

PLAIN TALK
ON
Chief Persons In
The Bible

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Chapter 1

Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel

Adam was the first man created by God. The record of Adam is in Genesis, the first five chapters. The word for "Adam" is the same as the word for "man." This leads some to say that the record as it is written in the original language, Hebrew, is the record about "mankind," rather than of an individual called "Adam." However, the rest of the story is so obviously referring to an individual man, it would seem no valid purpose would be served by thinking of "Adam" as a collective noun.

Adam was made of the dust of the earth with responsible freedom. When he followed the suggestion of Eve and ate the forbidden fruit, Adam sinned against God. He was cast out of the garden and condemned to live under the curse.

Adam is spoken of as the "first" man, even as Jesus of Nazareth was recognized as the "second" man. When Adam sinned, the whole human race, in his loins at that time, fell into sin. Death came upon all men.

Eve was the first woman God made. The record is to be found in Genesis, chapters 2, 3 and 4. The English translation reads that God "took one of his ribs," but the Hebrew word is not "rib" but "side," so that a more exact translation would be, and some of the newer translations are worded this way, that God took out the "side" of man what He used to make woman. Eve was deceived by Satan, and sinned in taking the forbidden fruit (II Corinthians 11:3). Paul reveals that the woman can be saved as she lives "in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." (I Timothy 2:13-15)

Cain was the first child born into this world from natural parents. He is generally known as the brother of Abel, since the tragic story of "Cain and Abel" is so well known. Cain was a tiller of the soil, the ground.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:3-5).

That is the way the record reads. The word "countenance" in the original language is "cheeks," so the record is "his cheeks fell."

We notice at once, as we look at these two brothers, Cain and Abel, that people are different. These two brothers, children of the same parents, in the one home, turned out differently. The difference in occupation does not seem to be so important. Both brothers knew about God and both came to worship Him. Each brought an offering, probably a thank offering. But their offerings were differently esteemed by God.

Some students are inclined to think that the basis of this difference in esteem lay in the offering themselves. They will point out that Abel's offering had blood and life in it, while Cain's offering had no blood, being just the fruit of the field, vegetables or grain, as the case would be. This difference did exist, but it is not clear that that was the basis for what happened. The Scripture reads: "The Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." The very structure of these sentences seems to point to the fact that the Lord saw the heart of each worshipper. He saw Abel and respected his offering. He saw Cain and did not respect his offering. When God spoke to Cain, he referred to Cain's attitude. He did not refer to the difference in the offering.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him (Genesis 4:6-7).

That is the way it reads. This shows that God came to Cain, recognizing how Cain felt, and raised the

questions with him, "If you had done what I wanted you to do, or should I say perhaps, if you had the kind of heart and attitude that I would want you to have, you would have been blessed, and since you do not have, you will not be blessed." God is reported as having said further:

. . . and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door (Genesis 4:7).

That expression in the original language is very graphic. You cannot very well put it into English. The actual language is: "sin croucheth at the door." It suggests a lion crouching at the door of a tent ready to spring on any person coming out. Cain was not only unhappy and discontented but provoked and angry, and when God saw this, God warned Cain in these words: "Don't you realize you are in danger? With this attitude you have now, sin is lying at the door crouching ready to spring on you. You are liable to do wrong." This was the implication in His words. The Lord had noted the evidence of Cain's discontent, and brought this to Cain's attention, before Cain had committed any overt act. Cain had not done anything wrong as yet. But he had his reaction; and God draws attention to the significance of his attitude. God seems to be reminding Cain that he would be fairly judged and he would receive his due recompense for whatever he did. But Cain is warned that if he does not act to control his attitude, and allows his attitude to lead him into wrong doing, sin will follow and there will be dire consequences.

Cain did not heed the warning. We read:

And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him (Genesis 4:8).

This is the classic instance that shows that being brothers does not assure kindly treatment. When the ego is involved, and envy and jealousy are present, men will do each other harm.

God immediately dealt with Cain: "Where is thy brother?" He then pronounced the curse upon Cain: "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." Thus, Cain was doomed to separation from other persons. This seems to be the first suggestion in Scripture as to what the condemnation of hell will be. To be homeless, friendless, can well imply "my punishment is greater than I can bear." Separation from others is the one intolerable condition so far as man is concerned. It hurts him. Although Cain went on living without the blessing of fellowship with God and God's people, he seems to have prospered in the world. He built a city, and his descendants are reported to have developed animal husbandry, the arts, and industry. The record is simply and plainly stated. In Cain's family occurred the first case of open social disorder in the scriptural record.

