and now he was in deep depression. He wanted his life to end. But that was not God's plan. God still wanted Elijah to serve Him and had great things for Elijah to do.

When we are with godly Christian friends who care about us and pray for us, we are more energized and supported than when we try to live life by ourselves.

What did God do to help hungry Elijah? \_\_\_\_\_

What were Elijah's complaints?

How did God respond to his complaints? \_\_\_\_\_

How did God help Elijah put his situation back into perspective? \_\_\_\_\_

“... I have had enough, LORD” (1 KINGS 19:4, NIV).

**E**lijah had been working alone. Being a prophet of God did not guarantee that he would have friends. In fact, it probably got in the way of making friends. Elijah had to do everything by himself, and he was feeling tired and unappreciated. But when Elijah was exhausted and depressed, God cared.

**Following God's example, what are three practical ways we should care for people who suffer from burnout and depression?**

**What advice did Jesus give His disciples when they were so busy serving others that they had no time to eat? (Mark 6:31)** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**s Christians, our spirits will live forever, but our bodies and emotions are human. We get hungry, tired, discouraged and sick. We must take care to rest and maintain balance in our lives if we are to continue to be useful to God and His mission.

Also, when we are with godly Christian friends who care about us and pray for us, we are more energized and supported than when we try to live life by ourselves. God was patient with His man. He knew that Elijah needed a partner, so He sent him to find and become a mentor to a young man named Elisha.

**Who was Elisha?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How could Elisha help the older prophet?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Elijah began to teach and train Elisha to be his successor. Who are you helping to grow in their Christian faith?** \_\_\_\_\_

**E**ach of us has spiritual highs or mountaintop experiences sometimes. What really counts is what we do when we come back down to earth. Elijah rested, ate, talked to and even complained to God. God then sent him to train a new prophet. Giving our time to help others be successful lifts our spirits and makes us feel more productive.

**Do you get enough sleep?**     Yes     No

**Do you eat properly and maintain good health?**     Yes     No

**Do you give your time to train or disciple someone else?**     Yes     No

**Who in your life needs a mentor or partner?** \_\_\_\_\_

“She said to her mistress, ‘If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy’” (2 KINGS 5:3, NIV).

## Bible Study 28

# An On Mission Maiden

BY BRAD PRICE

Read 2 Kings 5:1-19.

Who was Naaman? \_\_\_\_\_

What illness did he have? \_\_\_\_\_

What did the young girl say to Naaman’s wife? \_\_\_\_\_

Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Syria. He was second only to the king in importance. But Naaman had a problem—he was a leper. In those days, lepers could not be around other people. Everyone was afraid they would catch leprosy from them. So not only Naaman, but also the king of Syria wanted Naaman to get well. While raiding the land of Israel, the Syrians had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. This maiden became a slave in Naaman’s household.

She knew about Elisha and had faith in God’s prophet. This also meant she had faith in God. She believed in God enough to tell her mistress about the healing powers of Elisha, God’s prophet. She said to her mistress, *“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy”* (v. 3).

Not even the king of Israel had such faith in God’s prophet! When he read the letter from the Syrian king requesting that Naaman be healed by a Jewish prophet, the king thought it was a trick to start a quarrel between Syria and Israel. When Elisha heard about this, he said, *“Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel”* (v. 8).

How many times did Elisha tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan River? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Naaman become angry with the prophet?

What did Naaman’s servants say to convince Naaman to do what the prophet had said?

What happened to Naaman when he washed in the Jordan River? \_\_\_\_\_

What promise did Naaman make to Elisha in verse 17? \_\_\_\_\_

The spiritual rebirth of one person often involves many caring people.

**N**aaman expected the prophet to wave his hand like a magician and make him well. He wanted drama and greatness from the prophet. To simply go wash in a dirty river was not spectacular enough. His pride was hurt that he would be healed in such a humble way. His servants suggested that if he was willing to do something great to be healed, then surely he should be willing to do something simple. Sometimes great moments in our lives come to us in simple ways.

**In what ways was Naaman's healing similar to your salvation experience?**

**Did Naaman listen to the suggestions of other people in his life?**    Yes    No

**If Naaman had not listened to his wife and his servants, what would have happened to him?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who was the catalyst who began Naaman's journey to Israel and to a restored life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**he spiritual rebirth of one person often involves many caring people. The unnamed Israelite maiden started a change of events in Naaman's life that ended with Naaman becoming a worshiper of the God of Israel. As a kidnapped slave in a foreign country, this girl is a powerful example to us of how we should care about the physical and spiritual needs of even our enemies.

**Who are the people in your life who helped you become a Christian?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who is the person who started the process of pointing you to Jesus Christ?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who are some people in authority over you now who need Jesus?**

**How can you tell them where to find spiritual healing?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who needs your encouragement to obey God now?** \_\_\_\_\_

# Bible Study 29 The Lepers' Secret

BY BRAD PRICE

Read 2 Kings 6:24-7:20.

What motivated the four lepers to go out to the enemy camp where they might be killed? \_\_\_\_\_

What did the lepers find in the enemy camp? \_\_\_\_\_

Why had the Aramean army abandoned the camp? \_\_\_\_\_

**E**lisha was the prophet in Israel. God had shown Elisha a great spiritual army of horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:16-17). Elisha knew of God's ability to win the battle against any army that came against God's people.

Now, Samaria, a city located halfway between the Dead Sea in the south and the Sea of Galilee in the north, was under attack by the Aramean army. The people of Samaria were confined to their city under siege. Behind the city wall, they were starving. People were even eating their children because there was nothing else to eat. In the midst of this horrible scene, Elisha prophesied that food would be found within two hours.

Four lepers decided to throw themselves on the mercy of the Arameans. When they approached the enemy, they discovered that the army had fled and all the treasures and food in the camp were left behind. It was all theirs for the taking.

What options did the lepers have once they discovered the food and wealth? \_\_\_\_\_

What would a businessperson be tempted to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What would a dishonest person do? \_\_\_\_\_

What would an unselfish person do? \_\_\_\_\_

What would have happened to the people of Samaria if the lepers had not told them about the food? \_\_\_\_\_

What would have happened to the lepers? \_\_\_\_\_

We are always doing the right thing when we offer spiritual food to those who desperately need it.

“This day is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves”  
(2 KINGS 7:9, NIV).

According to this passage, God had frightened the Aramean army away with the sound of the approach of a large army. They ran away in total fear for their lives. When the lepers discovered this and decided to tell the king of Samaria, he did not believe their tale.

Sometimes the news is just too good to be true. We have a message like that. It seems too good to be true that God could love us enough to send His only Son to die for our sins—yet this is exactly what has happened. Like the king in this story, some will not believe the good news of Christ, but we must tell them anyway. We are always doing the right thing when we offer spiritual food to those who desperately need it.

Consider this: What if the four men had not had leprosy? Would their city have been saved? Was their disease a part of God’s plan to feed them and their city? Are unwanted circumstances in our lives sometimes part of His redemptive plan? Notice that God often uses people on the fringe of society—even outcasts—to be the ones to whom He first reveals His plans and purpose. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.)

List four words used to describe the kind of people God chooses. \_\_\_\_\_

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

What message has God given us? (v. 19) \_\_\_\_\_

What is the “ministry of reconciliation”? \_\_\_\_\_

People all around us need to hear the good news that Jesus Christ has already won salvation for us. Like the lepers in this story, we should run to those in need and share with them what we have found.

Have you found eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ?     Yes     No

Do you share your newfound treasure with others?     Yes     No

Would you like to tell others about the good news of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

List people you still need to tell about Jesus and His forgiveness. \_\_\_\_\_

What keeps people from believing your message? \_\_\_\_\_

What will happen to us if we fail to report the Good News to others? \_\_\_\_\_

Will you keep the Good News to yourself or will you run to go tell it?

“... who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this” (ESTHER 4:14, NIV)?

## Bible Study 30 Queen Esther's Time

BY BRAD PRICE

Read Esther 1-10.

What motivated Haman's hatred toward the Jews? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the new law that Haman wanted the king to enact? \_\_\_\_\_

What counsel did Mordecai give to Queen Esther? \_\_\_\_\_

Esther was a Jewish queen in the great Persian empire. She was beautiful, rich and popular. Mordecai had made sure that she was seen by the king and the king had fallen for her. He was so taken with her that every now and then he would promise her whatever she wanted. Esther used her power over the king to save her people from being massacred.

Haman hated the Jews and had a plan for killing them all legally. (Another man in history named Hitler had the same idea.) Haman's hatred for the Jews included the queen. Esther knew that not only was the welfare of her people at stake but also her life as well. Esther had to develop a strategy to defeat the evil plan of Haman. Esther was fearless, and she showed great intelligence and patience as she put her plan into motion.

We never know when our moment of greatest effectiveness will be for the kingdom of God. We must be ready to take a stand—to defend the faith.

What part did prayer and fasting play in Esther's plan? \_\_\_\_\_

What was her strategy for approaching the king?

How do we know Esther feared for her own life? \_\_\_\_\_

How did the king respond to her accusation of Haman? \_\_\_\_\_

Esther believed in prayer. Quietly she issued orders that all of the Jews in Susa hold a fast on her behalf. (This means that they were all praying for her and dedicating themselves to prayer instead of eating.) While they were interceding for her before the throne of God, she was walking into the throne room of an earthly king to intercede for her people. Mordecai saw God's hand in what was happening. He told Esther that she might have been born for this one moment.

The outcasts in Persia were the Jews. Who are the outcasts in your school? \_\_\_\_\_

Esther had it all. Why do you think she cared what happened to her people? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you ever see fellow students mistreated? How does that make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

How can you stand up for others who are being mistreated?

**G**od has great things for us to do. We never know when our moment of greatest effectiveness will be for the kingdom of God. We must be ready to take a stand—to defend the faith. In every generation, Christians have given their lives for their faith. The future is uncertain, but what is certain is that we serve a powerful God who loves us and has given us the Holy Spirit who is greater than anything we will face.

How can prayer be used in a strategy for blessing the outcasts in your school?

How can you minister to the lonely or lost in your school?

Can you be counted on to always stand up for God's people when you hear others criticizing them?

- Yes       No

## Bible Study 31

# Daniel’s Accountability Group

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Daniel 1-3.

Where was Daniel and why?

What changes was Daniel’s new culture trying to force on him and his friends?

Daniel 1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 1:7 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 3:4-7 \_\_\_\_\_

As a teen-ager, Daniel found himself a captive (POW) in a heathen empire hundreds of miles from his home, family, the temple, Hebrew Scripture, and the synagogues and schools of his native Jerusalem. Because of his good looks and high scores on a battery of aptitude tests, he had been selected and enrolled in the most elite university anywhere as a trainee for the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful ruler in the world. This university took the brightest and best young citizens of conquered countries and molded them into a multi-ethnic administration “dream team” designed for world domination.

Daniel’s personal trainer began a process designed to systematically alter his identity, culture, values and home training. First came the name change. Daniel and each of his friends had always carried the name of their God in their names (the “el” and “ah” suffixes). In Babylon, they were given names that carried the name of a local god. (Check out the “Bel,” “ach” and “nego” affixes.) Then the trainees were put on a royal Babylonian diet. (After all, you are what you eat.) Then, there were three years of training in language, history and literature. Finally, they were expected to submit and literally worship the structures and ideas of their new culture.

These four young men of God stood strong because they were united as a team of support and accountability.

How did Daniel and his friends handle pressures from their society?

Daniel 1:8-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 1:17-20 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 2:17-18 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 3:12, 16-18 \_\_\_\_\_

When these young “missionaries” stood together and held each other accountable for obeying God’s law and will for their lives, God Himself stood with them in the fire as a member and the leader of their team.

**H**ow did these four Jewish teen-agers withstand the brainwashing machine of the Babylonian Empire? How were they able to resist the temptation to get “the big head” of the elite? Why didn’t they get drunk and “pig out” with the others? Why didn’t they whine about impossible assignments from their boss? Why didn’t they compromise their beliefs when their lives depended on “getting along” and adapting? Why was Satan powerless to break them down and make their lives useless to the mission of God?

These four young men of God stood strong because they were united as a team of support and accountability. As a team, they did at least four things to support each other: 1. Together they remembered and applied God’s Word (*Daniel 1:8*). 2. Together they worked out and studied hard at school and developed the spiritual gifts God had given them (*Daniel 1:14-17*). 3. They faced difficult situations by talking and praying together about them (*Daniel 2:17-18*). 4. They stood by each other in trials (*Daniel 3:16-18*) and in victories (*Daniel 2:48-49*).

### What were the results of this accountability team?

Daniel 1:15-16 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 1:19-20 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 2:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 2:46,48 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 2:49 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 3:28-29 \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel 3:30 \_\_\_\_\_

**D**id Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah see themselves as missionaries sent by God to a foreign land to carry His message of love and reconciliation? Probably not. But God did. They probably did not expect to hear Nebuchadnezzar (the Great) make the decree recorded in Daniel 3:28-29. When these young “missionaries” stood together and held each other accountable for obeying God’s law and will for their lives, God Himself stood with them in the fire as a member and the leader of their team. That day God used them to reveal Himself to an empire of nations.

Do you have an accountability team? If you are not a member of a group of three to five believers committed to being *on mission* together with God, begin now to pray and look for those who will commit to stand and walk with you.

**List the names of your team members.** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

“... acknowledge that Heaven rules. ... O king, be pleased to accept my advice” (DANIEL 4:26-27, NIV).

## Bible Study 32 Daniel's Boss

BY ALAN HUESING

### Read Daniel 2-4.

Nebuchadnezzar was not an easy king to work for. Take a look at Daniel 2.

**What unreasonable demand did he make of his spiritual advisors?**

**What punishment did he promise if his demands weren't met?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did his advisors answer? (vv. 10-11)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did the king respond to their answer? (v. 12)** \_\_\_\_\_

**When Daniel told him the meaning of his dream, how did Nebuchadnezzar answer? (v. 47)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did the king do in Chapter 3 that totally contradicted what he said about Daniel's God in Daniel 2:47?**

**What was the punishment for not worshipping the 90-foot idol? (Daniel 3:6)** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**o say that King Nebuchadnezzar was a “difficult” boss to work for would be a gross understatement. You and I will never have a boss as tough to work for as Daniel had. The problem was that Nebuchadnezzar was all-powerful—or so he thought. He was emperor of the most powerful empire on earth at that time. He had absolute power, and “absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

So, Daniel was an alien in a heathen country with a power maniac for a boss. There were no workers' unions, no department of labor or laws to protect workers from managers who had tendencies to murder them. Even after Daniel survived the crisis over the forgotten dream and saw his boss face down on the floor acknowledging God as the “Lord of kings,” only a few verses later the king was demanding that everyone worship an idol!

Examine how Daniel handled the situation.

**How did Daniel act/react when the officer came to put him to death? (Daniel 2:14-18)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Daniel witness to his boss about God as he interpreted the dream? (Daniel 2:27-45)** \_\_\_\_\_

**W**e can learn a lot from Daniel, the prisoner of war in Babylon! He had a difficult work situation all his life. He was a government official—God's man working in politics. Power so often corrupts, but it never tarnished Daniel. He never took credit for God's work and he never passed up an opportunity to share his faith in the “God of heaven.”

Daniel never took credit for God's work and he never passed up an opportunity to share his faith in the "God of heaven."

But how did he really feel about his boss, the madman Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel 4 is the king's personal testimony of how he became a true believer in "the Most High God." In it are clues about the personal relationship between Daniel and his "boss."

**When the king had a problem and no one else could help, why did he call Daniel?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does verse 19 imply about how Daniel felt about his boss?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was Daniel's attitude as he urged the king to repent? (v. 27)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What might have happened to Daniel if he had hated his boss and tried to overthrow or undermine him?** \_\_\_\_\_

Notice that although Daniel's name was officially changed to Beltshazzar to honor the god of Babylon (Daniel 4:8), everyone continued calling him Daniel ("judgment of God"). The pagan name just somehow didn't fit.

Daniel, God's man in the story, appears to be successful in every way. He was successful in catching the king's eye in Chapter 1 as he gained an appointment in the royal civil service. He was successful in not compromising his faith and the practice of his religion. He was even successful in seeing his boss personally meet and accept the true God as the Lord of his life.

How did Daniel do it? Find the answer in the following verses.

**What kind of student was Daniel? (Daniel 1:19)** \_\_\_\_\_

**When the boss made unreasonable demands, how did Daniel respond? (Daniel 2:14)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did he complain, compromise, negotiate or refuse? (Daniel 2:16)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Daniel do at home when there was trouble at the office? (Daniel 2:17-18)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who did Daniel credit for his ability to do his work? (Daniel 2:23,28,45b)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Daniel talk about with his boss whenever he had opportunity? (Daniel 4:27)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did he show loyalty to his boss? (Daniel 4:19,36b)** \_\_\_\_\_

**M**ost important, Daniel recognized that God, always in control, was working in the life, mind and heart of his boss, the king. Perhaps Daniel's top goal at work was to see his boss become a believer. If so, his mission was accomplished. And the word went out to all "*peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world*" that God's "*kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation*" (Daniel 4:1,3, NIV).

**What "boss" in your life would you like to see become a believer in the True God?** \_\_\_\_\_

“Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed ... just as he had done before” (DANIEL 6:10, NIV).

## Bible Study 33

# Daniel: Fervent Pray-er

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Daniel 6.

Why did Darius plan to appoint Daniel to the highest position in his government? (v. 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did the other government officials hate Daniel? \_\_\_\_\_

What did the king do when Daniel got into trouble? (v. 14) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome of this incident for Daniel, for his enemies, for Darius and for the empire?

Prayer was the secret and strength of Daniel's amazing life. Prayer unlocked the answers to hard questions and revealed the mind and plans of God.

By the beginning of Chapter 6 of this book about Daniel's life and prophecies, he had been a government official and politician in Babylon for several decades. He had served in (and outlived) the governments of Nebuchadnezzar and his grandson, Belshazzar. After surviving a total takeover of the empire by the Medes and the Persians, Daniel rose to the top again in the government set up by Darius. While Darius was considering appointing Daniel as prime minister of the new government ruling most of the nations in the known world, it's no surprise Daniel had powerful enemies who were jealous enough to try to kill him any way possible. And they couldn't forget that Daniel was a foreigner, a Hebrew prisoner of war (*Daniel 2:25; 3:12; 5:13; 6:13*).

When the other administrators, the 120 satraps, prefects and advisors researched Daniel's work and life trying to dig up some dirt they could use against him, they were unable to find any corruption or even negligence in his entire history of public service. Daniel was a politician who had no skeletons in his closet, secret Swiss bank accounts, illegal contracts, pork barrel promises, illegal tapes, or illicit affairs with secretarial interns. He had kept all his campaign promises, balanced all his bank accounts, returned all his calls and completed all his assignments. His enemies' only hope was to find (or create) some conflict between his job and his "religion" (*Daniel 6:5*).