Abel is known mainly as the spiritually minded brother who was killed by his worldly minded elder brother; but the record of Abel is inscribed in Scripture:

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh (Hebrews 11:4):

It is important to note that in this record that we have thus far of persons in the Old Testament, we are immediately brought to see two great things. First, in the case of Adam, we are brought to see that it is not good for man to be alone. He needs fellowship with others. Then in the case of Cain's tragic experience, we find that the punishment put upon him is that he is to be separated from persons. Someone may point out that he had his family of his own. He had his own people. That is true. But there was a separation, evidently from the people of God. So right at the very outset, as far as these persons are concerned, it would seem that person-to-person relationships are very vital.

When you say person-to-person relationships you not only mean man-to-man, but you also mean man-to-God, for God is a Person. The human being deals with other human beings and with God. His life will be blessed as he is getting along with other human beings and getting along with God. Just as in the same way his life will be cursed if he is alienated from God and alienated from his fellow man.

Chapter 2

Noah, Abraham and Isaac

Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

That is the way the Scriptures read in talking about the man, **Noah**. In a time of widespread ungodliness when sin had spread to become rampant among men, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, who warned his generation of judgment to come by building an ark to escape the flood, that he prophesied would come. He was doomed to the role of a prophet whose message was not heeded because of unbelief. The Bible tells us that the world around him went on about their own affairs, paying no attention to the testimony of Noah.

When the flood did come, Noah and his three sons with their wives entered into the ark and were saved. The first thing Noah did when he came out of the ark was to build an altar that he might worship God. This pleased God, who made a covenant with Noah, establishing the permanent succession of the seasons, and providing for the government of men by men.

Noah was shamed by his son Ham in an incident which led to the announcement of a curse upon Canaan. Any notion that the curse was an act of an enraged parent is without foundation. The fact is the way to be forgiven by the grace of God was always open. There is no intimation that Ham repented in any sense. The curse upon Canaan may be taken as a warning to everybody, that respect for those in authority, and charity toward the unfortunate, is to be expected of every human being.

Abraham is perhaps the most widely respected man that ever lived: believers in the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan religions all call him their father. Popular ideas were manifested at Babel, when men came together to plan and work for their common interest, the building of a city and a tower. They wanted security and satisfaction. But Abraham was called to go by himself into a new, strange country, which God would give to him according to His promise.

The life of Abraham who believed in God was marked by obedience, which led him to follow the principle of separation. Abraham began by separating from his country and his people when he left Ur in the Chaldees. Early in his journey, he separated from Lot. Later he was called upon to separate himself from Ishmael, his own son in the flesh. Finally, he was called upon to separate himself from Isaac, the child of promise, when he offered him upon the altar. Above all else, Abraham wanted to respect and to honor God by obeying Him in faith, and for that he would separate himself from anything and everybody.

Abraham is called the father of the faithful, and biblically trained believers consider themselves to be "the children of Abraham."

Abraham began the practice of circumcision as a sign of belonging to God according to His promises.

Isaac was the child of promise born to Sarah and Abraham. His birth is famous because it occurred in the old age of his parents, and was a demonstration of the strong faith of Abraham. Paul writes about Abraham:

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform (Romans 4:19-21).

Isaac was harassed by Ishmael, his half-brother, with the result that Sarah, his mother, insisted that Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, be cast out of Abraham's household.

Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. The servant found Rebekah who was willing to leave her home to become the bride of Isaac.

During his relations with the Philistines, Isaac showed his great wisdom in following in the footsteps of his great father. The record reads:

And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them (Genesis 26:18).

There is both humility and wisdom shown when a younger new generation follows in the proven path of the steps of those who have gone before with success.

When Isaac was old and almost blind, his wife Rebekah and his son Jacob conspired to deceive him, to gain his blessing intended for his firstborn son, Esau.

These are known as the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I personally always include Joseph in that group. In studying this part of the Bible, the latter part of the book of Genesis, one can get a good insight into what we would consider to be the truth about family religion, household religion. God is quoted as saying about Abraham that He knew Abraham would bring up his children in his faith by way of worshipping God. His first son, Ishmael, whom he had as a son from Hagar, the concubine who had been Sarah's maid, was a quarrelsome person. He was inclined to get into trouble even in his boyhood, his childhood. On the occasion when Abraham had been directed to turn them out of his home, and Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were wandering across the desert and about to die of thirst, God spoke to Hagar and told her that He had heard the voice of the lad. Ishmael actually prayed to God for deliverance from the possibility of dying of thirst. This implies that so far as Ishmael was concerned, he had been taught to depend on God. That result would, of course, come from Abraham. Abraham had trained his household by his own example and teaching to put their trust in God. So Ishmael, even though he had been a quarrelsome child, which had caused his being sent away from Abraham's household, was yet one who believed in God. It belongs to the glory of God that this child, Ishmael, would call on God in prayer, and that God would hear him.

Hagar, whose whole experience is one that arouses great sympathy, had been chosen to be Abraham's second wife. When she gave birth to Ishmael, and felt that she was not properly treated by Sarah, Hagar ran away at that time. God spoke to her and told her to go back to Abraham's household, and submit herself to Sarah, and to be obedient. This seems to show that Almighty God looks down upon men in the world, and sees different people in different places where He has actually placed them. His will is carried out by each one carrying out his or her assignment, and this is seen when He sent Hagar back to serve as Sarah's maid.

Later when Hagar had given birth to Ishmael and Sarah herself had given birth to Isaac, and trouble arose between the children, Sarah recommended to Abraham that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. Almighty God told Abraham to do as his wife Sarah had suggested. In all of this we can see the hand of God guiding men in their response to Him.

Chapter 3

Jacob and Joseph

Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was the firstborn, but Jacob was destined to be the greater. Esau was a great hunter, and was his father's favorite. Jacob tilled the ground, and was preferred by his mother.

On one occasion, Esau returned from his hunt empty handed and he asked Jacob for something to eat. Jacob gave him the meal that he had prepared for himself in exchange for Esau's birthright. The significance of this can be seen in the New Testament as we read:

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears (Hebrews 12:16-17).

Rebekah prompted Jacob to deceive his aged father, Isaac, into thinking that he, Jacob, was Esau, at a time when Isaac gave him the blessing which belonged to the firstborn. When Esau discovered that Jacob had connived to get his blessing he sought to kill Jacob. Rebekah sent Jacob away to her brother, Laban, for safety. In the course of his flight Jacob tarried at a place called Bethel. Here he had a vision of a ladder, or, as it reads in the Hebrew language, a stairway, from earth to heaven: a means of communication from this world to the other world. Jacob heard the voice of God repeating the promise given to Abraham, which had been given also to Isaac, and now was given to him: God would bless him and would bring him back to this land that he should have as an inheritance.

While working for his uncle Laban, Jacob married his two daughters, Leah and Rachel, and their two maids as concubines. After twenty years of service, he gathered his possessions and his family and started his return to his homeland. When Esau heard of his coming back, he gathered his soldiers to raid Jacob's caravan, that he might seize Jacob's flocks and herds.

At Peniel, Jacob turned to God in prayer that he might be delivered from the wrath of Esau, who felt he had been cheated of his blessing twenty years before. Jacob wrestled with the angel from God all night long, and by his persistence won the blessing of God. That was the occasion when his name was changed. One of the results of this all night of wrestling in prayer was that Jacob's name was changed to Israel, which means "a prince with God." Another result was that Jacob was crippled, in that the sinew in his thigh withered. Another result was that Esau's heart was changed to friendliness. Jacob and his family were unharmed. His possessions remained as his own. But his encounter with God had resulted in a triumphant victory, and his descendants were afterwards known as "the children of Israel."

Joseph was the son of Rachel, and enjoyed his father's esteem and affection in a marked way. In his later years Jacob turned to his son, Joseph, for dependable help in the handling of his affairs. Joseph's brethren became jealous, and sold Joseph as a slave to some Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt. There he became a slave of Potiphar, where he rose to the position of being the Chief Administrator of Potiphar's affairs.

After being sold into Egypt as a slave, and being entrusted by his master, Potiphar, with the handling of all his affairs, Joseph was slandered by Potiphar's wife, when she falsely accused him of attempting to molest her. Joseph was cast into prison, where he soon became the chief trusty in charge of his fellow prisoners.

Because he showed himself as being able to interpret dreams, Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, that he might interpret a dream that Pharaoh had, and which had troubled him. Joseph interpreted the dream to mean that Egypt would have seven years of bountiful harvest, which would be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed he took Joseph from prison and put him in charge of the economy of the whole nation. Joseph supervised the sorting of the surplus in the seven good years, and then supervised

the distribution of that grain to the people during the seven lean years of famine that followed.