What law did Daniel's enemies pass? \_\_\_\_\_

How long was it to be enforced? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Darius agree to it? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did he put it in writing? \_\_\_\_\_

**D**aniel was an incredibly able politician. More importantly, he was an incredibly effective missionary. Notice how he handled this life-or-death situation. He didn't argue against the law. He could have avoided conflict by not praying for just 30 days—but he didn't. On the other hand, he didn't defy the law publicly by praying in the town square. He simply continued doing what he had always done. When he was accused, he didn't ask for the king's help. He simply thanked God (*Daniel 6:10*), asked Him for help (*Daniel 6:11*) and then trusted Him (*Daniel 6:23*).

Does life *on mission* with God get easier or harder as you get older? Good question! Trouble comes—either because you do wrong and mess up or because you do right and the enemy tries to mess you up. Daniel learned that “life-and-death” situations—like an irate boss (*Daniel 2:18*), a fiery furnace (*Daniel 3:15*), or a lions' den (*Daniel 6:16*) are really “make-or-break” situations for witness to nonbelievers. In every situation, God can use the crisis of the day to win over a friend (perhaps an emperor or other world leader) and make His Name known and respected throughout the world.

**How was God using Daniel to reveal Himself to Darius? (*Daniel 6:7, 13-23*)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Daniel and his friends react to the judgment and destruction of their enemies? (*Daniel 3:22; 5:30; 6:24*)** \_\_\_\_\_

**D**aniel maintained his prayer life throughout his long exile (and missionary stint) in Babylon. He set aside time and a place to meet daily with the God of his fathers. Prayer was the secret and strength of Daniel's amazing life. Prayer unlocked the answers to hard questions and revealed the mind and plans of God. He interceded for others and never stopped praying for his homeland as well as his friends—and others—in exile. Read Daniel's prayer in Chapter 9.

**Who came swiftly to Daniel to answer his prayer? (v. 21)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was God's opinion of Daniel? (*Daniel 9:23; 10:12; 10:19*)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your daily time and place of prayer?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study 34 Hosea: The Husband

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Hosea 1-3.

What assignment did God give Hosea at (or near) the beginning of his prophetic ministry? (Hosea 1:2)

What problems did Hosea and Gomer experience in their marriage? (Hosea 1:8; 2:2; 2:4-5)

What did God direct Hosea to do about his unfaithful wife? (Hosea 3:1-3)

Why did Hosea experience disappointment and heartbreak in his family life?

Old Testament prophets were sometimes given bizarre or difficult assignments in order to receive or to illustrate and deliver God’s message to His people. Hosea’s assignment was to experience the devastating pain of rejection and betrayal in marriage. His personal story has become the classic illustration of Israel’s (and our) unfaithfulness to God in the face of His love and care. It helps us to understand how personal and real God is and how our actions and attitudes affect Him. It shows how serious and committed God is in His relationship with us.

Here’s the story, understandable throughout all history and in all cultures: God sent Hosea to take for himself a wife. The marriage started out fine with the birth of a son. Then Gomer (what a name!) wandered into adultery and had two children, a daughter and another son, out of wedlock. Hosea named these children according to his response to the situation. He named the daughter Lo-Ruhamah, which means “no mercy, love or forgiveness.” The son was named Lo-Ammi, which means “he’s not mine.” Apparently Hosea publicly disowned the children and put Gomer away in divorce and disgrace (exactly what Joseph wanted to avoid doing to Mary when she became pregnant with Jesus in Matthew 1:19). But later, following God’s instruction, Hosea went out and found Gomer—by now a slave of the man she ran off with—and he bought her back (redeemed her) from slavery. He forgave her, remarried her, recultivated their love and relationship, and then adopted her children.

The poetry of these three chapters intertwines the Hosea + Gomer and God + His people love stories until the two are practically inseparable. Likewise, the past, present and future become blurred because that’s how God sees time—the end from the beginning and vice versa.

By directing Hosea to buy back his adulterous wife and adopt her illegitimate children, God revealed His love for the whole world and His great mission to reconcile us to Himself.

What is God's promise to His people when they forget Him? (*Hosea 2:8-13*) \_\_\_\_\_

What is God's ultimate promise and plan for His people? (*Hosea 2:14-20*) \_\_\_\_\_

Jezreel was Hosea's firstborn son. Who is God's firstborn son? (*Exodus 4:21-23*) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Hosea change Gomer's daughter's name to Ruhamah? (*Hosea 2:23*) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did he change her son's name to Ammi? (*Hosea 2:23*) \_\_\_\_\_

Who are God's adopted "sons and daughters"? (*John 1:11-13, Romans 9:24-25, 1 Peter 2:9-10*) \_\_\_\_\_

God used Hosea's tragic experience to reveal a great prophecy about our future. By directing Hosea to buy back his adulterous wife and adopt her illegitimate children, God revealed His love for the whole world and His great mission to reconcile us to Himself. His plan was to redeem both Jews and Gentiles from slavery to sin and to make us the bride of Christ and His adopted children.

Consider this: Did God cause Hosea's marriage to be miserable just to make a point? Did God plan for Hosea to experience personal disaster so He could teach Israel (and us) through an object lesson? Or, did He just take the problems and situations in His prophet's life and use them to accomplish His purpose?

We usually ask questions like this because we're afraid God might send us on a mission that causes us personal pain. Sometimes He does. Abraham probably anguished over taking his only son up to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him. But his experience helps us understand God as the Father willing to sacrifice His Son. Joseph languished in slavery and jail for years before being exalted as the world ruler who saved his family. He helps us understand God the Son who, as the Messiah, was a suffering Servant, Savior and finally exalted King. Hosea helps us know and understand God as our Husband and adoptive Father. Being *on mission* with God means helping others know Him in whatever way He chooses.

Is there tragedy, crisis or injustice in your life? How can God use it to accomplish His purpose and mission?

“Should I not be concerned about that great city” (JONAH 4:11, NIV)?

## Bible Study 35

# Jonah: Unmotivated Missionary

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Jonah 1-4.

Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh? (Jonah 1:2; 4:10-11) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jonah run away from his assignment? (Jonah 1:3; 4:2) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did the sailors throw Jonah overboard? (Jonah 1:11-16) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the message Jonah finally delivered to the people of Nineveh? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you ever want God to judge and punish people for their wickedness—especially when you’ve been their victim? How would you respond if God sent you as a missionary to your worst enemy? That was Jonah’s dilemma when God sent him to Nineveh, the capital city of Israel’s worst enemies at the time, the Assyrians. Nahum called Nineveh the “city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims” (Nahum 3:1). One of those victims was finally the Northern Kingdom of Israel when Assyria “cut them off” and then brutally destroyed and carried them away into captivity. Jonah would have preferred to prophesy about their coming doom and destruction. He had no interest in warning them or delivering a message to them from God.

Like most of the Jews, Jonah saw himself as one of God’s Chosen People—and he was. Jehovah had promised to bless their allies and curse their enemies. He was their national God—and the Judge of the rest of the world. Jonah couldn’t comprehend that God loved all people and that He had chosen the Jews to be a blessing to other nations. He didn’t understand God’s mission or Israel’s role in it.

What in Jonah’s prayer (Chapter 2) showed he thought Jehovah inhabited only Israel and could only be worshiped there? (vv. 4,7) \_\_\_\_\_

Jonah couldn’t comprehend that God loved all people and that He had chosen the Jews to be a blessing to other nations. He didn’t understand God’s mission or Israel’s role in it.

Jonah was not much different from Jesus’ first disciples or from us. Jesus had to teach them to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:43-45). Remember how James and John were ready and willing to call fire down from heaven to burn up a Samaritan village when the people there refused to receive Jesus (Luke 9:52-55)? We tend to see Jesus as our personal savior rather than as the Savior of the world. Other people will just have to do the best they can.

So Jonah ran away from God. Have you ever run away to avoid an assignment God gave you? Does God generally send storms and big fish for Christians who buy tickets on boats going west when He sends them east? Real disaster comes when God *doesn’t* do whatever it takes to get us back on track, or when we refuse to obey when He gives us a second call to go and tell.

How would you respond if God sent you as a missionary to your worst enemy?  
That was Jonah's dilemma when God sent him to Nineveh.

How did the Ninevites respond to Jonah's message? \_\_\_\_\_

How did God react to their response? (*Jonah 3:10*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was Jonah's reaction to God's response? \_\_\_\_\_

In your opinion was Jonah a *successful* missionary? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

God was successful in drawing the people of Nineveh to repentance. Of course He can use even reluctant and bitter missionaries to preach His message. (At least Jonah never got the big head about how great a preacher he was at Nineveh, bragging in his annual missionary report about the great revival that he caused by his new international evangelism strategy.) But Jonah missed out on the joy of sharing the gospel and seeing people's lives miraculously changed—simply because he didn't care. Like the father in the story of the lost son (*Luke 15:11-32*), God had to sit down with Jonah on the hill overlooking the city and patiently explain about His concern for the children of Nineveh.

How many times in this story was Jonah ready to throw away his life because of frustration, guilt or anger?

To really understand God, to know Him and to fully enter into His mission of love and mercy, we must understand that He is not willing for anyone to perish (*2 Peter 3:9*). God so loved the world that He gave ... (*John 3:16*) and so must we. We must learn to value our lives as investments in His mission. We must learn to care for the people He cares for.

# John the Baptist: Preparing the Way

BY ALAN HUESING

“He must become greater; I must become less” (JOHN 3:30, NIV).

**Read Luke 1:5-25, 57-80.**

List five unusual things related to John’s birth:

- Luke 1:7 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 1:11-13 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 1:21-22 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 1:59-64 \_\_\_\_\_
- Luke 1:67 \_\_\_\_\_

What five things did the angel foretell about John?

- Verse 14 \_\_\_\_\_
- Verse 15 \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- Verse 16 \_\_\_\_\_
- Verse 17 \_\_\_\_\_

How did the neighbors respond when John was born? (v. 66) \_\_\_\_\_

When Zechariah prophesied at John’s birth, about whom was he talking? (Luke 1:68-75) \_\_\_\_\_

To whom was he speaking in verses 76-77? \_\_\_\_\_

John’s birth was an incredible event. It had been hundreds of years since there had been a prophet in Israel. The Jewish nation was hungry for the Messiah to free them from the iron rule of Rome. The Scriptures said that Elijah, the great prophet who had disappeared into heaven in a chariot of fire, must first come back to usher in the messianic kingdom. Could this baby be the one that would prepare the way for the Messiah? Was he the Messiah? John’s birth had been foretold by prophets and was promised by an angel to his father serving as priest in the Temple Holy Place.

When the miracle boy was 8 days old, everything the angel foretold was accomplished. His mute father named him “John.” Then the old priest, now a new father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy incredible words (his first words in a year) over his newborn son. News spread like wildfire throughout the country. What was God going to do through this baby? And when?

Instead of the city life of Jerusalem, the robes of a priest or a rabbi, and the power and position that he could have inherited, he chose to live in the desert. He looked, dressed, ate, talked and even smelled like Elijah! Both Roman and Jewish leaders must have watched this guy carefully to see what he was up to and how he might challenge their establishments.

**Read Matthew 3:1-15; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-20; and John 1:6-9, 19-39.**

All four of the Gospel writers carefully described John and his message. Write a concise but complete description of John combining the details presented in all four passages.

Who came out to hear John’s message and how did they respond? (*Mark 1:5*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was John’s message to the Pharisees and Sadducees? (*Matthew 3:7-10*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was his message to soldiers, tax collectors and ordinary citizens? (*Luke 3:10-14*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was his message to Herod? (*Luke 3:19*) \_\_\_\_\_

What did John say about himself? (*John 1:19-27*) \_\_\_\_\_

What did he say about Jesus? (*John 1:29-30*) \_\_\_\_\_

**J**ohn is a unique character in the Bible—the human link between the Old and New Testaments. His mission was simple: Prepare Israel for the Messiah. He preached repentance and announced Jesus as the Lamb of God and Savior of the world. He spiritually awakened the entire nation as huge crowds went out to the middle of nowhere to camp out, listen to the prophet and respond to his call to righteous living. He was a phenomenal revival preacher and a living legend.

**What was John’s attitude toward Jesus? (*John 1:24-27, Matthew 3:13-14*)**

**What was Jesus’ attitude toward John? (*Matthew 11:7-15*)**

**What effect did Jesus have on John’s followers? (*John 1:35-42*)**

**What did John mean when he said, “*He must become greater; I must become less*”? (*John 3:30*)**

**J**ohn the Baptist understood his mission—pointing people toward Jesus. He wasn’t distracted by his own popularity or impressed by his own credentials. And he never allowed others to make him into something God didn’t want him to be. John didn’t hold on to what belonged to his Master. His focus was on Jesus. Even when he languished in jail wondering why Jesus was not filling the role everyone expected of the Messiah, he sent his questions to Jesus and continued trusting Him (*Matthew 11:1-6*).

Matthew 14:3-12 and Mark 6:17-29 tell the story of John’s demise. (Charles Spurgeon once joked that John was the first Baptist preacher who lost his head over dancing.) Faithfully and unselfishly pointing people to Jesus does not always lead to happiness and happy endings in real life. But it always brings glory to God and exalts the worthy Lamb of God.

“ ‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin’ ”  
(LUKE 1:34, NIV)?

## Bible Study 37 Mother Mary

BY GARY JENNINGS

Read Luke 1:26-56 and 2:1-40.

What was Gabriel's mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Gabriel was chosen to carry out this special assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you respond to a message like Luke 1:30-33?

What does Mary's answer in Luke 1:38 show about her?

Why was Mary chosen to give birth to the Savior? \_\_\_\_\_

I can see in my mind the day Gabriel announced to Mary that she was going to give birth to the King of Kings, Lord of Lords and her Savior, Jesus Christ. She was chosen from among thousands of women to do the impossible and to experience the improbable. I can also hear her reaction to Gabriel: "You want me to do what? To give birth to a child who is going to be the Savior of the world? To become a mother without Joseph?" No wonder God had an angel deliver this message.

As unusual and life-shattering as Mary's mission was, she was willing to accept it and sacrifice her reputation to give birth to the Son of God. What an opportunity and responsibility to be used of God to become the mother of Jesus! Was she different from all other women? Probably not, except for the fact that she was willing to be obedient to her Lord.

As unusual and life-shattering as Mary's mission was, she was willing to accept it and sacrifice her reputation to give birth to the Son of God.

What are four characteristics you see in Mary?

Luke 1:38 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 1:46-55 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 2:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 2:22-24, 39 \_\_\_\_\_

What traits did she have in common with other biblical characters who accepted God's mission for their lives?

Mary was willing to allow God to use her body as well as her mind and spirit to do His will. We can learn a lot from this teenage girl.

Mary was willing to receive and believe Gabriel's message by faith. *We should be willing to take God at His word.* Mary was willing to risk her reputation to be obedient. *We should be willing to take risks to do what God wants.* Mary was willing to take on this impossible mission even though she might not understand what was happening to her. *We need to live our lives by faith, not by sight.* Mary was willing for every area of her life to be changed as a result of following God's will. *We must never stop following the One who called us and saved us, even if others turn back.*

**Once Mary accepted her mission, God used several events to confirm and encourage her. Briefly describe those:**

Luke 1:39-45 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 1:18-24 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 2:8-19 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 2:25-35 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 2:36-38 \_\_\_\_\_

**S**ome people honor Mary to the point of worshiping her as the Mother of God. Mary is awesome not because she was the mother of the Son of God, but because she accepted God's plan for her life. Jesus explained in Mark 3:31-35 that each of us can be related to Him as mother or brother by doing His Father's will.

Mary was human just like the rest of us. On the other hand, it's amazing to realize that when Mary kissed the face of the newborn Jesus she was kissing the face of God. Mary was holding, embracing, caressing, rocking and changing the diaper of the God Man, Jesus Christ. Wow! The world needs more teenagers who will take the risk and believe God for Who He is—God!

**Do you want God to choose you to complete an awesome mission for Him?**     Yes     No

**What is the most risky or seemingly impossible mission God (or His messenger) is asking you to do for Him now?**

**Will you accept this mission and follow Him?**     Yes     No

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (MATTHEW 1:24, NIV).

## Bible Study 38

# Joseph: The Stepfather

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Matthew 1:18-25, 2:1-23 and Luke 2:1-40.

Why was Joseph considering divorce even before he and Mary were married? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was Jesus' father? \_\_\_\_\_

How do we know? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Matthew list Joseph's lineage? (Matthew 1:1-17) \_\_\_\_\_

Who named Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

**W**e all know what Mary's role was in God's plan to save the world, but what about Joseph's role? Mary's mission and "calling" didn't exactly fit into Joseph's original plans for his life. Starting a marriage as the stepfather of someone else's child was not what Joseph had in mind when he asked Mary to be his life partner. Imagine the strain on their relationship when she tried to explain her pregnancy to him. How could he possibly believe her wild story about an angel and an "assignment" from the Most High God? He would have to see his *own* angel before he could tag along with whatever was ahead in Mary's great (but rather inconvenient and awkward) adventure as mother to the Savior of the world.

And it was an adventure! Joseph's new mission was to be the guardian of the Messiah, and his assignment caused him to make incredible adjustments in his life. He would have to be willing to travel to any place, live in any city, pack up and disappear in the night, or go the long way home to protect God's greatest Gift to the world. His own career and business—even his new family—would have to be put on hold while he and Mary carried out their mission from God. Their marriage became an *on mission* partnership focused on delivering the Savior to their world.

After they were married in Nazareth, how many times did they move? \_\_\_\_\_

Name the places they lived and an approximate length of time for each stay. (Check out Luke 2:4; Matthew 2:7,16; Matthew 2:13,19; Matthew 2:23 and Luke 2:39-42.)

Try to list all the adjustments the family must have made living in Egypt (e.g., language, diet, school, job).

What other children did Mary and Joseph have? (Matthew 13:53-57) \_\_\_\_\_

## Read Luke 2:41-52.

Joseph's unique mission was to be stepfather and mentor to the boy he named Jesus. Joseph had the responsibility of creating and maintaining the physical and educational environment for Jesus throughout his childhood, adolescence and even into young adulthood. He obviously did a great job according to Matthew's book (informed by Jesus) and Luke's book (informed by Mary). Was it "normal" for a Galilean family to walk to Jerusalem every year (Luke 2:41) for the Passover?

They were a young family with several small children—all younger than Jesus was. Mary must have been pregnant nearly every year they traveled. Who taught Jesus so well that He was able to ask such probing intelligent questions in the Temple when He was only 12 years old? Was this family wealthy enough or well-connected enough for Jesus to have a formal rabbinical education, access to teachers or even a copy of the Scriptures, way up in Galilee?

Joseph was a student and practitioner of the Scripture (Luke 2:22,27,39,42). How well would you have studied your Old Testament prophecy after an angel announced your wife was going to be mother to the Messiah? As Jesus did His apprenticeship in the carpenter shop, Joseph was teaching his stepson much more than woodworking.

Apparently Joseph died between Jesus' 12th and 30th birthdays (between Matthew 2 and 3). Imagine all the changes and challenges the family faced. In what ways did Jesus become head of the household? How many mouths were there to feed? Why was Jesus always called the "carpenter's son" and never the "carpenter"? Had He not yet finished with his apprenticeship? Was his leadership role in the family what caused the tension in Mark 3:31-35?

By reading between the lines of the biblical account and considering the very human situations of people like Joseph, Mary, Jesus, and his brothers and sisters, you can learn and apply some of the most practical lessons of Scripture to your own life.

**What can you learn about marriage from Joseph's example?**

**What do you learn from his experience about "stepfathering"?**

**What insight have you gained about parenting your own children?**

**Are you willing to accept any mission from God and make whatever adjustments necessary in your life to fulfill it?**    Yes    No

**Do you want your marriage to be an *on mission* partnership?**    Yes    No

## Bible Study 39 Jesus' Mission

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Mark 1:9-45.

After Jesus' baptism and temptation, He began His public *on mission* ministry. List the various projects He undertook in the first chapter of Mark's account:

Verses 16-20: \_\_\_\_\_ Verses 29-31: \_\_\_\_\_

Verses 21-22: \_\_\_\_\_ Verses 35-39: \_\_\_\_\_

Verses 23-28: \_\_\_\_\_ Verses 40-45: \_\_\_\_\_

What was the usual result of His miracles? (vv. 28,33,37) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jesus warn people He healed not to tell anyone? (vv. 25,34,43-45) \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus' mission was to preach the kingdom of God and call people to repentance from sin (v. 38). His mission was to call out disciples to be trained as fishers of men (v. 17). He came to planet Earth as the Lamb of God who, by His death, became the Way to be reconciled to God.

So, what about all Jesus' miracles of healing, casting out demons, turning water to wine, feeding thousands of people and resurrecting dead people? Those actions caused a lot of attention and made Him extremely popular—for a while. Usually, when Jesus met the physical needs of one individual, soon floods of people overwhelmed Him and His disciples so much that they didn't even have time to eat (Mark

Jesus' mission was to preach the kingdom of God and call people to repentance from sin (v. 38).

3:20). Jesus' concern about the situation was that His healing, feeding and exorcisms were often keeping Him from His real mission (reconciliation). Seventeen times Jesus told those He healed not to tell anybody who had healed them. His popularity finally became such a problem, that, after feeding the 5,000 in John 6, the crowds tried to force Him to become their king (v. 15). But that was not His mission. Jesus refused to meet their physical needs anymore, saying, "*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing*" (John 6:63, NIV).

Then why did Jesus get into "social ministry" in the first place? And, as *on mission* Christians, should we? Those are two important questions. First, examine Jesus' motivation for doing miracles. Mark's account records three reasons:

1. Mark 1:40-41 and 8:2-3: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Mark 2:3-5; 5:34; 9:21-24 and 10:51-52: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Mark 4:38-41; 5:22-24; 7:25-30, 32-36 and 8:22-26: \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus clearly did not help people to gain public visibility, improve His image, gather a crowd or win popular votes or political power. *Should we?* Jesus was all the power of God walking around in a human body. As the God of love who left heaven to die for His creation, it was not easy for Jesus to ignore someone who was personally trusting and begging Him for help—although He understood that fed people get hungry again, cured people get other diseases and resurrected folks eventually die again. Jesus cared. *And so should we.* He never publicized His healing services, counted His “help projects” or set goals to minister to more people next week than last week. *Should we?*

On the other hand, Jesus often used His miracles as object lessons and opportunities to fulfill His real mission. For example, when He changed water to wine, He revealed Himself selectively and personally to His disciples, and they “put their faith in him” (*John 2:11, NIV*). The miracle illustrated His power to not only change dirty wash pots into fountains of fine-grade wedding wine, but also to re-create the hearts of sinful men into living springs and rivers of righteousness. John’s account helps us understand Jesus’ message in His miracles.

**Explain the following:**

John 6:26-58: \_\_\_\_\_

John 9:35-41: \_\_\_\_\_

John 11:25-26: \_\_\_\_\_

**What about us? Jesus clearly expects us to “go about doing good” and to help those in need. List five human needs He expects us to be involved in meeting (*Matthew 25:34-40*).**

\_\_\_\_\_

**T**hese ministries to needy people, however, are not our mission. Our mission is to join Him in His mission. Jesus commissioned His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (*Matthew 28:19-20, NIV*). Paul wrote that our ministry is to deliver the message of reconciliation.

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 and John 17:25-26.**

**State Jesus’ mission in six words or less:** \_\_\_\_\_

“when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch’ ” (LUKE 5:4, NIV).

## Bible Study 40

# Jesus: Gone Fishing

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Luke 5:1-11 and Mark 1:14-20, 29-31.

When and where did Jesus first meet Simon Peter? (*John 1:26-43*) \_\_\_\_\_

When and where did Jesus call Peter to follow Him as His disciple? (*Mark 1:14-17*) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Peter ask Jesus to leave him? (*Luke 5:8*) \_\_\_\_\_

What did Jesus promise He would do for Peter, Andrew, James and John if they became His followers? \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus was fishing for men. He was patiently fishing for men whom He would train to become fishers of other men. We have no record of how long it was between the day Jesus' cousin (John the Baptist) first introduced Him to Andrew and the day Jesus challenged Andrew and his brother to leave everything and follow Him. Mark's Gospel tells us that John had been jailed by that time (*Mark 1:14*).

We can only imagine how many times Jesus might have met with Andrew and Peter and possibly their partners, James and John. He may have gone fishing with them many times out on the Sea of Galilee (a.k.a. Tiberius or Gennesaret) where they probably had to introduce the carpenter to all the basics of fishing. Then came this day when the professional fishermen had fished all night and caught nothing. The exhausted brothers were washing their nets when Jesus asked to use their boat as a floating platform and pulpit. After He finished His sermon to the crowds, Jesus wanted to go fishing. He urged Peter to gather his net, hoist his sails and launch out again into the deep water. Peter humored his new friend, set sail and then threw out his freshly washed net at exactly the place where Jesus suggested. The rest of the story is history.

Jesus really knew how to get a person's attention. (He still does.) These guys had never seen a catch near the size of the one that filled their boats that day! Jesus always knows just what to say or do to speak to people in terms with which they can personally relate. The miracle was all it took to convince Peter of Jesus' Deity—and to make him painfully aware of his own sinfulness in Jesus' presence. Peter wanted to escape, but Jesus had other plans.

When Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Him, He laid out His plan for their lives. ... If they would come—just as they were—and follow Him, He would teach them to “catch” men as powerfully as He had taught them to catch fish.

When Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Him, He laid out His plan for their lives. And He expressed it in terms the fishermen could understand. If they would come—just as they were—and follow Him, He would teach them to “catch” men as powerfully as He had taught them to catch fish.

When these men left everything to follow Jesus, did they have difficulty explaining their decision to their families? James and John left their father, Zebedee, to fish by himself. Peter had a wife and maybe some children. Did Jesus care about their responsibilities at home?

Jesus understood all about family responsibilities. He had been head of the household for His mother and several brothers and sisters since Joseph, His stepfather, died. Jesus took responsibility for His mother until the day He died, when He assigned that responsibility to His best friend, John (*John 19:25-27*). Perhaps He was helping Peter’s relatives to understand and accept Peter’s calling when He personally healed his mother-in-law.

The four fishermen followed Jesus for three years. They each experienced their share of victories—and defeats. But Jesus never gave up on them as He taught them to fish for men. On the night before Jesus died, Peter failed miserably—so badly, in fact, he feared he was no longer one of Jesus’ disciples. But Jesus knew all about Peter’s fears, doubts and failures, and He was able to completely restore him and reaffirm his faith and his calling. Read the message Jesus sent to Peter in Mark 16:6-7.

**Where did Jesus tell Peter to meet Him?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Briefly recount what happened to Peter there. (*John 21:1-22*)**

**What was Jesus’ instruction to Peter at that time? (*v. 22*)** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**fter three years, the fishing lessons were over. It was time for Peter and the others to launch out into deep water and begin to catch men. They were ready. Only a few weeks later, Peter became the powerful preacher of Pentecost. Then, at Cornelius’ house, he was really deep-sea fishing as he opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Be careful to learn from Jesus’ example as the Master fisher of men. Continue to follow Him and He will train you to fulfill your commission to go and make disciples.

# Bible Study 41 Come and See

BY ALAN HUESING

Read John 1:35-42; Matthew 9:9-13; John 1:43-51 and 4:4-42.

Briefly tell how each of the following people first met Jesus:

Andrew (*John 1:35-42*) \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew (*Matthew 9:9-13*) \_\_\_\_\_

Philip (*John 1:43-51*) \_\_\_\_\_

Samaritan woman (*John 4:4-42*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the first thing each of them did once they were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah? \_\_\_\_\_

What did the Samaritan woman say to her neighbors about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did her neighbors decide to believe in Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

These four stories are incredibly similar in what they show about new believers. John the Baptist pointed out and introduced Jesus as the “Lamb of God” to two of his disciples. The two of them began following Jesus—mainly out of curiosity. After spending the day with Him, Andrew was convinced Jesus was the Messiah. The first thing Andrew did was to go find his brother and take him to Jesus. He wanted Peter to see and experience Jesus, too.

Jesus selected Matthew and challenged him to be His follower. Matthew accepted Jesus’ invitation. By the next verse Matthew had assembled many of his friends and colleagues to introduce them to Jesus and His disciples. Similarly, when Jesus found Philip and invited him to become a follower, Philip immediately found Nathanael and took him to Jesus.

And the woman at the well outside Sychar had the same first reaction. Once she was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, she left her water pot at the well and went immediately to tell her neighbors about Him.

It’s natural for new believers to tell their brothers, friends, co-workers and neighbors about their discovery of new life in Christ. It’s as natural as calling a friend to tell him you met your favorite athlete signing autographs at the mall. No one had to tell or encourage these new Christians to go out and share their faith in Christ. They certainly had no training in witnessing. They simply couldn’t contain or conceal their excitement about meeting and knowing Jesus.

No one had to tell or encourage these new Christians to go out and share their faith in Christ. ... They simply couldn’t contain or conceal their excitement about meeting and knowing Jesus.

“And he brought him to Jesus” (John 1:42, NIV).

What indicated that the Samaritan woman was not absolutely sure about who Jesus was? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think Matthew was more "at home" with the tax collectors and "sinners" or with Jesus' disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

What was similar about the ways Andrew told Peter and Philip told Nathanael about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What indicated that Philip didn't really know much about Jesus when he invited Nathanael to come meet Him? (*John 1:45*) \_\_\_\_\_

What did Philip say when he was unable to answer all of Nathanael's questions about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

**W**e don't have to have all the answers before we begin introducing our friends, neighbors and relatives to Jesus. Like the woman who met Jesus at the city well, we can always tell people what He has done in our lives. And when people doubt that He's real or when they have questions we can't answer, like Philip, we can always say, "Come and see for yourself." And when we take people to "see for themselves," we must not settle for introducing them to our church, our Christian friends, our Christian music or activities. We must lead them to the Person of Jesus and help them know Him.

As we become mature Christians, we must never lose our enthusiasm for introducing people to Christ. To enthusiasm we must add experience, skill and understanding. Philip tried to use the Law of Moses to explain who Jesus was even before he understood that Jesus was the Son of God. As he grew in his understanding and mission skills, he became ready and able to use any part of the Scriptures to lead someone to Christ. (Read about Philip's witness to an Ethiopian in Acts 8.) And Philip became the great missionary to Samaria, baptizing the first believers there.

Matthew never lost his desire to share Jesus with people, either. He wrote his biography of Jesus to help Jews everywhere know Him as their Messiah. His book still helps people worldwide to meet and know Him.

How and with whom did you share Jesus immediately after you first believed in Him? \_\_\_\_\_

How and to whom have you introduced Him this week? \_\_\_\_\_

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples” (MATTHEW 9:10, NIV).

## Bible Study 42 Matthew’s Party

BY TIERCE GREEN

Read Matthew 9:9-13.

Why do you suppose Jesus chose Matthew (Levi) to be an apostle? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of people came to Matthew’s party? \_\_\_\_\_

Were they the kind of people who would be likely to attend a religious event?  Yes  No

Who hosted this party? (Luke 5:27-32) \_\_\_\_\_

When did he throw the party? \_\_\_\_\_

Where was the party? \_\_\_\_\_

If we are not careful, we can become very comfortable in our isolated fellowship groups—protected from any contact with those who are lost—where we worship our worship and serve ourselves.

Matthew (a.k.a., Levi) had connections. He used the network he had developed as a tax collector to provide an opportunity for his friends to have a personal encounter with Jesus. The event was not at the synagogue or even a non-threatening place like a hillside or town square—the party was at his house. People were no doubt curious why a man of his position and profession would choose to follow Jesus. The party he threw was probably the hottest ticket in town that evening! But it was surrounded by controversy.

The tax system under the Roman government was devised so taxes could be collected as efficiently and as cheaply as possible. A man bought the right to collect taxes within a particular district and was responsible to the Roman government for an agreed salary. He was allowed to keep anything he raised above that amount as commission. People did not really know how much they ought to pay in taxes nor did they have any right of appeal against the tax collector. Many tax collectors became wealthy men—Zacchaeus in Luke 19—through illegal extortion. They were notoriously dishonest and universally hated.

Why did so many people come to Matthew’s party? \_\_\_\_\_

What were the advantages of having the party at his house? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Matthew lose by following Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What did he gain by following Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

In verse 11, the Pharisees asked the disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” By Jewish law a tax collector was barred from the synagogue and included with things considered to be

unclean. “Robbers, murderers and tax collectors” were classed together. The Pharisees were careful to separate themselves from such detestable “things.” They presumed themselves to be righteous by their rituals and sacrifices, but legalism had made them blind. Legalism keeps you from seeing people—all you can see are rules. When the rules become more important than people, we isolate ourselves from those who need contact with us the most—those who need the Savior.

In response to the Pharisees’ complaint, Jesus gave them an assignment: *“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’”(Matthew 9:13, NIV).* (If you would like to research this assignment, some good places to start are Psalm 51:16-17, Isaiah 1:11-17 and Micah 6:6-8.) If we are not careful, we can become very comfortable in our isolated fellowship groups—protected from any contact with those who are lost—where we worship our worship and serve ourselves.

**What concerns do you have about being a friend to those who are lost?**

**How did throwing a party at his house give Matthew a certain amount of control?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some things you can do with your lost friends that you can control?**

**If your Christian friends complained about your hanging out with the “wrong kind of people,” how would you respond?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can you get them to partner with you in your mission to be friends with the lost?**

**W**hen Jesus called Matthew, He called a man who was hated by all men. Jesus saw in this man not only what he was but also what he could be. Matthew’s trade had taught him to use a pen. This man who had been barred from the synagogue would use that pen to compose one of the most important books the world has ever read.

The compassion Jesus showed to Matthew must have helped him show compassion to his friends. He didn’t go into hiding. Matthew threw his party the same day he decided to follow Jesus. Engaging with God does not mean we disengage completely from the world. There are many friendships that can be leveraged as a platform to present the gospel. Do you have enough non-Christian friends to be called (like Jesus) a “friend of sinners”? Can you think of someone who needs a “party”?

**Who needs to be added to your guest list?** \_\_\_\_\_

# A Lean, Mean Missionary Machine!

BY TIERCE GREEN

Read Matthew 10; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-17 and 22:35.

In what special way did Jesus equip His disciples for this mission? (*Matthew 10:1*) \_\_\_\_\_

What specific group were they to “target”? (*Matthew 10:5-6*) \_\_\_\_\_

What was their specific message? (*Matthew 10:7*) \_\_\_\_\_

List the twelve men Jesus called as apostles and sent on this mission. Include any information about them from Matthew 10:2-4.

**I**n Matthew 9:37, Jesus told His disciples to pray that God would send more workers into the mission fields. They must have prayed. In the first few verses of Matthew 10, Jesus selected and sent the twelve into the fields. Praying passionately for people who don't know Christ personally can radically alter the lives of those who pray. When we pray for God to send out workers, He is likely to respond by sending us! Don't be afraid. When He calls us and sends us, He will also prepare us.

Jesus was very specific about where they were *not* to go—to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. We can be certain that this was not a permanent command. We see Jesus talking graciously to a Samaritan woman while traveling through Sychar in John 4. The hero in one of His stories is a Samaritan in Luke 10. He heals the daughter of a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 and gives His final commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

The target group of this mission trip was the Jews—the lost sheep of Israel. The Jews have a very special place in God's scheme of things. They had to be given the first offer of the gospel. It is true that they rejected it, but God designed history for them to have the first opportunity to accept it.

How did Jesus group the twelve for this mission? (*Mark 6:7*) \_\_\_\_\_

What does this unusual mixture of men from diverse backgrounds, working together on this mission, teach us about our own mission partnerships? \_\_\_\_\_

If Matthew 10:2-4 is a probable grouping of the twelve, why do you think Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot (a radical Jewish nationalist—an extremist) were not “roommates” on this mission trip?

The twelve were probably not equipped to preach to the Gentiles. Why not? \_\_\_\_\_

“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ ”  
(MATTHEW 10:7, NIV).

## Why is it important to focus our mission and limit our objectives?

**T**he apostles were sent on a mission of words and deeds. Their message was that the kingdom of heaven was near. Of all the people who ever lived, Jesus was, and is, the only person who ever perfectly did—obeyed and fulfilled—God’s will. In Him, the kingdom of heaven had come. To the Jews who had dreamed of the kingdom and longed for the kingdom, these messengers were saying, “Here in the life of Jesus *is* the kingdom! Look at Him and see what being in the kingdom means!”

The mission of the twelve was not confined to words. They were equipped by Jesus to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, to cast out demons. Imagine what it must have been like for them to experience the power of God flowing so freely through them! This strategy of preaching with power was designed to capture the attention of the Jews who had lost sight of God’s salvation. The twelve were a complete package—a lean, mean missionary machine—with a message of hope and a ministry of helps.

**Why is the combination of words and deeds so important? (James 2:14-17)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are the spiritual parallels to healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons?**

**How can we help people who are confused about the kingdom of heaven? What should be the focal point of our message?**

**Jesus prepared the twelve for a negative reaction to their message. From which groups of people did He expect this persecution to come? (Matthew 10:17-36)** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n Luke 10:1-20 Jesus sends 72 missionaries to the towns and villages He would visit later. He gives many of the same instructions He gave in the first mission trip. Verses 17-20 record their excitement, particularly about how the demons submitted to them. While it would be hard not to be excited about that, Jesus reminded them of the thing that should be most exciting to them.

**What is it? (v. 20)** \_\_\_\_\_

At every point in our mission, we must remember—it is all about Jesus. The details of what we did, what we sacrificed for the mission, even the results of the harvest should all fade in the light of Jesus (*Galatians 6:14*). The kingdom of heaven is near! Do you want to see it? Look at Him!

**Where is He sending you today?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you need to take with you or leave behind?** \_\_\_\_\_

At every point in our mission, we must remember—it is all about Jesus. The details of what we did, what we sacrificed for the mission, even the results of the harvest should all fade in the light of Jesus (*Galatians 6:14*).

## Bible Study 44

# Little Man, Big Heart

BY TIERCE GREEN

Read Luke 19:1-10.