It was in the time of that famine that Jacob sent ten sons into Egypt to buy grain; They did not recognize Joseph when they came to get the grain, but he recognized them. Joseph proceeded to work things around to where Jacob finally came down into Egypt in person. Joseph received his father with open arms and arranged to supply the brethren with whatever they needed.

In appreciation of the service that Joseph had rendered to Egypt, Pharaoh gave the land of Goshen to Jacob and his family. When Jacob died the brothers were so conscience stricken because of their treatment of Joseph when they had sold him as a slave, that they made up a story to tell Joseph, claiming that their father had left word that Joseph should not call them to account for that old evil deed.

But Joseph put them all at ease by reminding them that while he knew they "meant it for evil," God meant it for good, to save many people from dying of hunger.

When Joseph's death drew near, he exacted a pledge from his people that his bones should not be buried in Egypt, but they should be stored in a coffin, that they might be transported back to Canaan and buried in the cave of Machpelah. In this way, the presence of the bones of Joseph for all those 400 years were always a reminder that Joseph had been confident that God would keep His promise to give Canaan to the children of Israel.

Joseph is a remarkable illustration of the providence of God. When one considers his life, one can see a remarkable type, as it were, of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Just as Joseph had been the beloved son of his parents, so when Jesus of Nazareth began His public career the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Then just as Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good, we are reminded that Joseph was in a position of authority where he was able to render benefit to all the people round about him. We remember, too, that just as Joseph was hated by his brethren and sold to the enemy as a slave, it is said about the Son of God, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not."

When one has in mind how Joseph was put into prison and forgotten there, left there, one can think about Jesus of Nazareth being rejected, and put on the cross and buried in the tomb. When one thinks of Joseph being brought out of prison and being given a position of authority, so one can think of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who was brought out of the grave and finally ascended into heaven where He sitteth at the right hand of God.

Just as Joseph shared the supplies with his brethren, taking care of them, so the Lord Jesus Christ in His present place with God, gives gifts unto men and actually blesses people here on earth. And as his brethren did not recognize Joseph in his authority, so Jesus of Nazareth was not recognized though He was the Son of God.

These things are remarkable; just as the fact that eventually when the brethren actually tried to connive at being spared by Joseph, all their fears were unnecessary. Joseph was already minded to do them good, because he was not dealing with them, he was dealing with God. So we can think about Jesus of Nazareth on the cross of Calvary saying, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." It is a remarkable thing to notice how these Old Testament accounts of those men in Old Testament times reflect and reveal so many of the great truths that are revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

Moses and Pharaoh

Moses was the lawgiver in the Old Testament history. He was born of the tribe of Levi, at a time when all Hebrew boy babies were being killed. Hidden in the bulrushes by the river when he was an infant, he was found by Pharaoh's daughter who took him as her ward, and brought him up in Pharaoh's household.

When he was forty years of age, Moses made the first great decision of his life:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:24-26).

He saw injustice, as an "Egyptian was smiting a Hebrew?" He interfered, trying to correct the injustice, and the Egyptian was killed. The next day he saw two Hebrews quarrelling. When he tried to arbitrate, he was rejected. Then he realized that he must flee for his life.

Moses spent forty years as a shepherd in Midian. Then God called him to go back to Egypt that he might lead the Hebrews out of Egypt across the desert into the land of Canaan, which had been promised to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. When Moses hesitated because he felt so inadequate, God sent Aaron his brother to go with him as spokesman.

Pharaoh denied Moses' request for permission for the Hebrews to leave Egypt. There now ensued a long conflict between Moses and Pharaoh. But Moses was persistent. Finally Moses announced the plague of the death of the firstborn. The Hebrews were instructed how to escape the judgment of death by putting blood on their doorposts. The promise was given "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). This event is the origin of the Feast of the Passover which is celebrated among the Jews until this day.

When the Hebrews began their exodus, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued them to bring them back as slaves. By the power of God, the waters of the sea were divided so that the Hebrews could cross on dry land. As Pharaoh followed them, the waters returned and destroyed Pharaoh and his army. When the Hebrews were safely escaped, Miriam led them in a song of deliverance.