Where did Zacchaeus live? \_\_\_\_\_

What was his occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

Was he honest in his business?  Yes  No

What was the practical reason and the motivation behind him climbing a tree? \_\_\_\_\_

How did the townspeople feel about Zacchaeus and why? \_\_\_\_\_

Zacchaeus was influential and wealthy but apparently one of the most disliked Jews in Jericho. He had learned to work the system as a tax collector, making his money unfairly, and everybody knew it. The fine material used to construct his robes, the jewelry he wore, the “designer sandals” on his feet—all irritants to those who had been cheated by him. Even for the people who had not been fleeced by this vertically challenged weasel, how could they not be jealous of a rich businessman whose house was so much nicer than theirs! It was much easier to just call him a “sinner” and disassociate themselves from him.

The word traveled quickly that Jesus was coming to Jericho, and Zacchaeus was determined to see Him. Being a short man, he knew the crowd around Jesus would eliminate his chances of seeing Him. He needed a vantage point—someplace high. As always, he had a plan to sidestep the system. Running ahead of the crowd, he climbed a tree and waited. (A sycamore tree has large, low-hanging branches.) Zacchaeus was so anxious to see Jesus. What a shock (for everybody) when he realized that Jesus was anxious to see him!

Running through town and climbing a tree—what does this say about Zacchaeus? \_\_\_\_\_

It is possible that no one would have noticed Zacchaeus if he stayed still and quiet in his tree. But Jesus knew he was there.

How did Jesus address him? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you suppose Jesus knew his name? \_\_\_\_\_

Being aware of his name and location (in the tree), what does this say about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think Jesus chose not to preach to Zacchaeus while he was in the tree? \_\_\_\_\_

Salvation is an inside job. First Jesus was welcomed into the home of Zacchaeus, then He was welcomed into his life. Only God can change the human heart.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”  
(LUKE 19:10, NIV).

In targeting those who are lost, it is important to not “draw a target” around their head and fire away like a holy hit man!

What do you suppose Zacchaeus was thinking at this point? \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n targeting those who are lost, it is important to not “draw a target” around their head and fire away like a holy hit man! In one single sentence, Jesus put Zacchaeus at ease (and the crowd on edge) by inviting Himself to dinner. The invitation was made so quickly that Zacchaeus didn’t have time to think about it. He shimmied down the tree and welcomed Jesus gladly into his home.

What interesting conversations there must have been around the dinner tables that evening in Jericho. Vicious words disguised as righteous indignation fed the hypocritical lifestyles of some. The bitter aftertaste of self-righteousness lingered in the mouths of many. Others were quietly content that they did not associate with “sinners” like the tax collector. But in the home of Zacchaeus there was talk of grace and peace. And in the homes of others—perhaps not ostracized to the extent of the tax collector but alienated because they didn’t quite measure up—there was hope that salvation could come to their house, too!

Why did Jesus need to use the “relationship approach” with Zacchaeus? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Jesus speaking quickly to Zacchaeus facilitate His mission? \_\_\_\_\_

Why would Zacchaeus so readily accept Jesus’ invitation? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was Jesus not concerned about what the crowd might think of His invitation? \_\_\_\_\_

**A**t dinner, Zacchaeus is ready to give half of his possessions to the poor and he is willing to quadruple the return on any amount he had cheated people. Salvation is an inside job. First Jesus was welcomed into the home of Zacchaeus, then He was welcomed into his life. Only God can change the human heart. When the heart changes, the life will follow.

Jesus proclaimed that Zacchaeus, too, was a son of Abraham because salvation had come to his house. Technically—by physical birth—Zacchaeus was already a son of Abraham. However, because of his occupation as a tax collector, he was considered to be a heathen. The statement Jesus made was significant. It is by supernatural birth that Zacchaeus—or anyone, for that matter—is a son of Abraham. Salvation is offered to everyone!

Who is the most disliked person you know? \_\_\_\_\_

Instead of keeping a safe distance, what will be your version of Jesus’ strategy? \_\_\_\_\_

“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst” (JOHN 4:14, NIV).

## Bible Study 45 Water for the World

BY TIERCE GREEN

Read John 4:1-42.

Where was Sychar located? \_\_\_\_\_

What “historical site” was this? \_\_\_\_\_

Jewish time was measured from sunrise (about 6 a.m.) to sunset (about 6:00 p.m.) About what time was Jesus at this well? \_\_\_\_\_

Where were the disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

How did the Jews feel about Samaritans? \_\_\_\_\_

The typical Jewish traveler would have deliberately avoided Samaria—a place of half-breed descendants of the former tribes of Israel whose racial purity had been corrupted by foreign settlers (*2 Kings 17:24*). It had become a despised ghetto with a confusing, diluted religion, but Jesus knew that His disciples needed to learn how to witness not only in Jerusalem and in Judea but also in Samaria as well. So, He took the direct route that would lead them through Samaria.

It was about the middle of the day and Jesus was tired from His journey. He sat down by the well. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, in one simple request—“*Will you give me a drink?*”—Jesus crossed cultural, racial and gender barriers. (First of all, the rabbis frowned on a man talking to a woman in public—even his own wife! Secondly, it wasn’t that Jews did not have any contact at all with Samaritans, but they certainly did not share the same food vessels with them for fear of ritual contamination.)

The Samaritan woman was taken by surprise. She was astonished by the proposal of Jesus because Jews did not drink from a cup that Samaritan lips had touched, and Jesus had no cup of His own. At this point, she did not know that Jesus was looking to draw something a lot deeper than water.

Jesus immediately had this woman’s attention. How did He do it? \_\_\_\_\_

How many husbands had this woman had? In what kind of relationship was she currently involved? \_\_\_\_\_

How could so many failed relationships with men have compounded the problem for Jesus in communicating with her? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jesus change the subject so quickly from physical water to living water? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jesus bring up the subject of her husbands? (*John 4:19*) \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus connected with the woman and won her trust. Only then did He expose her sin and her need. In John 4:19-20, she may have been expressing her desire to seek forgiveness through worship by revealing her confusion over the debate about where to do it—on this mountain or in Jerusalem. A woman of questionable background like herself must have felt helpless and frustrated thinking about her need to worship and then—in the face of so much religious rhetoric—just giving up, consumed by her past and imprisoned by her culture.

The idea of worshiping in spirit and truth must have tasted like cool, living water to her. The thought of connecting with God anywhere, anytime, must have rushed through her heart and mind like a river. She had been anticipating the coming of Messiah, certain that He would set the record straight and explain everything. The words Jesus said to her, *“I who speak to you am he,”* washed over her like an ocean, cleansing her past and bringing hope for her future. What a difference living water makes!

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, in one simple request—*“Will you give me a drink?”*—Jesus crossed cultural, racial and gender barriers.

**Why is it possible to worship God anywhere and at anytime? (John 4:21-24)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth?**

**After this woman’s background was exposed, how was Jesus still able to connect with her?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When the disciples returned, what did they do (or not do) that showed they were learning about ministry from Jesus? (John 4:27)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What “food” was Jesus referring to in John 4:32?** \_\_\_\_\_

Although the disciples had spent an hour or more shopping in Sychar, they had not impacted the town with the gospel. The woman at the well was way ahead of them. An unlikely new believer, she left her bucket at the well and hurried back to Sychar as a self-appointed missionary to tell everyone that the Messiah was at Jacob’s well. Many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus because of her testimony. No one told her to do this. We don’t have a record of a missionary conference she attended. You just can’t stop *living* water from flowing.

**Who do you know in need of living water?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What things do you need to look past in order to offer it to them?** \_\_\_\_\_

“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (MARK 5:19, NIV).

## Bible Study 46

# God Loves Freaky People, Too

BY TIERCE GREEN

Read Mark 5:1-20.

Who came to meet Jesus when He got out of the boat? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did he live? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe this man's appearance and his strength. (Mark 5:3-5; Luke 8:27-29)

How did this man address Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What was his name? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did he have this name? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was speaking—the man or the evil spirit(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

The man who had been demon-possessed became a constant reminder of the power of God to change lives.

This is a vivid and eerie story. At the end of Mark 4, when Jesus and His disciples set sail, it was evening. (This particular part of the Lake of Galilee was probably about five miles across.) Their boat was nearly swamped by a furious squall—even the macho fishermen were terrified! Then Jesus calmed the storm, leaving the disciples awestruck and marveling, “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him*” (Mark 4:41, NIV). When they reached land, out of the shadows of the night came a demon-possessed man who answered their question when he shouted at the top of his voice, “*What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*” (Mark 5:7, NIV).

Jesus had taken His disciples to meet the most unlikely candidate for the kingdom of God. Restraining orders were useless against him—the demons had given him superhuman strength. He ripped apart chains for breakfast and broke leg irons for lunch! He was a naked raving maniac, into self-mutilation, who lived in the cemetery. This is not the kind of person most churches were hoping to contact. It was best just to avoid him and leave him to himself—maybe he would just disappear. But Jesus knew who he was and where he lived. He came not to restrain him but to set him free.

What had been the town's “solution” in dealing with this man? \_\_\_\_\_

Of what do you think his cries and self-mutilations were symptoms? \_\_\_\_\_

Could the people have not been aware of his predicament? (Mark 5:5) \_\_\_\_\_

Why is it so easy to ignore a person like this? \_\_\_\_\_

**The demons were fully aware of the identity of Jesus. What does this tell you about people who believe in God and those who are fully aware of who Jesus is? (James 2:19)** \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus was completely aware of this man's name, as well as the names of the demons inside him. When Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" it was a teaching opportunity for those standing by—especially His disciples. They needed to know what they were up against, now and in the future. It was a wake-up call to prepare for spiritual battle—time to put on the full armor of God (*Ephesians 5:10-18*). The enemy was not this maniac—he was one of the victims. The enemy was identified and dismissed with authority.

Don't feel sorry for the 2,000 pigs! By law they were unclean creatures, unfit for consumption. Commanding the demons to leave this man and enter the pigs—driving them to their death—was a vivid visual aid of what could have happened to the man had he been left alone. The mutilations and the screams might have been a foretaste of a tragic finale—his suicide. Of course, the people who owned the pigs were less than pleased. At first, everyone was afraid and were forced to acknowledge the power of Christ. Then they decided it would just be best for Him to leave. But the man who had been demon-possessed became a constant reminder of the power of God to change lives.

**What was clearly the priority of Jesus—the pigs or the person?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why do you think the people begged Jesus to leave?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did the man who had been demon-possessed want to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**To what particular mission field did Jesus assign him?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did he fulfill and exceed his mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why is it so important for us to pray for power in our mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

Protecting ourselves and others from dangerous individuals is certainly a concern, especially in light of the horrible acts of violence in recent years. The demon-possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes was a monster—a freak—to many. It is only natural that most people would think more about protecting themselves than helping him. But we must not project our hatred for sin onto the person. God doesn't.

Recently, in many schools in America, several "freaks" have stepped out of their personal darkness to wound or kill their classmates and teachers. When a lifestyle culminates in assault, murder and suicide, the opportunity for Christians to make a difference in these lives has already passed. What if some *on mission* Christians had heard the cries of these students long before their rampages and had asked, as Jesus asked the demon-possessed man, "What is your name?" (*Mark 5:9*).

**Who is the least likely person you know to hear and accept God's message and receive new life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is God able to change him/her?**     Yes     No

It was best just to avoid (the demon-possessed man) and leave him to himself. ... But Jesus knew who he was and where he lived. He came not to restrain him but to set him free.

“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (LUKE 7:47, NIV).

## Bible Study 47

# Love Forgives, Forgiveness Loves

BY RICH RATTS

Read Luke 7:36-50.

Who are the main characters in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

Where does the story take place? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the name of the homeowner? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the name of the woman? \_\_\_\_\_

Isn't it interesting that in this story a lady gets saved and her name is not even mentioned? It would be easy to focus on Simon as you read through the story. After all, the woman was a "sinner." Her sin was well known by others in the city. Consider what we can learn from Jesus' words and from His example in Luke 7:36-50.

First of all, Jesus doesn't treat anyone differently due to wealth, status or social standing. Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, He is a friend to "sinners." Over and over again, the Pharisees and religious leaders just didn't get it.

Secondly, Jesus never misses an opportunity to teach a lesson while He is in the midst of changing someone's life. In this story, Jesus proves His point by sharing a parable and asking a question.

Finally, Jesus once again makes sure that He keeps the main thing the main thing. After all, helping people have their sins forgiven and begin a relationship with God is the most important thing in the whole world.

**What examples can you find in this passage that illustrate Jesus acting in the following roles?**

Friend of sinners: \_\_\_\_\_

Master teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

On mission Savior: \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the result of Jesus' encounter with the woman? (v. 50)** \_\_\_\_\_

**According to verse 48, what must happen for someone to be saved?** \_\_\_\_\_

Many times in my life I have been guilty of making false assumptions or wrong judgments pertaining to the sins of others. In this story, the focus is initially on Simon. However, the focus quickly changes as Jesus takes an opportunity to respond to a lady who is seeking something that only God can provide—forgiveness. The point is simply that no one is beyond the ability to be forgiven by God. It is not for us to decide who can be saved and who cannot. Any person who comes to God seeking forgiveness can be saved. Our mission is to help people understand the truth of the gospel message and the opportunity they have to know Jesus personally.

It is not for us to decide who can be saved and who cannot. Any person who comes to God seeking forgiveness can be saved.

Think of people in and around your life who are thought of as “sinners.” Write their names down.

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What can you do, in addition to prayer, to help them come to know Jesus personally?

**I**n Luke 7, Jesus encounters the woman while He’s eating dinner. Jesus is constantly *on mission* whether He is preaching on a hillside, healing people in the crowd, getting a drink of water at a well, or eating dinner at a friend’s house.

Think about some activities that you do with people on a regular basis. List some of those activities.

Now think about how you might be able to use the everyday, normal events in your life to share with others the good news of God’s forgiveness. Write down your thoughts.

What about Simon? Although he was a very religious man, he was a sinner in need of a Savior. What effort did Jesus make to change Simon’s life? \_\_\_\_\_

Why wasn’t Simon forgiven of his sin at this encounter with Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Has God forgiven you of your sin?    Yes    No

How can you best show your love and appreciation for His forgiveness in your life?

**T**hank God now for His love and forgiveness shown to you. Ask Him to strengthen you and help you to love Him and show others His forgiveness. Also, ask Him to help you use the everyday happenings in your life to introduce others to Him.

Jesus is constantly on mission whether He is preaching on a hillside, healing people in the crowd, getting a drink of water at a well, or eating dinner at a friend’s house.

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God’ ” (MARK 10:27, NIV).

## Bible Study 48

# Share the Truth—No Matter What

BY RICH RATTS

Read Mark 10:17-27 and Matthew 19:16-26.

Do you think there is anything wrong with having lots of “things”? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

In the story, what do you think was the rich young man’s problem? \_\_\_\_\_

Does Jesus’ response surprise you at all? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

**T**his is one of the most famous encounters in the Gospels between Jesus and another person. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the story in their accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry. In this study we will focus on how Jesus handled this encounter with the rich young man. Jesus, as always, is the model for us to follow today.

Notice in this story that the man approached Jesus and asked, “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life*” (Mark 10:17, NIV)? Jesus responded to the man. He “saw through” the man’s words and questions to his thoughts and misunderstanding of life and God and Scripture.

How did Jesus respond to the word “good”? \_\_\_\_\_

How did He respond to the word “do”? \_\_\_\_\_

Notice that Jesus did not respond with some “canned” or prepared gospel presentation. Can you find any two places in the Bible where Jesus gave the same message to lost people? \_\_\_\_\_

**Briefly, summarize His response to these people who needed salvation:**

John 3:2-3 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 5:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 23:42-43 \_\_\_\_\_

John 18:33-37 \_\_\_\_\_

When Jesus responded to the rich young man, why didn’t He use words like “faith,” “believe” and “trust”? \_\_\_\_\_

The one common message that Jesus conveyed is that salvation is all about “relationship” to Him. His challenge and invitation, in whatever form, is always ultimately to “follow Him.”

The man responded by leaving—a very sad man. No life-changing event occurred in spite of his encounter with Jesus.

Sometimes we want someone to believe in Jesus so badly that we may be tempted to change the message to make it more appealing. Jesus never compromised the truth of the gospel.

**When the young man began to walk away, why didn't Jesus pursue him and possibly change the demand that He gave the young man?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Does it surprise you that this young man did not get saved? Why or why not?** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n this story Jesus did something that we must often do. Jesus talked with someone who didn't completely receive His message. However, the man's response did not cause Jesus to change the message. Sometimes we want someone to believe in Jesus so badly that we may be tempted to change the message to make it more appealing. Jesus never compromised the truth of the gospel.

There are also times in our lives when we know that we need to say something or confront someone, but we are afraid to do so because we are concerned about the potential response. The truth is the truth, and we need to live and speak it regardless of what the response of others may be.

**Can you think of a time that you compromised the truth because you were worried about what your friends might think of you? Describe the situation.** \_\_\_\_\_

**How could you have handled the situation more effectively?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you normally do when someone doesn't accept the message of Jesus' love and forgiveness?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What should you do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**t is always sad when someone does not respond positively to the gospel message. However, our responsibility is to share the truth faithfully. It is up to each person how he or she responds to the truth. Some will receive the truth; some will reject it. You and I have to live and share the truth for others to have the opportunity to receive or reject it.

**Do you know someone who is wealthy by the world's standards but is poor in terms of a lack of relationship with Jesus Christ? Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can you share the truth with this person?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How will you respond if he or she rejects the message?** \_\_\_\_\_

Ask God to give you boldness to speak the truth even when you are concerned about a potential negative response. Remember that the results are up to God. Be faithful to share the truth today.

“Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you ...” (LUKE 15:29, NIV).

## Bible Study 49 The Other Brother

BY RICH RATTS

Read Luke 15:11-32.

From reading this story, what do you notice about the personalities of the two brothers?

Which of these two boys are you more like, the older or the younger one? How? \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways is this a “dysfunctional” family? \_\_\_\_\_

Most of the time when people study this passage of Scripture, they focus on the younger son. At other times there is an emphasis placed on the father and his love and forgiveness. Certainly the parable of the lost son can be applied to our lives in many different ways. However, in this study we will focus on the older of the two brothers.

Look over the story again. Let’s examine things from the older brother’s perspective. Notice how the oldest son had served his father faithfully all while his younger brother was wasting his life and his father’s money. Consider how he had worked hard every day to build up his father’s estate. He had been an obedient and honorable son to his father. He had built the farm and fortune the old-fashioned way—he *earned* it! To the casual onlooker, the older brother would appear to be the “good guy” in the story.

What caused the older brother to be upset when his younger brother came home?

How would you feel if you were in the older son’s shoes? \_\_\_\_\_

What can you learn about the older brother from studying the conversation he had with his father? \_\_\_\_\_

This story parallels the experiences of many youth groups and many churches. Perhaps you know someone who has gone off and wasted a great deal of time, talent and treasures living life like he wanted—selfishly. What happens when that person returns to fellowship with the Lord and with his brothers and sisters in Christ? Unfortunately, sometimes we respond like the older brother in this story. Not only are we unhappy that this one who was lost has been found, but also we go to the Father and complain because he or she is getting something that we think we deserve.

In the story, what four things did the younger brother receive when he arrived home? (vv. 22-23) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the father do the right thing? Why or why not?

What does the older son reveal about himself, his motivation, his relationship with his father and brother, and his values by his tirade out on the back porch with his father? (vv. 28-30)

What was the father thinking when his oldest son complained instead of rejoicing when his younger brother came home?

The father reminded his older son of two things that were his. What were they? (v. 31) \_\_\_\_\_

**R**ead verse 31 again. The father made a very special promise to his older son. He declared that all of his possessions belonged to his faithful son. God has said the same thing to us. As His children, we are heirs of His kingdom! Everything that belongs to God has been freely offered to us.

What are you doing with what you have been given?

What can cause you to resent other Christians? \_\_\_\_\_

As  
His children,  
we are heirs of His  
kingdom! Everything  
that belongs to God  
has been freely  
offered to  
us.

**E**xamine your attitude toward your fellow believers. Are there any Christian brothers or sisters that you resent? Do you feel that some receive what they do not deserve? Any barrier between you and a brother is also a barrier between you and the Father. Reconciliation with the Father demands reconciliation with our brothers. (See Matthew 5:23-24.)

Think of all that the Father has done for you. "He didn't kill a fattened calf and have a celebration for me," you say. No, He hasn't. But what He did is even more amazing! He sent His only Son to Calvary to give His life for you so that you could join an eternal celebration in heaven someday.

Is that something to be thankful for?

# Bible Study 50 Sowing Seeds

BY RICH RATTS

Read Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, 26-29 and Luke 8:4-15.

Describe the four different kinds of soil referred to in this parable.

List the responsibilities of the sower.

What was Jesus teaching us about spreading the gospel?

**I**t's interesting that Jesus didn't discuss any possibilities of how the sower could enhance the yield of his crop. Notice that the four kinds of soil differed in only one way. The same seed was used in each by the same farmer using the same method. The only difference was in the preparation of the soil.

What does that imply about spreading the gospel effectively?

Make a simple list of the things you would do if you were planting and growing a garden.

How many of the things that you listed occur *before* you plant the seed? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of the things that you listed occur *after* you plant the seed? \_\_\_\_\_

**S**ome of my neighbors have beautiful lawns and gardens. They spend a tremendous amount of time working in their yards. They weed, they feed, they weed some more, and then they feed some more. Not me. I mow, and then let her grow!

So, what's the difference between my yard and theirs? Well, I mostly grow a crop of weeds and wild grass, while their yards look like snapshots out of a *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine. The Bible says that you reap what you sow. In other words, what you get out of something is often determined by what you put into it.

“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop”  
(MATTHEW 13:8, NIV).

Certainly sowing the seeds of the gospel is more important than working in any garden or lawn. Growing new believers is infinitely more critical than growing a tulip. Isn't it awesome that God allows you and me the privilege of working with Him in His fields?

**Name some specific people or groups of people in your mission fields.**

**What are some of the stones, weeds, thorns and hard ground in their lives that need to be broken or removed?**

**What are three things that you can do to better prepare the "fields" for the seeds of the gospel?**

**List five different ways that you can plant "seed" in the "soil" of your fields.**

**What will you do to nurture the seed once you have scattered it?**

**What does Mark 4:26-29 tell us about our efforts and abilities as farmers in God's garden?**

Jesus tells us that when we hear and understand His Word our lives will produce a crop. In fact, we will yield 30, 60 or 100 times what is sown.

**G**od's Word is full of precious promises. One of my favorites is found in this parable. Jesus tells us that when we hear and understand His Word our lives will produce a crop. In fact, we will yield 30, 60 or 100 times what is sown. That's pretty good production!

Spend time praying about your spiritual gardening. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see the fields He has placed right in front of you. Ask Him to strengthen you and guide you through the process of preparing the soil and nurturing the seedlings for His kingdom.

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life” (JOHN 6:27, NIV).

## Bible Study 51 More Food!

BY RICH RATTS

Read John 6:1-15, 22-71.

Make a list of the different characters involved in this story. \_\_\_\_\_

Which one on your list stands out to you? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

What to you is the most remarkable fact or concept presented in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

**Y**ou could call the feeding of the multitudes Jesus’ most popular miracle. Every single Gospel writer included this miracle in his biography of Jesus. You can find similar stories in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44 and Luke 9:10-17. It’s possible to get so caught up in the miraculous feeding of the multitude that we miss the real message in Jesus’ miracle. The people He fed certainly missed the point.

How would this miracle have been different if Jesus had performed it alone (without anyone’s help)? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Jesus utilize those around Him to partner with Him in accomplishing this miracle? \_\_\_\_\_

**I** don’t know about you, but it is incredible to me that God actually gives His people (including me) opportunities to partner with Him to do miraculous things. In this story, a little boy had five small barley loaves and two fish. When he gave what he had to Jesus, Jesus did miraculous things with it.

What do you have in your hand that could become great if you gave it all to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What needs to happen for you to surrender to Jesus all that you have?

How did Jesus’ disciples partner with Him to feed the crowd?

Mark 6:38 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 6:39-40 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 6:41 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 6:43 \_\_\_\_\_

What are some ways that you can partner with God this week to do miraculous things? \_\_\_\_\_

**T**he main point of this story is that physical food can satisfy for a while, but Jesus is the Bread of Life and those who partake of Him will be fed for all of eternity. The day after Jesus fed the crowd, they came looking for Him. They wanted more groceries!

**What did Jesus tell them they should do? (vv. 28-29)** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**hese people had a hard time understanding what Jesus had to say. They knew what they wanted from Him (more free fishburgers). But Jesus' mission was not to feed all the hungry people or to make our lives more comfortable. He came to redeem us and give us access to a relationship with God as His children and friends. Reread verses 43 through 52.

**What did Jesus mean by what He said in verse 51?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why did the Jews have a hard time understanding this statement?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why do people today have a hard time placing their faith and trust in Jesus?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does verse 47 mean to you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What three friends, family members, schoolteachers or neighbors need to digest this Bread of Life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What will you do to introduce them to the One who can feed them for all eternity?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rank the following by how important you think they are (1 being most important; 4 being least important):**

- feeding thousands of people from one person's meal
- leading a person to faith and trust in Jesus as his personal Savior
- teaching an illiterate adult to read
- repairing a family's home

**N**ow go back and read verse 27. This is another truly remarkable and important concept! God put His "stamp of approval" on Jesus. In the world today, people are striving to gain approval from friends, co-workers, family members and others. However, the greatest endorsement you could ever receive would be to have God's stamp of approval on your life. What about you? Do you have God's stamp of approval?

Take time now to let God know about your desire to have His stamp of approval on your life today. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out areas in your life that need adjusting in order for you to be a more effective partner with Him in His work. And thank Him for being the Bread of Life to you.

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’ ” (MARK 2:5, NIV).

## Bible Study 52 On Mission Friends

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26 and Matthew 9:1-8.

Who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

How many people were involved in restoring the man physically and spiritually? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did the paralyzed man enter the house through the roof? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jesus forgive the man's sins? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Jesus heal him? \_\_\_\_\_

This is truly a unique miracle—unlike any that Jesus or anyone else ever performed. Usually Jesus would come upon somebody with a huge need, they would ask Him to heal them, and He did. Then He would say something like, “Your faith has healed you.” (See Matthew 9:20-22 and 27-30, Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 17:12-19.)

Then, on some occasions Jesus would heal a person because of someone *else’s* faith—usually the faith of a father or mother, as in Matthew 8:5-13 and 15:22-28.

On several occasions, Jesus publicly forgave people of their sins. Remember the story about the sinful woman who wept on Jesus’ feet at Simon’s house (Luke 7:36-50)? Jesus forgave all her sins and told her, “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50, NIV). The Bible consistently says that we are saved by faith: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8, NIV).

However, in this rare incident, Jesus not only healed a paralyzed man, He forgave the man’s sins because of the faith of his friends! Each of the Gospel writers was careful to point this out. (See Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:5 and Luke 5:20.)

The four friends who carried this man to Jesus provide a great example of how we should be involved in the lives of our lost friends. They knew that if they could just get their friend to Jesus, the Master would “fix” him. They realized that the man was paralyzed and totally unable to get to Jesus on his own. They weren’t satisfied to study paralysis, to read Scriptures to him about the Messiah, or to pray for him. The four men stopped whatever they were doing, picked up their friend and took off. They let no barrier stand in their way. They were creative and persistent. Jesus saw their faith and was pleased to completely change their friend’s life—eternally.

Do you have lost friends who need Jesus? Do you recognize when a person is paralyzed in sin? If not, you can’t be *on mission* bringing people to Christ. Do you have Christian friends who are working with you to do whatever it takes to bring others to Jesus? Do you really have faith that Christ is able to change anybody you bring to Him? Are you creative and willing to take risks to get people face-to-face with Him? Is Jesus so impressed with your faith in His ability that He will stop whatever He’s doing, forgive your friend’s sin and totally restore him?

In this rare incident, Jesus not only healed a paralyzed man, He forgave the man’s sins because of the faith of his friends!

List the names of two friends who are paralyzed by sin and need Christ. \_\_\_\_\_

List three friends who will work as your partners to bring these two to Jesus: \_\_\_\_\_

According to Luke, what was Jesus doing when the paralyzed man showed up? \_\_\_\_\_

Which is easier, to forgive someone's sins or heal their paralysis? \_\_\_\_\_

According to Mark, Jesus was preaching the Word when the man came through the roof. Luke said He was teaching a house full of Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Whatever Jesus was teaching or preaching about had to wait while He personally pronounced the man forgiven and innocent of all sin.

The Jewish teachers were correct when they complained in their minds that only God had the power or authority to forgive sin. But they were wrong to not accept the fact that Jesus was their God. They were spiritually and intellectually paralyzed by unbelief, the most deadly sin of all.

To help these theologians understand and believe in Him, Jesus healed the man of his paralysis. Did they see Jesus then for who He was and believe? How sad that in a room full of people who were looking God in the face, only one man had friends who would share their faith in Him.

How sad that in a room full of people who were looking God in the face, only one man had friends who would share their faith in Him.

“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (JOHN 8:7, NIV).

## Bible Study 53 Condemned No More

BY LEOLA FLOREN

Read John 8:1-11.

Why did the teachers of the law and the Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery before Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

According to Old Testament standard, what should have been the penalty for her sin? (*Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22-24*) \_\_\_\_\_

**Y**ou can't blame them for trying. Here they were, the religious leaders of the community, well educated and listed in the Who's Who of Jerusalem. But who did the people flock to hear at dawn in the temple courtyard? *Jesus*. Jesus—the carpenter with the rough hands, the dirty feet and no graduate degree from Rabbi State University. No wonder they were out to get Him. But how?

Ah. You can almost sense their excitement as they hatched a plan. Their spies would follow a woman with a wild reputation, catch her in the very act of immorality, then drag her before Jesus and all the people and say, “OK, Mr. Know-It-All. The Law of Moses says this woman should be stoned. What do you say?”

Jesus couldn't win! If He said, “Stone her,” then His message of God's love was blown to bits. On the other hand, if He let her off scot-free, He was defying the Scriptures. At last, they had Jesus right where they wanted Him. Or did they?

In verse 6, what did Jesus do? \_\_\_\_\_

What was their response? (v. 7) \_\_\_\_\_

Why was Jesus' reply in verse 7 so startling?

What do you think Jesus may have written in the dirt?

Who were the first to walk away after they had read what Jesus wrote? \_\_\_\_\_

What two questions did Jesus ask the woman? \_\_\_\_\_

**O**f all those present in the temple courtyard that morning, only Jesus was qualified to judge the woman who had committed adultery. Only Jesus, as the sinless Son of God, had the power to condemn her or forgive her. She must have trembled as she stood before Him, embarrassed, frightened and uncertain of what He would do.

Of all those present in the temple courtyard that morning, only Jesus was qualified to judge the woman who had committed adultery. Only Jesus, as the sinless Son of God, had the power to condemn her or forgive her.

As a female, it is unlikely that she could read what Jesus wrote in the dirt. How amazed she must have been as her accusers walked away, one by one. And how nervous she must have been when Jesus stood, looked her in the eye and said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you" (John 8:10, NIV)?

"No one, sir," she said (v. 11).

**What do you suppose she thought might happen next?**

**In verse 11, what statement indicates that Jesus forgave the woman?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who has the authority to forgive sin?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why was Jesus accused of blasphemy? (Matthew 9:2-8)** \_\_\_\_\_

**In John 8:11, what did Jesus instruct the woman to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name another instance in which Jesus encouraged someone to leave his or her life of sin.**

Instead of condemning the woman, Jesus forgave her and encouraged her. If Jesus has forgiven someone for his or her sins, how can it be our role to condemn the person?

The *on mission* Christian tries to help sinners reconcile with God, to restore a right relationship. Yes, that requires repentance, and there will be times when we need to remind others of the importance of obedience. As we encourage them to turn away from wrongdoing, just as Jesus told the woman to sin no more, let's remember that we, too, are sinners in need of forgiveness.

**What do you think became of the woman?**

**After her encounter with Jesus, to whom would the woman have been an effective witness?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who in your life has sinned and been forgiven but still suffers guilt and remorse because of his or her failure?**

**What can you do this week to encourage that person?**

# From Darkness to Light

BY LEOLA FLOREN

“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see” (JOHN 9:25, NIV)!

**Read John 9:1-38.**

**Why was the man born blind? (v. 3)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jesus could have healed the man without physically touching him. Why do you think He spit on the ground and applied mud to the man’s eyes?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why did the Pharisees say Jesus was not from God? (v. 16)** \_\_\_\_\_

At least when he was a blind beggar, nobody harassed him. As soon as he showed up in town with 20/20 vision (this was 2,000 years before laser eye surgery, remember), the people went nuts.

Poor guy. At least when he was a blind beggar, nobody harassed him. As soon as he showed up in town with 20/20 vision (this was 2,000 years before laser eye surgery, remember), the people went nuts.

“Isn’t this the beggar?” wondered some neighbors.

“Can’t be. Just looks like him,” said others.

“How did this happen?” they wanted to know, when they realized it really was him.

All he did was tell the truth (v. 11) and the next thing you know, he was dragged in front of the Pharisees for a once-over. Again he told the story of how Jesus healed him, and instead of congratulating the man, they focused on the day of the week that the healing occurred. Because it was the Sabbath, and it was illegal to make mud on the Sabbath, the Pharisees said, “Gotcha! Jesus can’t be from God, because He broke the law!”

Swell, thought the man formerly known as blind. All I did was tell what happened, and now I’m in trouble.

**What are the two opposing viewpoints in verse 16?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**What did the Pharisees ask the blind man in verse 17?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did the man reply?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who did the Jews call in as witnesses? (vv. 18-19)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why did they answer the way they did? (vv. 20-23)** \_\_\_\_\_

Ouch. That must have made the blind man feel great. Instead of jumping for joy that their baby boy could see for the first time in his life, Mom and Dad made it clear they didn’t want anything to do with the situation.

Frustrated, the Pharisees called the blind man in once again. “We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner,” they said.

“Maybe, maybe not,” said the blind man. “All I know is that I was blind, and now I see.”

Not liking what they heard, they kept pressing for another answer until the man was thoroughly disgusted. “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times,” he said (or words to that effect), “why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become Jesus’ disciples, too?”

Now they were really annoyed.

**The Pharisees said they were whose disciples? (v. 28)** \_\_\_\_\_

**The blind man said God does not listen to whom? (v. 31)** \_\_\_\_\_

**To whom did the blind man say God listens? (v. 31)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What argument does the blind man give regarding where Jesus is from? (v. 33)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did the Pharisees respond to the blind man’s logic? (v. 34)** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**fter being healed, the blind man was immediately put to a test when his own parents distanced themselves. He literally was alone. That’s when Jesus sought him out and introduced himself as the Son of Man (vv. 35-37). Then the man who had been born blind, was transformed by the Light of the World. “Lord, I believe,” he said, and he worshiped Jesus.

Discouragement will come to new believers. When they tell what God has done for them, in some cases they won’t be believed, and they may even be ridiculed or shunned by loved ones. That’s when it’s particularly important for other Christians to come alongside and offer a reminder: You were blind and now you see.

**What specific things would you do to encourage a new believer whose faith is being criticized or ridiculed by a friend or family member?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study 55 Rolling Stones

BY LEOLA FLOREN

Read John 11:1-45 and 12:9-11, 17-18.

Why did Jesus not go to Bethany immediately when He heard that His friend Lazarus was sick?

Why were the disciples afraid to return to Judea?

**W**hat were his parents thinking when they named Lazarus? “Mary” is a perfectly normal name, and so is “Martha.” But *Lazarus*? Bet he never found a key ring with *his* name stamped on it. Perhaps Mom and Dad had an inkling that something significant would happen to their boy one day, when they chose a name that means “God is my help.”

We don’t know how Jesus became acquainted with this family, but we do know He cared about them deeply. When they were in trouble, they sent word, expecting Him to respond. And, despite the very real possibility of physical danger, Jesus let the disciples know He intended to visit His friends in their time of need. Thomas, who will never win the “Optimist of the Year” award, urged on the other disciples with this upbeat suggestion: “*Let us also go, that we may die with him*” (John 11:16, NIV).

In verse 19, who had come to Mary and Martha to console them? \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus promised Martha something in verse 23. What was it? \_\_\_\_\_

In verse 24, Martha made a statement of faith regarding the future. What did she say?

One of the great biblical passages of hope occurs in verses 25 and 26. What did Jesus promise every believer?

With what words did Mary greet Jesus? (v. 32) \_\_\_\_\_

In verses 33-35, what emotions did Jesus exhibit, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

There were two responses from the Jews who observed Jesus’ grief. What were they?

1. Verse 36: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Verse 37: \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus paused to ask for help before He performed one of His all-time greatest miracles. Someone needed to remove the stone in the mouth of the tomb.

Martha, ever practical, balked. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and there is no air freshener on the planet that could have covered up that fact.

Nevertheless, strong hands rolled away the stone, and Jesus prayed: *"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me"* (vv. 41-42). Then He shouted, *"Lazarus, come out!"*

Out walked Lazarus, looking like the Mummy, and Jesus called for more help: *"Take off the grave clothes and let him go"* (John 11:44).

**Who is capable of raising the dead with his voice? (John 5:25)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Jesus could move a mountain by speaking to it. Why did He ask for help in moving the stone? (v. 39)**

**Similarly, why did Jesus tell the people to remove the grave clothes? (v. 44)**

**As a result of being raised from the dead, Lazarus became something of a celebrity. Why did the chief priests determine that he should be put to death? (John 12:9-11)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did the people who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection do? (John 12:17-18)** \_\_\_\_\_

**O**nly God can raise the dead—both physically and spiritually. But it should be encouraging to us that Jesus enlisted the help of others when he brought Lazarus to life, allowing those who witnessed the miracle to participate. Likewise, He calls us to participate today in assisting Him in His work. We need to be busy rolling away barriers that bury people out of our sight and away from God's life-giving touch. We can carefully, lovingly help snip away the death rags of old habits that confine and stifle new believers. We can help free them, just as Jesus allowed the bystanders to free Lazarus, the man whose name means "God is my help."