The journey across the desert brought repeated crises when it looked as though the Hebrews would be brought to destruction; but Moses stood in the breach, praying to God on their behalf. They were led by a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. In answer to the praying by Moses, God showed them how to treat the bitter water of Marah to make it fit to drink. At a time of hunger He sent manna from heaven. At a time of thirst, God brought water out of a rock. At the time when Amalek attacked them, God heard Moses when he prayed, aided by Aaron and Hur, and strengthened Joshua to win a notable victory. After they had organized helpers for Moses in his leadership, the Hebrews came to Mount Sinai where they received much revelation from God.

After due preparation, Moses went to the top of the Mount and spent forty days in fellowship with God. He received the Ten Words on two tablets of stone. When Moses came down from the Mount, he found the Hebrews had made a Golden Calf to worship after the manner of the Egyptians. After destroying the calf and disciplining the people, Moses returned to the top of the Mount to get the complete revelation which included the instructions for the tabernacle, for the priesthood, for the sacrifices, and for guidance as to how to maintain order on their march across the desert.

Sometime later the Hebrews came to Kadesh Barnea. Here they sent spies to scout the situation in Canaan. When the spies reported the military situation to be so hopeless for Israel, the people did not go in because of their unbelief. As a consequence of that, they spent the next thirty-eight years wandering about in the desert until the whole generation except Joshua and Caleb had died. This is the remarkable aspect of the whole story. When they were slaves in Egypt and in trouble, they turned to God. But now that they

were in the desert, and were free from Pharaoh, and on their own, so to speak, they were not ready to trust God. It makes one realize again that oftentimes under pressure and in trouble a person will actually turn to God. Then afterwards when the trouble is past, they have misgivings and uncertainties which cause them to doubt the Lord and actually fail to obey Him. That is the way it went with Israel.

Then there occurred a period of experience that is always strange to read about and hard to understand. These people day by day were blessed of God. Every night He led them with a pillar of fire. Every day He led them with a cloud. Every morning He supplied the manna. And yet they were not getting into the land of Canaan. They did not complete their journey, yet they were under God's disciplining hand, and were shut out from the greater glory of the land of Canaan. As I say, this is a strange thing.

Some of us can have in mind how under certain circumstances we turned to God. Usually when we are under pressure, in some trouble, we come to God. It seems so easy to do. It is the natural thing. We just have to have help. So we turn to God. Then surprisingly enough before very long when the pressure is off, we have all sorts of misgivings. We are not sure this is the way to go. We are not sure we are doing the right thing. We are not sure that God's will is actually necessary. We begin to figure for ourselves and make our own plans. Over and over again this will occur. It happened this way with Israel. Thirty-eight years they spent wandering about in the desert. They belonged to God and yet they did not get into the land of promise. This is the picture of so many, many persons. You could not say they were not believers. They are believers. But you cannot say they live a godly life because they do not. Where are they? In desert wanderings.

When I have tried to understand how that could be, I have thought of the growing of an apple on an apple tree. Every apple that ever was completely ripened on an apple tree began as a blossom. Not all blossoms on the apple tree become apples. Some of those blossoms drop off. For those which do not drop off, they are not apples in a moment. It takes several weeks, if not several months, for that apple to mature. In the course of that time, there can be storms. When a storm comes a lot of those green apples will be broken off the tree. When you think of a little green apple on the ground, what would you say about it? Is it an apple? Yes. It is not a pumpkin. It is not a strawberry. It is an apple. But is it an apple? Not yet. It is green. Eating of it is liable to make a person sick.

So we wonder about believers. They belong to God but they do not all walk with Him. They trust in God, yet they doubt Him. This is the way it went with Israel.

After thirty-eight years of wandering about in the desert until that whole generation except Joshua and Caleb had died, they came to the point where they could enter into the land. Moses called the people together to instruct them about how to live after they had entered. His three major messages are recorded in the book of Deuteronomy.

At the age of 120 Moses died on Mount Nebo, without having entered the land. But he had been permitted to see it from a great distance. He transferred his leadership to Joshua who was to complete the task that Moses had begun forty years before.

Pharaoh is the Egyptian name for "Emperor." It is probable that Moses dealt with several different individuals in the course of his leadership, who, each in turn, were spoken of as Pharaoh. The one Moses contended with was a typical opponent of the will of God. When Moses requested permission for the Hebrews to go into the desert to worship God, Pharaoh was not impressed. Instead of permitting them to go, he increased their work load.