**Do you know someone who is under a "boulder" that must be removed before Jesus speaks new life into him or her?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How can you help move it?**

**Who is a new believer in your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What steps can you take that will enable you to help free him/her from the grip of failure or discouragement?**

# Bible Study 56 Peter's Denial

BY LEOLA FLOREN

Read Matthew 26:31-75, Mark 16:5-7 and John 21:1-19.

On the night of His betrayal, whom did Jesus say would fall away? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Peter respond to this prediction (v. 33), as well as Jesus' assertion that Peter would disown Him three times (v. 35)? \_\_\_\_\_

**P**eter would have fit right in on a World Wrestling Federation tour: big mouth, hard muscles, quick temper, supremely confident. Problem was, he also had a tendency to run scared. When Peter told Jesus he would never desert Him, he truly meant it. And when he said he would rather die than reject his friend, he meant that, too. It must have been a little embarrassing later that evening then when he dozed off three times as he was supposed to be keeping watch while Jesus prayed.

Perhaps this failure was fresh on his mind when he grabbed a sword and whacked off the ear of the high priest's servant (*John 18:10*). "Put your sword away," Jesus told him (v. 11). After all, how could the Scriptures be fulfilled if Peter was going to run around acting like Conan the Barbarian?

All in all, Peter was not having a good day.

When Jesus was arrested and led away to the high priest's house, who followed? (*Matthew 26:58*)

What did the servant girl in the courtyard say to Peter? (v. 69) \_\_\_\_\_

How did Peter reply? (v. 70) \_\_\_\_\_

What did another girl say about Peter? (v. 71) \_\_\_\_\_

How did Peter respond? (v. 72) \_\_\_\_\_

What made some of the onlookers connect Peter with Jesus? (v. 73) \_\_\_\_\_

What did he say to them? (v. 74) \_\_\_\_\_

Despite the fact that he had blown it on numerous occasions, Jesus still trusted Peter to care for His "sheep," instructing him to "Follow Me!"

"But go, tell his disciples and Peter ..." (MARK 16:7, NIV).

**W**hen he realized what he had done, Peter wept bitterly. After claiming that he'd die before rejecting Jesus, he claimed never to have known Him. (Ever been there and done that?) But there was no turning back. The wheels were in motion, and within a matter of hours Jesus would be crucified.

What would Peter do? Wait for the uproar to die down, then go back to work as a fisherman? How could he face the future knowing he had betrayed the best friend he'd ever had? Peter suffered from a broken past, a broken heart and no future. What could he possibly have to look forward to?

Nothing.

Nothing but Sunday morning.

**What did the angel in Jesus' empty tomb tell the women to do? (Mark 16:7)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why was Peter singled out?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In John 21, how many times did the risen Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many times did Peter reply that he loved Jesus?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How many times did Jesus tell Peter to care for His sheep or lambs?** \_\_\_\_\_

**D**espite the fact that he had blown it on numerous occasions, Jesus still trusted Peter to care for His "sheep," instructing him to "Follow Me!" Peter went on to serve the Lord faithfully for the rest of his life and did, in fact, give up his life for the Lord, just as he said he would do in Matthew 26:35.

Have you, like Peter, blown an opportunity to serve the Lord? Thank Him for second chances and the opportunity to encourage others when they've failed.

**Who are Jesus' "sheep" today?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some ways that you, like Peter, can help care for other sheep?**

## Bible Study 57

# Pilate: Facing the Truth

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:1-15, Luke 23:1-25 and John 18:28-19:22.

What did Pilate understand about the Jewish religious leaders? (*Matthew 27:18*) \_\_\_\_\_

What six questions did Pilate ask Jesus?

Luke 23:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 15:3-5 \_\_\_\_\_

John 18:35b \_\_\_\_\_

John 18:38 \_\_\_\_\_

John 19:7-9 \_\_\_\_\_

John 19:10 \_\_\_\_\_

What did Pilate's wife have to say about Jesus? (*Matthew 27:19*) \_\_\_\_\_

What fault did Pilate find in Jesus as he interrogated Him? \_\_\_\_\_

Name five ways Pilate tried to avoid making a decision about Jesus.

John 18:29-31 \_\_\_\_\_

John 18:38-40 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 23:5-11 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 23:13-17 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 27:24 \_\_\_\_\_

**A**t first glance it appeared that some poor young Jewish guy had gotten himself into big trouble with some powerful Jewish leaders. His only hope seemed to be that the Roman governor might take pity on him and give him a break. But the Jewish leaders were really determined to get rid of the guy once and for all, and it just wasn't worth the time or effort for the governor to sort out all the details and rescue the poor guy.

A closer look at the situation reveals a different reality. Actually, Jesus was not on trial—Pilate was. Jesus' future was already determined and secure. He would accomplish His mission in a matter of hours and be resurrected as Lord of all in three days. Pilate was the one whose immediate and eternal future was in the balance. He had to determine what to do with Jesus.

Pilate wrestled with the all-important question of who Jesus is. First he tried to release Jesus quietly. Then, when that didn't work, he tried to avoid making a public decision by passing Jesus on to Herod. Pilate could either declare Jesus innocent, the King of the Jews, the Son of God and the all-powerful Truth or he would have to

send Him to the cross to be unjustly executed as a criminal. The decision was impossible to avoid and he couldn't wash his hands of personal responsibility. To declare Jesus innocent, he would have to defy the entire Jewish power structure and he knew they could stir up a riot that would cost him his job. Recognizing Jesus' innocence (holiness) eventually requires becoming personally subject to His lordship. Anything less is rejecting Him totally.

Now take a careful look at how Jesus dealt with Pilate in His crucial hour of decision. Jesus could have remained silent as He did before Herod and His Jewish accusers. Instead, He continued to carry out His mission to seek and to save lost people—even the Roman governor. Jesus revealed Himself to Pilate as the King of Heaven and the Son of God. He warned him of the seriousness of his situation through a dream (his wife's) and explained that Pilate's authority was limited by God's power and purpose. Jesus answered Pilate's questions and spoke to him in a personal and straightforward manner (*John 18:33-38*).

How did Jesus respond when Pilate asked him the following questions? (Refer back to Matthew 27:11-26, Mark 15:1-15, Luke 23:1-25 and John 18:28-19:22.)

**Are you the king of the Jews?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you answer your accusers?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did you do to make the Jewish leaders so angry?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where did you come from?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Don't you realize that I have the power of life and death over you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**L**ike many lost people today, Pilate was not interested in religion. He saw and recognized the hypocrisy and politics of religious leaders. However, confronted face-to-face with the Person and presence of Jesus, he was impressed by His poise and authenticity. Pilate had to decide personally what to do with Jesus who is called Christ. Even after Jesus was dead and buried, Pilate apparently realized he had not seen the end of this Jesus as he told the Jewish leaders, *"Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how"* (*Matthew 27:65, NIV*).

We must follow Jesus' example as we encourage others to make Him their Savior and Lord. We don't need to defend or prove Him. He's never the one on trial. And the decision about what to do with Jesus, the King of the Jews, is never simply an intellectual choice. It is always a life-changing commitment.

Pilate could either declare Jesus innocent, the King of the Jews, the Son of God and the all-powerful Truth or he would have to send Him to the cross to be unjustly executed as a criminal.

Recognizing Jesus' innocence (holiness) eventually requires becoming personally subject to His lordship. Anything less is rejecting Him totally.

“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” (LUKE 23:43, NIV).

## Bible Study 58

# The Focus to Finish

BY ALLEN JAMES

Read Luke 22-23.

What annual Jewish event was about to take place in Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the response of the chief priests and the teachers of the law to Jesus? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

What were the disciples disputing over after the Passover meal? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the name of the criminal who was released by Pilate in place of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n Luke’s account of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, we see Jesus living out His mission to seek and to save those who are lost (*Luke 19:10*). In every situation and in every circumstance, Jesus displayed His love and compassion for His people. In the midst of the betrayal by Judas, Jesus spent an evening eating the Passover meal and preparing His disciples for what was to come (*Luke 22:7-38*). Soldiers arrested Him, yet He paused to heal one who had been injured (*Luke 22:51*). Rulers and leaders mocked and ridiculed Him, but Jesus responded by asking His Father to forgive them all (*Luke 23:34*). Finally, with His death only a few hours away He heard the plea of a lost criminal for salvation (*Luke 23:43*). Jesus was *on mission* at all times.

What were the two primary purposes for Jesus coming to earth?

Luke 19:10 \_\_\_\_\_

John 17:1-5 \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways did Jesus fulfill those purposes in Luke 23:26-49? \_\_\_\_\_

**I**ndeed, Jesus focused on living for His Father’s glory. Many times throughout His life and ministry Jesus avoided the detours of power, prestige and position that might bring Him glory so that God would be honored. Jesus also remained focused on meeting the needs of people. Although Jesus was ultimately concerned with a person’s spiritual need, He never neglected their emotional or physical needs. Jesus lived by a simple principle: People matter to God. He applied that principle to His life by never being too busy for anyone whether they be crippled or blind or sick or even if they were little children. Jesus always took time for people and He was always ready to help them at their point of need.

Reread Luke 23:32-43. Put yourself in the situation. Considering your personality, what would have been your response to these two criminals? \_\_\_\_\_

What can we learn from the response of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Read 1 Peter 3:15. How did Jesus exemplify this verse in Luke 23:32-43? \_\_\_\_\_

Give an example of a time recently when you were “too busy” to care for someone. \_\_\_\_\_

If you could recapture that moment, how could you show that person that he/she matters to God? \_\_\_\_\_

The challenge of the Christian life is not to be *on mission* only when we want to be. The real challenge lies in our always being ready to share God’s love, both when it is convenient and inconvenient. Take a few moments and ask God to give you eyes to see so that you can focus on the needs around you in order that He might be glorified.

The challenge of the Christian life is not to be *on mission* only when we want to be. The real challenge lies in our always being ready to share God’s love, both when it is convenient and inconvenient.

## Bible Study 59 God’s Challenge

BY BOB UTLEY

**Read Matthew 28:16-20.**

To whom was Jesus speaking? \_\_\_\_\_

Write Jesus’ instructions in your own words:

What promise did Jesus make? \_\_\_\_\_

**T**his well-known text is often called “The Great Commission,” but it seems that for too many believers it is the “good suggestion” directed to specially called and trained leaders. This text, like so many passages in the Bible, is often misunderstood for several reasons: 1) We do not read the entire context. 2) We have a pre-understanding about the audience to whom it is addressed. 3) We use it only for evangelism.

Notice that the paragraph actually begins in verse 16. At first glance, it may appear that only the eleven apostles received this worldwide commission. But we must consider the greater context.

Before His death, what did Jesus tell His disciples in the upper room? (*Matthew 26:32*) \_\_\_\_\_

After His resurrection, what instructions did the women receive? (*Matthew 28:7,10*) \_\_\_\_\_

**I**t is important to note that all of Jesus’ followers were given the invitation and instruction to meet with Him in Galilee. Notice in verse 17 that upon seeing Jesus, “some worshiped” and “some doubted.” Some doubted? It seems surprising because, by this time, all the apostles and the 120 believers assembled in the upper room had seen Jesus. He had appeared to them three Sunday nights in a row in the upper room. (By the way, this set the precedent for believers to worship on Sundays.) But remember, Jesus looked a little different after the resurrection!

**Read John 20:14-16 and Luke 24:13-31.**

When did Mary Magdalene recognize the risen Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

When Jesus appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, at what point did they recognize Him? \_\_\_\_\_

So what does Matthew 28:17 imply? That the group addressed in the Great Commission was larger than just the apostles! In fact, this meeting on the mountain in Galilee may be the one described in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

According to this verse, how many followers did Jesus appear to at one time? \_\_\_\_\_

If this is the attended meeting, it establishes a very important truth: The mandate from the resurrected Lord was not addressed to leaders only but to all disciples! We must rid ourselves of the unbiblical notion that God calls some to a special elite group. In the New Testament, whenever the Greek words “cleros” or “laos” are used (from which we get the English terms “clergy” and “laity”), they always refer to the entire body of believers. We are all called, gifted and sent! This means every believer, not just the pastor, church staff or deacon body, is commanded to go and make disciples.

You might say, “Not me. I am too young, too shy, too afraid!” So were the early disciples. These words of Jesus must have terrified them. After all, they were Jews. They believed that Gentiles were unclean, unloved and unaccepted. But now the Gentiles were included in God’s message of forgiveness.

Reread Matthew 28:16-20. The One who has “*all authority in heaven and on earth*” (v. 18) is the One who sends us and has promised to be with us (v. 20). It is His work and His power that will accomplish the task. You and I must only be available.

Finally, realize that this text has two emphases:

1. Make disciples.
2. Make disciples.

Yes, it’s the same command, but in two senses. The first has to do with becoming a Christian. Notice it says “make disciples” not “make a decision.” There is a real difference between the two. One is a relationship of growing trust and service; the other is an action in the past. Salvation is not a product (i.e., a ticket to heaven or a fire insurance policy). It is a growing, daily relationship with Jesus.

The second part is crucial. As Christians, we are commanded to not only share the gospel with unbelievers (v. 19), but also to take the time to share with them all that Jesus has shared with us. The Great Commission is not fulfilled until new believers are mature, functioning, reproducing, serving believers themselves.

We do a better job in focusing on verse 19, but we’ve done a poor job in fulfilling verse 20! Making disciples is not the special, unusual assignment for an elect few; it’s the normal assignment for us all!

The mandate from the resurrected Lord was not addressed to leaders only but to all disciples! ... We are all called, gifted and sent!

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ...” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

## Bible Study 60 The Power Plan

BY ALLEN JAMES

Read Acts 1:1-11 and 2:1-41.

To whom was this letter being written? \_\_\_\_\_

From His resurrection to the day of Pentecost, over what period of time does Jesus appear to the apostles giving them instructions about the kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

What does Jesus promise the disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

What miraculous event takes place on the day of Pentecost?

How does the crowd respond?

The book of Acts provides a transition from the life of Christ to the early church. Jesus had specifically invested in the lives of the apostles to prepare them for this point in time. What was truly about to take place had not yet computed in the minds of the apostles. If you recall, it was only shortly after His resurrection that Jesus begins to appear to these men. Their minds must have been a blur. Physically, many of them were exhausted. Most of them were emotionally drained as a result of the activity of the last few weeks. Now Jesus is appearing to them and teaching them about the next step in God's plan. Acts 1:6 reveals to us that they did not fully comprehend what He was teaching. God's plan was for these men to help build the foundation of the early church so that the world would know of His Son.

God has a plan for you. He has strategically positioned you to share His love.

Recall a time when someone close to you passed away. What was your response? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you think the apostles were feeling at this point? \_\_\_\_\_

In Acts 1:9, we read that Jesus was “taken up before their very eyes.” Do you think this made them feel better or worse? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

**G**od always has a plan. God's plan was for the Holy Spirit to come and empower His church to do ministry. Until recently, the disciples had been a part of many miracles. However, they were also physically walking side by side with Jesus. Naturally, they probably felt on their own, but they did not understand the power God had planned through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God used the day of Pentecost to show the apostles they were not alone. As a matter of fact, God revealed to the apostles that His power was even greater than they understood. Imagine being in a place with people from many different countries and suddenly everyone having the ability to understand one another in their own language. This is essentially what happened on the day of Pentecost. Jesus promised that they would be empowered by His Spirit and that they would be His witnesses. On the day of Pentecost God kept His promise to them, and as Peter preached, an incredible number received Jesus and were baptized.

**By the power of His Spirit, God removed the barriers allowing people to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**What are some barriers you face in sharing Christ with your friends?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In what ways have you seen the gospel translated to reach different people?**

**T**hrough the power of the Holy Spirit, we can proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, and people will believe and become a part of His body, the church. We must be faithful in sharing the gospel and allow the Spirit of God to translate our words into meaningful and moving messages in the hearts of lost people.

God has a plan for you. He has strategically positioned you to share His love. He has purposefully placed you in your family and at your job to share the gospel. God has the power and He is faithful. All He needs are His people to be *on mission*.

**Who is God leading you to share the gospel with today?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your plan for accomplishing your mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Bible Study 61

# Strength to Stand

BY ALLEN JAMES

**Read Acts 3:1-4:23.**

Why were Peter and John going to the temple? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was the crippled man at the gate of the temple? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened to Peter and John after Peter spoke to the onlookers? Why?

Upon their release, what were Peter and John ordered not to do? \_\_\_\_\_

Did they obey?     Yes     No

Anyone who has ever been around church much while growing up has probably heard this familiar story. It was customary for cripples to place themselves outside the gate leading to the temple to ask alms (to beg) from those individuals who were going to worship inside the temple. On this particular day, a crippled man begged for money from Peter and John which opened up a very unsolicited and unexpected opportunity to witness.

**When was the last time an unexpected opportunity came along for you to share your faith? How did you respond?**

On several occasions I've encountered people who were ready to hear the gospel. Essentially they have asked me, "How can I have eternal life?" However, most times the opportunities are there, but people are not eagerly waving me over to share my faith with them. Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the customary time of prayer when this crippled man asked them for help. He was probably expecting some type of monetary gift, but God had something else in mind. Peter and John could have looked down at the ground to avoid making eye contact with the man and walked on into the temple. Yet they both listened to the Holy Spirit and responded, giving him the help he needed.

**Where were you the last time you had an encounter like this (e.g., seeing someone with a "will work for food" sign while waiting at a stoplight)?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was your response?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are some ways God might use us to meet the needs of people like this?**

Seeing the unexpected opportunity that God had planned, Peter stepped up and began to share with the crowd how Jesus Christ could heal their spiritually crippled condition if they would repent and seek God's forgiveness.

**P**eter and John were vessels whom God used to heal this man. The passage reveals to us that the man had been lame from birth and that many in the community knew him. We also find that he is over 40 years old. Can you imagine this scene? A 40-year-old man who had never been able to walk, run or play as a child now had the strength to stand and walk. Can you imagine the excitement in his voice as he began walking and jumping throughout the temple courts?

As he returned to Peter and John, a crowd of people followed him. Seeing the unexpected opportunity that God had planned, Peter stepped up and began to share with the crowd how Jesus Christ could heal their spiritually crippled condition if they would repent and seek God's forgiveness. Notice in Acts 3:11-26, Peter never drew any attention to himself or to the other apostles. Everything he said pointed to Jesus.

**What was the effect of Peter's message on the crowd? (Acts 4:4)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the effect of the message on Peter and John? (Acts 4:3)** \_\_\_\_\_

**When was the last time you remember God moving in a mighty way?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Have you ever been persecuted for your faith or for sharing Christ? Explain.**

**D**oes it amaze you at the stand Peter and John made even while in jail? What was their secret? Acts 4:13 is an incredible statement about these two men. It says that the rulers, elders and leaders of the law "took note that these men had been with Jesus." Peter and John had been through much the preceding few months. Peter had even denied Christ. Yet God had provided them with the strength to stand in this moment. Even after they were ordered not to speak of Jesus anymore, they took a stand. Peter and John knew three things. They knew where they came from, they knew what they came for, and they knew who to point to. *On mission* Christians know where they came from, what they are here for, and who to point to. What kind of stand are you taking right now for Jesus?