At the beginning Pharaoh was encouraged by his magicians who performed similar works of wonder to deny Moses' request. Later when the plagues became more severe, the magicians recommended that Pharaoh grant Moses' request, but by now Pharaoh had become an aroused active opponent of Moses' plan.

Pharaoh offered Moses a number of inadequate compromises, but Moses declined to accept anything less than his original request. The final plague of the death of the firstborn influenced Pharaoh to yield,

and to grant permission for Israel to leave the country. He soon changed his mind and pursued the Hebrews to bring them back. He was hindered by providence from capturing the Hebrews but he pursued them into the crossing of the sea. There he was destroyed with his entire army so that the Hebrews were really free.

Chapter 5

Aaron, Miriam and Joshua

Aaron was the brother of Moses, chosen to be his spokesman in dealing with the people. Thus he is associated with Moses in the spiritual leadership of the Hebrews. When the ritual of worship in the tabernacle was set up, Aaron was the High Priest. We shall be thinking about Aaron now, that we might understand something of God's ways of doing things with His people.

When Moses was spending forty days on Mount Sinai, Aaron allowed the people to influence him, so that he actually helped them to turn away from God by making the Golden Calf, which they worshipped after the manner of the Egyptians. When Moses came down from the Mount with the tablets of stone on which had been inscribed the Ten Words of the Law of God, Moses manifested the anger of the Lord by shattering the tablets of stone on the rocks. Then he challenged Aaron for his part in this sin. Aaron claimed the people had been insistent and that he had merely done as they requested. Moses made him grind the idol into powder, dissolve it in water, and drink the solution.

Generally, Aaron collaborated with Moses. But he joined Miriam in criticizing Moses, because Moses had married an Ethiopian. When Miriam was afflicted with leprosy in judgment for her insubordination in this matter, Aaron interceded for her with Moses.

Though never noted for his wisdom in practical matters, Aaron led the Hebrews in worship as their High Priest. For this he was specially instructed, specially clothed, and specially consecrated. In the Scripture, Aaron is the classic High Priest.

Miriam was Moses' sister. It was her suggestion to Pharaoh's daughter that led to Moses' mother being chosen as the nurse for Moses. On the occasion when the Hebrews escaped from Egypt by crossing the sea, Miriam led the celebration of deliverance in song.

Miriam was associated with Aaron in his function as the leader of the worship of the people. In Micah we read:

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

Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married an Ethiopian. They claimed equal status as servants of the Lord. The Lord manifested His anger by striking Miriam with leprosy. Upon Aaron's request Moses prayed to God for Miriam and she was cleansed. However, the nation made no progress during the days she was being disciplined.

This incident shows there may be differences of opinion among the leaders. There may even be contention among the leaders of God's people, but it should be noticed from this, that when there is this kind of contention and strife among the leaders of God's people, the people do not advance. They make no progress on their journey. They did not move from where they were for the whole time that Miriam was experiencing the discipline that was placed upon her.

This speaks to our hearts and makes us realize that if we want to help people along, if we want to lead them closer to the Lord it is important that those of us who are older believers, those of us who are the ones who are teaching and preaching, need to get along with each other. While it is true that this would fit with reference to preachers, it can also be taken into the home. The same thing would be true there. If father and mother are going to lead their children in the ways of the Lord, it is very important that father and mother get together, that they manifest outwardly, openly, a fellowship and communion with each other so that those who are following can be strengthened. Just as surely as there is quarrelling among the parents, you can be satisfied there will not be any progress among the children.

Joshua was a fellow laborer with Moses, who was perhaps best known for his military prowess. He was the leader of the Hebrews when they went to battle. It is an interesting thing that even to this very

modern time, in our own day, that in the general field of military strategy, Joshua is one of the prime examples of military wisdom.

As a young man, Joshua was close to Moses. He went with Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to have communion with God. I have always been impressed when I read of the fact that on an occasion when Moses came out from the presence of God, the young man Joshua lingered behind. This means, he tarried behind in the presence of God to prolong that time of communion. While Joshua was a very great military leader, we should not overlook the fact that he was a very great spiritual leader as well. He became the leader of the people because God directed Moses to name Joshua as his successor in leading the Hebrews.

When Amalek attacked the Hebrews in the desert, Moses sent Joshua to lead the people into battle. As long as Joshua was fighting in his own strength, Amalek could prevail against him. But when Moses on the mount, aided by Aaron and Hur, prayed for him, Joshua prevailed. Thus aided by united intercessory prayer, Joshua won a notable victory over the enemies of the Lord's people.