**What are some areas in your life where you need to improve on taking a stand?**

# Obedience Is the Key

BY ALLEN JAMES

Read Acts 5:12-42.

Why were the apostles arrested? (Acts 5:12-17)

When confronted about teaching in the name of Jesus, what was the response of the apostles? \_\_\_\_\_

What teacher of the law negotiated for the apostles? \_\_\_\_\_

What was his reasoning? \_\_\_\_\_

What punishment did the apostles receive? \_\_\_\_\_

What was their response? \_\_\_\_\_

*On mission  
Christians live to  
share the gospel  
no matter  
what!*

Within the context of this event, God had been providing His power to the apostles through the Holy Spirit to heal people and to perform other miracles and wonders. Because of these miracles and wonders, great crowds began to follow the apostles. The Jewish culture of that day always looked for a sign or an attesting miracle to prove that something was from God. As a result of these miracles and wonders, the crowds continued to grow and the Jewish religious leaders were becoming threatened and jealous of the apostles. Therefore, the apostles were placed in jail. But, God was still with them. God released them so they could teach and proclaim the gospel once again. The apostles seemed to have a “no fear” attitude.

What was at stake for the religious leaders of that day? \_\_\_\_\_

Was the issue the miracles the apostles were performing or the popularity they were gaining? \_\_\_\_\_

Why were the apostles so willing to do whatever it took to share Christ?

What are your fears in sharing the gospel?

“We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29, NIV)

**In what areas are you asking God for His power to help you take a stand for Him?**

**In Acts 5:27-29, what word best characterizes the apostles' response to the question of the Sanhedrin?**

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**I**n many countries throughout the world, persecution of Christians is a harsh reality. Perhaps in America the day is coming when believers will have to pay a price for following Jesus. Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, NIV)!

As Christians, we are taught to respect and obey those in authority. We abide by the laws of God and man. When the two are in conflict, practicing Christians are caught in a very personal and real dilemma. Even the most "civil" disobedience is difficult for most Christians. Fortunately, God has given us examples to follow in His Word. See two more examples in Daniel 3 and 6.

When we disobey the laws of man, we must be ready and willing to pay the consequences. God will not always open prison doors, but He promises to never leave us.

**What punishment did the apostles receive? (v. 40)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was their response? (v. 41)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Jesus say about this kind of suffering? (Matthew 5:10-12)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What benefit of suffering did Paul point out? (Philippians 3:10)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**T**hroughout this passage of Scripture, the apostles never brought any attention to themselves personally. They were only striving to share Jesus with a lost world. They were resolved to share the gospel with everyone they encountered. *On mission* Christians live to share the gospel no matter what!

## Bible Study 63 Hearing God

BY ALLEN JAMES

**Read Acts 8:26-40.**

Why had the Ethiopian been to Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_

What book was the Ethiopian reading from in the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

From that Old Testament passage, who was the prophet talking about? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the response of the Ethiopian to Philip’s message? \_\_\_\_\_

**What happened to Philip after the Ethiopian was baptized?**

**I**n Acts 8:4-8, we find that God was using Philip in incredible ways to reach Samaria with the gospel. Philip went wherever God sent him. For whatever reason, God called him to leave Samaria and go toward Gaza. To Philip, this might have been confusing, because so many were responding in Samaria. Nevertheless, Philip obeyed.

While on the road, God spoke to Philip and told him to go to a specific place at a specific time. Once again, Philip obeyed. On a desert road, God arranged a meeting for Philip with this Ethiopian governmental official. Many consider this to be a divine appointment with Philip and the Ethiopian. Only God would know that this single governmental official would be the one to take the gospel back to his country and to the continent of Africa. Whether we share the gospel with one or a thousand, we must be obedient messengers, trusting God to lead us to those He is speaking to.

**Have you ever experienced a divine appointment? Explain.**

**Philip seemed tuned in to hearing God. Many things can keep us from hearing God’s direction. What are some things in your life that are keeping you from hearing God?**

Whether we share the gospel with one or a thousand, we must be obedient messengers, trusting God to lead us to those He is speaking to.

**P**hilip chose not to give in to the customs of the day. Culturally, racially and socially, the differences were great between these two men. Yet, Philip followed the voice of God to “that chariot.” It is interesting that the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53 and that he simply asked Philip to tell him what it meant.

When *on mission* Christians make themselves available to the plan of God, God often places prepared listeners in their way. Philip seized the opportunity to share the gospel successfully and the Ethiopian was immediately ready for baptism. Acts 8:12 shows that Philip knew baptism follows faith in Christ. From that we can deduce that the Ethiopian trusted Christ and wanted to show the world what had taken place in his heart.

There are times in our lives when God arranges an appointment like this. At these times the spiritual harvest is ripe and ready to be gathered. *On mission* Christians must always be ready to follow God's leading as He guides us to encounters with people who are ready to learn the way to know Him. God will provide the appointments. We only need to be prepared and available.

Notice that Philip was familiar with the passage the Ethiopian was reading. We don't need to memorize the entire Bible. However, it is important to know God's Word and to be comfortable explaining the gospel as it is given throughout Scripture.

**What can you do daily to help stay “ready” for divine encounters?**

**If someone were to ask you what it means to believe in Jesus and have eternal life, how would you answer?**

**In what way(s) do you communicate the gospel (e.g., tract, Bible, testimony, memorized Scripture)?**

**What verses do you use when sharing your faith?**

If you struggled with these questions, commit the following passages to memory as a starting block in sharing your faith: John 3:16; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 10:9-10, 13 and John 14:6.

## Bible Study 64

# Ananias: His Brother’s Keeper

BY ALLAN THOMPSON

Read Acts 9:1-19.

What was Saul’s mission in Damascus? On whose orders? (vv. 2,14) \_\_\_\_\_

What word is used to describe Ananias? (v. 10) \_\_\_\_\_

Name the three descriptions of Christians in verses 2, 13 and 14. \_\_\_\_\_

What term did Ananias use to address Saul? (v. 17) \_\_\_\_\_

How could he call Saul that? \_\_\_\_\_

**P**ut yourself in Ananias’ sandals in this story. Soon after Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision, telling him to go to the house where Saul was staying and restore his sight. Ananias feared this man who had a widespread killer reputation, and he dialogued with the Lord just as Moses did in Exodus 3 when God sent him to liberate the Hebrew slaves.

The mission God described for Saul’s future didn’t alleviate Ananias’ fears but probably added to them. God informed him that Saul would become the spearhead of a mighty mission movement to the Gentiles, a concept beyond Ananias’ imagination. He also revealed that Saul would suffer as a result of his mission.

Has your name ever been on someone’s “wanted” list?     Yes     No

Have you ever been specifically targeted or threatened by someone?     Yes     No

If so, have you prayed for or about your enemies?     Yes     No

Read Proverbs 25:21-22 and Matthew 5:43-47.

These passages imply that a Christian should expect to have enemies. They give very clear instructions on what to do about your enemies. We are to recognize our enemies and be proactive toward them.

What two directives are we given in Matthew 5:44? \_\_\_\_\_

Ananias and the other believers in Damascus probably prayed a lot about Saul, especially when they heard he was coming to town.

What do you think was the main message or request of their prayers? \_\_\_\_\_

Was Ananias expecting God to change Saul’s heart and select him for missionary service? (Acts 9:13-14)

Yes     No

Who is the most unlikely person in your school or neighborhood to make a decision for Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of impact on your school or neighborhood would that person's conversion have? \_\_\_\_\_

**S**aul was highly intelligent, a Roman citizen, a man of considerable reputation who spoke several languages. He would have been intimidating even without orders to persecute Christians. He was not from the same region of the world (Tarsus) as Ananias (Damascus). Most of us do not consider ourselves famous, or in any place that will become famous, or in the middle of a situation that will make us famous. Nothing in Ananias' life prepared him for this moment when his obedience to a simple but terrifying command would be crucial to the first hours of rebirth of the greatest missionary that has ever lived.

We don't know much about Ananias' life or Christian ministry. All we know is that he was a disciple of Jesus (*Acts 9:10*) and that God sent him on a mission one night to his greatest enemy. Although he had good reason to be afraid of Saul, when God said "Go," Ananias trusted Him and went. As it turned out, the day Ananias baptized Saul was probably the highlight of his ministry.

Only God could save Saul and change him into Paul, the apostle and great missionary to the Gentiles. Only God could use him to plant churches all over the western world and write half of the books of the New Testament. But it would take a fellow man—a loving, obedient Christian—to go to Judas' house and call this former enemy "Brother Saul." Only an *on mission* Christian could receive Saul and baptize him into the fellowship of the believers.

Think about your classmates, teammates and neighbors. What does God have in store for them?

**If you got a letter from the meanest person in school asking for help, would you respond?**

Yes       No

**If three fellow classmates of another world religion asked you to teach them a Bible study so they could decide which religion was true, yours or theirs, would you accept the challenge?**     Yes     No

**Who is your most feared enemy?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you praying for him?**     Yes       No

**Have you enlisted others to pray and intercede for him?**     Yes       No

**Can you visualize God changing him to become the greatest *on mission* Christian of our time?**

Yes       No

**Are you prepared to forgive him and call him a brother in Christ?**     Yes       No

**How will you be a tool in God's hand to bring him to faith in Christ and to Christian maturity?**

Nothing in Ananias' life prepared him for this moment when his obedience to a simple but terrifying command would be crucial to the first hours of rebirth of the greatest missionary that has ever lived.

## Bible Study 65

# Barnabas: Son of Encouragement

BY ALLAN THOMPSON

Read Acts 9:20-30 and 11:19-26.

What was the result of Saul’s first preaching? (Acts 9:21-25) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result of Saul’s second round of sermons? (Acts 9:29) \_\_\_\_\_

To whom did the new Christians preach? (Acts 11:19) \_\_\_\_\_

Who preached to the Greeks at Antioch? (Acts 11:20) \_\_\_\_\_

What were three characteristics of Barnabas? (Acts 11:24) \_\_\_\_\_

**B**efore his conversion, Saul had ordered the stoning and imprisonment of Christians to suppress their heretical beliefs. Now, he was equally passionate to preach those same beliefs. The Jews of Damascus and subsequent locales of his preaching felt betrayed. Saul was a “traitor.” Barnabas showed courage equal to Saul’s by standing up for and speaking out about him. We can only assume they met secretly at first because Barnabas knew details of Saul’s last few days (Acts 9:27). Barnabas was acting out of conviction but in character. His very name means “Son of Encouragement.”

The first mention of Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) tells us he was wealthy (had land), generous (sold the field and donated the money to the church), and a respected Jew (a Levite). Barnabas was a nickname given by the apostles; his real name was Joseph. His whole life was a preparation for this moment when he used his influence and leverage to gain an audience for Saul. Instead of focusing on a man’s past, he was focused on Saul’s future. Barnabas realized that their greatest earthly enemy could now become their strongest partner for evangelization.

Barnabas encouraged the believers in Antioch and their numbers grew under his leadership.

What does the phrase “proving that Jesus was the Christ” mean? (Acts 9:22) \_\_\_\_\_

What verses of Scripture and what lines of thinking would you use to convince someone that the claims of Jesus about His messiahship were true? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been called upon to mediate between two disagreeing parties or people?  Yes  No

Barnabas took a huge risk of being rejected by both the Jews and his Christian brothers. Why would he do this? \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the latest major victory experienced by your church in winning the enemies of Christ over to the kingdom of God?**

**B**arnabas was from Cyprus (*Acts 4:36*), an important island of trade. There he met men and women from every country adjoining the Mediterranean Sea. He learned to appreciate instead of fear cultures different from his own. His countrymen also understood this and took the gospel to the Greeks (*Acts 11:20*). They were “coloring outside the lines,” stepping out of accepted boundaries. It took daring and courage to preach to a group unfamiliar with the Old Testament, who spoke different languages and held completely different values. But in some ways, it was also easier to preach the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection to them, because they did not have any preconceived notions about Him.

Barnabas was sent to investigate the genuineness of the decisions being made in Antioch. He was sent because the church leaders knew he had experience with other cultures since he thought like the other men from Cyprus and since he had no personal pride. He encouraged the believers in Antioch (living up to his name again) and their numbers grew under his leadership. But he knew he had found a wonderful environment where the preaching of the gospel would best flourish under the leadership of Saul. And Barnabas gladly brought him to help out.

**Identify a cultural, racial or social group in your community that is not effectively being reached with the gospel.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What kind of person would be needed to best reach this group for Christ?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you willing to become that kind of person?**    Yes    No

**T**hink about what racial, cultural and social groups you are best equipped to reach because of your background and your life experiences. The groups you want to reach for Jesus in the future could determine what college you attend, what major you choose, where you will work, what you will do for a living, and even who or if you will marry.

**How could you discover what groups of people you are specially suited to reach for Christ?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What additional skills are you willing to acquire to become a better communicator of the gospel?** \_\_\_\_\_

“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right ...” (Acts 10:34-35, NIV).

## Bible Study 66 A Quantum Leap

BY ALLAN THOMPSON

**Read Acts 10:1-11:18.**

What was Cornelius' vocation? (Acts 10:1) \_\_\_\_\_

How many times did Peter receive his rooftop vision? (Acts 10:11-16) \_\_\_\_\_

What was in the “sheet” and what did God tell Peter to do with it? (Acts 10:12) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did this disturb Peter? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the central message of Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his friends? (Acts 10:43) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome of the whole incident? (Acts 11:18) \_\_\_\_\_

**P**eter received a vision from heaven, not once, not twice, but three times. It is reminiscent of young Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:1-11 repeatedly being called by the Lord to deliver a message; of Gideon in Judges 6 needing repeated signs from God that he was to deliver his people from the Midianites; and of Moses having several rounds of an argument with God about the mission of delivering the Hebrew people from Egyptian bondage.

It is truly a frightening thing when God asks us to embark in a new direction, to undertake a new task or to give up our security. Peter was doing fine in his role of leader in the Jerusalem church. Gideon had a steady farm job, and Moses had been doing well herding sheep. God called them to deliver His people in His time and in His way. Peter was aware that some strange happenings were occurring in Antioch and the surrounding areas, but preaching to the Gentiles was for Barnabas and Saul. He thought he knew his mission in life and that it wouldn't change. He was mistaken!

**Have you ever had to change a strong belief you held? If so, what was it?**

What was the Lord telling Peter through the vision? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the “elements” of the gospel message Peter presented to Cornelius' household? (Acts 10:37-43) \_\_\_\_\_

Why would the new believers ask Peter to stay for a few days? (Acts 10:48) \_\_\_\_\_

It is truly a frightening thing when God asks us to embark in a new direction, to undertake a new task or to give up our security.

**A**s a career missionary, I lived and served in Germany for six years. Sometimes I find it difficult to describe to someone who has not lived in another culture about my experiences and my feelings during my time of ministry to Germans. Many people back at home would question the tactics and timing of a missionary accomplishing his task in the manner he does, because they don't know the situation or the facts surrounding it.

Peter was brought before a group in the Jerusalem church of Jewish believers. They felt Peter had acted irresponsibly and demanded an explanation. To their credit, they accepted Peter's story as proof that God had granted eternal life to the Gentiles. The young Christian church had taken a quantum leap from being a regional sect of Judaism to a world religion. The role of the Mosaic Law changed. The temple in Jerusalem was no longer the only place to offer prayers and sacrifices. Grace through Jesus' death made salvation available to the Gentile as well as the Jew.

**What would have happened to the advancement of the gospel if Peter had withdrawn his story and not told what took place in Caesarea?** \_\_\_\_\_

Like the Jews who heard Peter's report, some people question your motives and methods in mission work. Some want to criticize, and some are just curious.

**How do you handle criticism?** \_\_\_\_\_

**To remain calm and cool under tough conditions, Peter started off recounting only the facts. Why did he take that approach?** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**hroughout the Gospels and the book of Acts, the Jewish leaders are shown as refusing to cooperate with Jesus and the plans God had to reconcile the world to Himself. In Acts 11:17, Peter says he doesn't want to be found fighting God.

**When was the last time you knew that God was asking you to do something and you refused to do it?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How did Paul express his fears about falling out of step with the will of God? (1 Corinthians 9:26-27)** \_\_\_\_\_

**If you knew you couldn't fail, and you knew that God had prepared a way for others to hear the gospel through you, what group of people would you want to reach?** \_\_\_\_\_

“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2, NIV).

## Bible Study 67 Dynamic Duo

BY ALLAN THOMPSON

Read Acts 11:25-30; 12:25; 13 and 14.

When Saul and Barnabas are paired in these passages, whose name is listed first? \_\_\_\_\_

Who joined Saul and Barnabas on their first mission journey? (Acts 12:25) \_\_\_\_\_

Where were Barnabas and Saul and what were they doing when they were called to missionary service? (Acts 13:1-2)

What happened to Elymas? (Acts 13:11) \_\_\_\_\_

Why was this ironic? (Acts 9:8-19) \_\_\_\_\_

Who did the people at Lystra and Derbe think Paul and Barnabas were? (Acts 14:11-13) \_\_\_\_\_

Wherever Paul and Barnabas preached, they stirred up strong emotions on both sides of their arguments for the resurrection of Christ.

These two missionaries were always overcoming barriers. First it was hecklers (Acts 13:8-12), then race and culture (Hebrew/Gentile), and then mistaken identities when they performed miracles (Acts 14:10). Most New Testament commentaries tell us the order of words in a list is in descending order of importance. In a pair of names, the first one is more prominent. When Barnabas and Saul began their partnership in Antioch, Barnabas had more recognition and position in the church.

Later in the narrative (beginning in Acts 13:9), Paul assumed first place in the pairing. After all the barriers they had overcome, pride or jealousy could have been the one to trip them up. But Barnabas eventually learned to play the role of “second fiddle,” not only for Paul but also for John Mark. The New Testament contains books written by Paul and Mark but not Barnabas. However, his role as supporter, encourager and friend made him a valuable partner in missions.

In a list of three partners *on mission*, where would you want your name to appear? First, middle or last? Why?

In these verses, how many times were Paul and Barnabas stoned or their lives threatened? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did Paul return to a city where he had recently been stoned? (Acts 14:20) \_\_\_\_\_

In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas addressed the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. They knew their audience well; history was extremely important to the Hebrew people. Many times the Jews had been near extinction and God had delivered them. Paul tried to show that once again God was attempting to rescue them, this time

One basic mission principle in reaching people is this: The gospel message should be told both in the "birth" language of the target culture and in images and phrases that are meaningful in their particular culture.

finally through Jesus as their Deliverer. He recounted stories from the Torah (first five Old Testament books), quoted from the Psalms (*Acts 13:33,35*) and from the prophets (Isaiah in *Acts 13:34*; Habbakuk in *Acts 13:41*).

A basic mission principle is this: The gospel message should be told both in the "birth" language of the target culture and in images and phrases that are meaningful in their particular culture. Eskimos have no concept of alligators; Floridians don't understand living six months of the year in darkness. Target groups must be studied to discover "keys" to reaching them with the gospel.

**What group of people of a different "culture" (age, race, interests, etc.) are you trying to reach with the gospel?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What will happen to the advance of the gospel and the kingdom of God if Christians only share it with people like themselves?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What groups of people in your community are still spiritually unreached?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What will it take to reach them?** \_\_\_\_\_

**T**he "audience" that Paul and Barnabas understood best (the Jews) largely rejected their message, while the Greeks responded well to it. Although Paul was extremely qualified to preach to the Jews, God had other plans for him. He told Paul (during his conversion experience on the road to Damascus) that He would send him to the Gentiles. Paul had to learn how to communicate the Good News to people who had no understanding or interest in the God of the Jews, their history or their Scriptures.

Consider the gospel message Paul preached to the Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. Wherever Paul and Barnabas preached, they stirred up strong emotions on both sides of their arguments for the resurrection of Christ (*Acts 13:50-52; Acts 14:4*).

**What caused these reactions?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Could they have omitted this portion of the message to keep from offending or stirring up trouble?**

Yes       No

**What are the essential and non-negotiable parts of the message of the gospel? (*1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 15:1-11*)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What would it take (e.g., partners, prayer, resources, study, practice, desire, opportunities) to make you a more effective witness and missionary of the gospel of Christ?** \_\_\_\_\_

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God ...”  
(ACTS 16:25, NIV).

Bible Study 68

# On Mission in Philippi

BY ALLAN THOMPSON

Read Acts 16:6-40.

What is meant by “receiving the Macedonian call”? (vv. 7-11) \_\_\_\_\_

What was the name of the first European convert? (v. 14) \_\_\_\_\_

What happened when the slave girl interfered with Paul and Barnabas’ gospel preaching? (vv. 17-18)

What did her masters think of this? (vv. 19-21) \_\_\_\_\_

How did Paul and Silas react to their imprisonment? (v. 25) \_\_\_\_\_

In Acts 16:6-40, Paul received a heavenly direction to visit Macedonia. There, he was promptly thrown in jail after being severely flogged, stripped, beaten and put in stocks.

To think that the will of God always leads to a pot of gold at the end of some rainbow with soft music in the background is not only untrue but it is also misleading. God led the missionary duo to Philippi so they could have a breakthrough to share the gospel. Their imprisonment, their attitude of praise and the miracle earthquake all combined to give them an incredible “launching pad” for the gospel in the leading city (v. 12) of Macedonia. The spread of the Good News is more important than my level of personal comfort.

The Spirit of God can give both warnings and instructions (vv. 7-10). Which one have you received lately about sharing the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

What did God do that influenced Lydia’s response to Paul’s message? (v. 14) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think this happens with every salvation experience? Why or why not?

In Acts 16:16-18, Paul delivered the slave girl from a prophetic demon. Since she was telling the truth, why did he want to silence her?

What was the outcome of this event? (vv. 19-21) \_\_\_\_\_

**S**trength comes in different forms; but the one type of strength that Paul and Silas displayed was the strength of knowing they were doing the right thing. A great inner strength that allows a person to endure pain, suffering and neglect comes from knowing that your life is based on the truth.

Paul and Silas did not sing hymns in the jail because they knew what was about to happen, but because they knew the cause of Christ was just and right. Even after the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his family, Paul and Silas returned to prison and waited to be tried as Roman citizens. The town was abuzz about Paul and Silas because of their courageous stand. They remained strong because they were rooted in the truth. Truth is not based on circumstances but on Christ.

**After being treated poorly, could you preach the gospel to your former captor? (v. 31)**    Yes    No

**Was this trip to Phillipi a success or failure? Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**S**everal very different responses to the preaching and witness of Paul and Silas are recorded in this passage. Lydia and the members of her household believed and were baptized (vv. 14-15). The silversmiths of Philippi heard and rejected Paul's message. Then they had him beaten and thrown into prison.

God led the missionary duo to Philippi so they could have a breakthrough to share the gospel.

Although Paul and Silas' fellow prisoners in the jail listened intently to their hymns and prayers, no decisions are recorded. After the earthquake and the word of the Lord (v. 32) was preached to the jailer's household, his family believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have no control over the decisions people make concerning their walk or non-walk with the Lord Jesus. Our task is to preach, witness, serve and testify to the character and power of our God, which we find in its highest form in Jesus Christ. If we lift Him up, He will honor our preaching. Some will respond, some will scoff, some will ignore, but all will hear.

**How consistent are you in sharing your faith with others?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do your circumstances and environment affect your willingness to share?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the last prayer you prayed in the midst of a difficult situation?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the outcome of the prayer?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sometimes we ask God to deliver us from the very circumstances that allow us to accomplish His mission. Did Jesus ever pray that way? (Matthew 26:36-39)**    Yes    No

**With which person in Acts 16 do you most identify? Why?**

# Mentored for the Mission

BY ALAN HUESING

Read Acts 16:1-5, 1 Timothy 1 and 2 Timothy 1.

What do we know about Timothy's family? \_\_\_\_\_

How did he become a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

How was Timothy involved in Paul's second missionary journey? (Acts 15:36-18:22)

Paul was a missionary who not only won people to faith in Christ but also disciplined them to become mature believers. He was truly a Great Commission Christian who made disciples (not just converts) of all nations, baptized them into the fellowship of the church, and taught them all he had been commanded. Paul was a powerful and effective advocate of the mission, serving as mentor to dozens of Christians as they grew in faith and shared the gospel with others. His worldwide network of *on mission* friends and associates was truly incredible. In the last chapter of Romans, Paul sent greetings by name to 27 of his fellow workers and friends in a church he had *never* personally visited. Read the words of advice he wrote to them in Romans 16:17-19. He encouraged them by writing that God "will soon crush Satan under your feet." Then he signed the letter with the eight friends who were working with him at the time.

One of those friends and co-workers was a young man named Timothy. He had been one of Paul's many protégés ever since the missionary first met him in his hometown of Lystra where he lived with his mother and grandmother, both Jewish believers, and his Greek non-Christian father. Luke wrote that the Christians at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy, and Paul wanted to take him on as a team member (Acts 16:2-3). Timothy became one of Paul's closest companions and partners, traveling with him throughout Asia Minor and Europe. Later, Paul sent him to serve the churches in Ephesus, Thessalonica and Corinth. It was Timothy who Paul sent for in his final days as a prisoner in Rome. He assisted Paul in maintaining, teaching and serving the network of believers by joining him as he wrote several of his letters, now part of our Bible.

God had blessed Timothy with a godly grandmother and mother who shared their faith and instilled it in him (2 Timothy 1:5). Because of their efforts to teach their son, he was ready and useful to the great missionary when he passed through Lystra. Timothy was willing to meet whatever requirements necessary to serve under the tutelage of Paul for a lifetime. What a privilege to be mentored by someone God would use to evangelize the world and write half the books of the New Testament!

The blessings of the Paul-Timothy partnership were mutual. Paul loved Timothy as his "true son in the gospel" (1 Timothy 1:2). He constantly prayed for him,

Paul was a missionary who not only won people to faith in Christ but also disciplined them to become mature believers. He was truly a Great Commission Christian.

"I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you ..."  
(2 TIMOTHY 1:6, NIV).

missed him when he wasn't around, and wrote letters full of advice to help him out. Paul knew Timothy would multiply the scope of his ministry because he would outlive and out-travel him. In his last letter, written from a jail cell in Rome, Paul encouraged Timothy to carefully select trustworthy men to whom he could pass on the powerful legacy and instruction he had received. These men would then faithfully pass on this training to others.

**List nine pieces of advice, experience and instruction Paul gave Timothy through his letters:**

1 Timothy 1:12-17 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 2:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 4:12 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 5:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 6:6-10 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 1:6-8 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:2 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:15 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:22 \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you think Paul would have described Timothy?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you think Timothy would have described Paul?** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**t's been said that every Christian should have a mentor and every Christian should be a mentor. Paul was mentored by Gamaliel, Barnabas and others. Then he mentored Timothy and dozens of other believers. Joseph mentored his stepson, Jesus, who then mentored the 12 apostles. Eli mentored Samuel, who mentored the first king of Israel. Moses served as mentor to Joshua, Elijah mentored Elisha, and the list goes on.

**What family member(s) have had a dramatic positive effect on your faith?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who is your mentor and partner in God's mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who can you serve as mentor?** \_\_\_\_\_

“... he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols”  
(ACTS 17:16, NIV).

Bible Study 70

# Religion Can Be a Bad Thing!

BY BOB UTLEY

**Read Acts 17:16-34.**

**What motivated Paul to preach and teach in Athens? (v. 16)** \_\_\_\_\_

**At what three places in Athens did Paul preach?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where were Paul's missionary partners, Silas and Timothy, while he was in Athens?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the result of Paul's mission work in Athens?**

**A**thens, like America, was a religious place. After being run out of Thessalonica and Berea, Paul found himself in Athens, the intellectual capital of the ancient Mediterranean world. Two ancient writers characterized Athens by the following:

- There were 30,000 statues to different gods. (Pliny)
- “It is easier to find a god in Athens than a man.” (Petronius)

Religion was big business in Athens in Paul's day, but the people did not know the one true God! Paul was deeply moved by this (v. 16).

The awesome responsibility of the gospel weighed on Paul. He also suffered from some chronic physical problem (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10) that interfered with normal things of daily life. And it would have been so easy for him to make excuses why he could not share, teach or preach the gospel. But Paul allowed God to overcome every shortcoming and fear.

In Athens, Paul preached in the local synagogue (v. 17) and in the marketplace (v. 17), and he reasoned on the Areopagus (v. 19).

**What is a synagogue and what audience would Paul have found there?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who probably heard Paul preach in the marketplaces?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is an “Areopagus”? (For a description, refer to a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What kind of people heard his message there?** \_\_\_\_\_

Only on mission Christians can know the fullness of joy that comes to those who are available to be used by the Spirit as a channel of the gospel to others.

Let's examine Paul's message to the different groups to whom he spoke. In the synagogue, he spoke to Jews and "God-fearing Greeks" who knew the Old Testament. From other sermons to Jews, we know Paul preached using Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Messiah would suffer.

We are not told how he spoke to those in the marketplace. However, we are given an account of how he approached the philosophers on Mars' Hill (vv. 19-31). He noted their religiosity. He noted their reverence for the gods. He then found an altar inscribed to an "Unknown God" (v. 23) and used it as an opening to tell them about YHWH and His Son.

**Was Paul well received in Athens?**     Yes     No

**Did many believe (v. 34) and want to hear more? (v. 32)**     Yes     No

Athenians rejected and even mocked Paul and his message. I cannot promise you that someone will trust Jesus every time you share your faith or that you will not be laughed at. I can promise that the Lord Jesus will be with you (*Matthew 28:20*) and that internal joy and peace in life is only experienced by those who are *on mission*. Only *on mission* Christians can know the fullness of joy that comes to those who are available to be used by the Spirit as a channel of the gospel to others.

**Name those in Athens who received Paul's message.** \_\_\_\_\_

Although you can only list two names, God wrote the names of all the others in the Lamb's Book of Life (*Revelation 21:27, Philippians 4:3*). When you share the gospel, you may not be aware of all those who believe and respond, but God knows.

Notice that Paul had not gone to Athens on a planned campaign to win the city or plant churches. He was simply waiting there for his partners to catch up with him (v. 16). But he saw needs and created opportunities to preach the gospel.

Much of our lives are spent waiting—waiting to grow up, to graduate, to get a job, to get a better job, to get married, to have children, to retire.

**What do you see now that "greatly distresses" you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the synagogue, marketplace or Areopagus where you can share Christ?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Who are the people who need to hear your message?** \_\_\_\_\_

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (PHILIPPIANS 1:12, NIV).

## Bible Study 71

# Prison: The Plan of God

BY BOB UTLEY

**Read Acts 21:17-26:32.**

Why was Paul arrested in Jerusalem? (Acts 21:17-36) \_\_\_\_\_

What did he tell the mob at his arrest? (Acts 22:1-21) \_\_\_\_\_

What did Paul discuss with Governor Felix and his wife? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Paul tell King Agrippa and his wife about in Acts 26? \_\_\_\_\_

**T**hese chapters deal with Paul's trials during some of his years in prison. It seems so wrong that God's powerful servant would have to "waste" time in prison. How could God allow this? Believe it or not, God didn't just allow it; He wanted it! This was exactly His plan for Paul—so he could speak to the highest leaders of the Mediterranean world of his day.

What did God tell Ananias about Paul? (Acts 9:15) \_\_\_\_\_

How did Luke summarize Paul's imprisonment? (Acts 28:31) \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Paul say about his prison experience?**

Philippians 1:12-14 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 2:9 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 4:16-17 \_\_\_\_\_

**P**aul was physically attacked and imprisoned unfairly. Things looked really bad. But that was how God would get him to Rome. God's will was for Paul, an excommunicated rabbi, a tentmaker, to speak to powerful political and religious leaders. He would be put on trial where he would take the opportunity of his legal defense to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. What a great idea! Notice how this worked out.

**Name the groups or individuals Paul was able to preach to in each of the following trials and difficulties during his imprisonment.**

Acts 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 23 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 24 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 25:1-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 25:13-26:32 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 28:1-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 25:11; 26:32; 28:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 28:17-28 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 28:1,6,30; Philippians 1:13 \_\_\_\_\_

**S**ometimes we are discouraged about the difficult or unfair circumstances of our lives. We wish things were different. But wait, maybe *on mission* Christians are exactly where they should be. We are in the hands of a loving, purposeful God. He has called us, gifted us and is using us for His kingdom. The old saying "Bloom where you are planted" is true.

**Are you experiencing problems right now that could actually be spiritual opportunities? If so, how can you use them for God's purpose?**

Notice how Paul repeated his personal testimony several times in Acts. Check this by looking at Acts 9:4, 22:7 and 26:14. These passages show how Paul used his own personal experience as a witnessing tool.

Write your personal testimony in a brief form and memorize it so you can share your faith in Jesus with others. The following will help you get started!

**Remember how you felt before you became a Christian. Were you afraid of death? Did you feel alone and without purpose in life? Were you afraid of failure? Tell a little about your life before you met Jesus.**

**When did you realize your need for Christ? How did you come to know Him as Savior and Lord? Include Scripture passages that were meaningful to you in making your decision (e.g., John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23 and 10:9-13). Explain clearly about sin, grace and forgiveness in words your friends can understand.**

**Identify specific ways Jesus has changed your life since you became a Christian and what He is teaching you now.**

**When sharing Christ with people, invite them to personally receive Jesus' gift of salvation by praying to Him. Write a simple prayer that expresses repentance and receiving Christ by faith.**

Of course, your testimony will be structured slightly different as you share it with different people in different situations. That's what Paul did. He structured his presentation of the gospel to his audience.

Practice sharing your testimony with a friend and use his or her suggestions to improve it. Then go out and prayerfully look for opportunities to share it with others.

# The Theme of the Bible

BY VAN SANDERS

Read Genesis 3:15, 11:1-9 and 12:1-3; Exodus 19:1-6; Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 17:26-27.

**H**ow do you view the Bible? As a medicine chest to go to when you are spiritually sick? As a refrigerator to go to when you are spiritually hungry? Perhaps you use the Bible like a crystal ball to help you understand the future. All of these are good at times, but the Bible reveals that God's purpose is to form a people for Himself from all of the approximately 13,000 people groups of the world. And He has revealed this purpose so that we may be *on mission* with Him to do our part in making disciples of all people groups.

## THE PROMISE

Identify the five "actors" involved in Genesis 3:15. (Hint: Not all are clearly stated.) \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n this verse, God speaks to Satan about His plan to provide salvation to all people through the Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ. So in the very beginning, God tells us that His purpose in history is to bring people to Himself through the salvation offered in Jesus Christ.

## THE PREPARATION

Describe one way that the events in Genesis 11:1-9 help *achieve* God's worldwide evangelism purpose stated in Genesis 3:15. \_\_\_\_\_

Describe one way in which the events in these verses may *hinder* God's worldwide evangelism purpose stated in Genesis 3:15. \_\_\_\_\_

According to Acts 17:26-27, what was God's purpose for dividing people by language, culture and geography? \_\_\_\_\_

**G**od is sovereign over all creation and history. These verses teach that God orchestrates the circumstances of all the people groups of the world to give them opportunity to find Him. In North America, the shifting populations and migration of peoples from many countries are God's preparation for the church to bring the gospel to them.

## THE CALL

What did God promise to do for Abram in Genesis 12:2? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did God promise to bless Abram so much? (Genesis 12:3) \_\_\_\_\_

**G**od called Abram to Himself so that Abram could experience the blessings of knowing Him through a relationship based on His grace. Abram was responsible to pass that blessing of knowing the true God to all the families of the world. The same is true for Christians today.

"Go and make disciples of all nations ..." (MATTHEW 28:19, NIV).

## GOD'S PRIESTS

Try to describe Israel's intended function in God's plan to make Himself known to the nations surrounding Israel. (*Exodus 19:5-6*)

Israel was to have a priestly function and be mediators between God and the nations. By their obedience to the covenant, their holy character would point the nations to the true God. Refer to 1 Peter 2:9-10 where Peter applies the verses in Exodus 19:1-6 to Christians today.

Can you list some non-Christians who are seeing God reflected in your daily living? \_\_\_\_\_

## THE COMMISSION

In Matthew 28:19, what did Jesus first tell His disciples to do? \_\_\_\_\_

According to Matthew 28:18, what gave the disciples confidence to obey Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

Where are the nations today that need discipling? \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus has commanded all Christians to follow His example to make disciples of all the nations or people groups of the world. This is not an option; it is a command that we as Christians are required to obey no matter where we live.

## THE ASSURANCE

Read Revelation 7:9-10.

To what time period are these verses referring: before creation, the present time or life in heaven? \_\_\_\_\_

How many nations, tribes, peoples and tongues will be represented in heaven, according to verse 9? \_\_\_\_\_

God will accomplish His purpose of forming one people for Himself from all the peoples of the world. We are assured that when we obey His command to make disciples of all the nations, we will be a part of the winning team.

## THE QUESTION

What does Matthew 24:14 say must happen before the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the world? \_\_\_\_\_

How important is it for you and your church to be *on mission* with God in making disciples where you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus Christ's return waits upon His church's obedience to participate with Him in the purpose He has revealed from Genesis to Revelation. That purpose is to witness and make disciples of all people groups of the world so that there may be one people of God who will worship and enjoy Him forever.

The question is, "Will you join God where He is working today and do your part in fulfilling His eternal purpose?" Jesus, the groom, is waiting on His bride, the church, to make herself ready for His return. What are you waiting for? Be *on mission* today!

Jesus has commanded all Christians to follow His example to make disciples. ... This is not an option; it is a command that we as Christians are required to obey no matter where we live.

# Epilogue

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**I**n these studies you have examined the lives of 50 specific men and women of God (including the Son of God) whose stories are scattered throughout 26 books of the Old and New Testaments. You have read eyewitness accounts of how God allowed and enabled them to be His partners in His mission to bring new life and reconciliation to countless people throughout the ancient world. And these are only a fraction of the stories of *on mission* people in the Bible.

Although the stories of the Bible are complete, the mission of God continues. He still works through people like you and me as we follow Him day by day. Our challenge is to allow Him to write the current and future chapters of His story as He continues to use people like us in His mission to seek and to save the lost.



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