This is a marvellous truth. It is one that we should never forget. We should pick it up where it is demonstrated here in the Old Testament, and carry it with us all the time. When people anywhere or any person is out facing the world, and that means your own people, your own family, when they are out facing the world, it would be a good thing for those of us who are at home to remember that they are facing danger. They are facing peril and we need to be faithful in prayer. If we would pray as Moses, Aaron and Hur prayed for Joshua, if we would pray for that young man or pray for that young woman out there in school, in college, in the office, wherever they happen to be, they would have more chance, more assurance of victory over the enemy in those things. United intercessory prayer counts. You and I could share in it.

When Moses commanded the Hebrews to "Go up and possess the land," twelve spies were sent to scout the situation in Canaan. Joshua was one of the twelve spies. When ten of those spies came back to report that the military situation in Canaan was impossible, that there was no chance for them to get in there with the high walled cities and the soldiers like giants, it was Joshua and Caleb who stoutly maintained that with God's help, the Hebrews would be well able to conquer the land. That is where we read such phrases: "Our God shall fight for us." That was the way in which they put it.

It was written of Joshua that he was "full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:9). Joshua was magnified in the eyes of the people as Moses had been before him.

Here is a very interesting thing. When we think about the work of Moses and the achievements of that great man, we are inclined to study him as if we wanted to make a character study of him. I can imagine Moses must have been a great man. Do not misunderstand me: he was. But this is beside the point. We are missing the important truth if we think for one moment that Moses was able by himself to do what he did. The great truth of the achievements of Moses lies in this fact that the Lord magnified Moses. The Lord built Moses up in the minds of the people. In our day and time we would say about him that the Lord built up his image to make him a great man in the eyes of the people, so that the people would yield to him and follow him as they did.

Now Joshua was to succeed him. Many a time a person will feel when he is at the point of following some other person, and it is his duty to take up where some great person has been serving that he has a sense of unfitness. He may have a sense of inability. He may think he cannot ever do this thing. He can never do as his predecessor did. That was such a good man. Or some woman will say, "I cannot do as she did. She was such a capable woman." You can always have in mind that if what you are asked to do is in the will of the Lord, the Lord can build you up in the minds of the people. He can magnify you far beyond what you are in yourself. He can make you something that the people will look to and will follow.

When Moses died, Joshua was given a direct call from God to assume the leadership of the children of Israel (Joshua 1:1-9). It makes very stirring reading when the reader takes it just for himself. The Lord

will speak to his heart:

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:6-7).

"Joshua" is a Hebrew name meaning "God is my Savior." In the Greek language this name is translated "Jesus."

Chapter 6

Judges, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson

After the death of Joshua, there was no national leader in Israel. The people lived in tribes. The unity of the nation was centered in their tabernacle worship. So far as Israel was concerned that was the one place where they felt themselves together as a nation. When serious problems arose some strong leader in one of the tribes would become prominent, and win cooperation from some of the other tribes for the particular issue at stake.

Joshua had supervised the division of the land to the several tribes, each of whom was to proceed with the conquest and the elimination of the Canaanites from that particular territory. However, in each instance the tribes compromised to allow some of the Canaanites to remain in the land. This was displeasing to God who then said He would allow these Canaanites to remain as a threat to Israel.

Over and over a cycle of events was repeated in Israel. Because of close association, the children of Israel would become friendly with the Canaanites dwelling among them. And so it followed they would forget God and worship the gods of the Canaanites, Baal and Ashtaroah, after the way of the Canaanites. Then God would withhold His favor and leave the children of Israel to themselves. Soon the Canaanites would take over the government of the country and begin to oppress the children of Israel. In their distress they would turn to God and call upon Him for help. God would send them a **Judge** who would recall the people to the worship of God and lead them in battle against the Canaanites. By the help of God, the judge would win the victory, and the land would have peace during the life of that judge. That happened over and over again.

Deborah was the one woman judge. Apparently her wisdom and judgment were a source of blessing to the people. But when the nation went to war, she was wise enough to prevail upon Barak, the king, to lead the army.

Gideon was working on his father's farm, when he was called by an angel to lead the resistance to the Midianites who oppressed the Israelites. His career was marked by several striking events. First, there was this personal encounter with the angel who told him he was chosen to lead his people against their oppressors. Then there was the occasion in praying when he tested the authenticity of his guidance by using his fleece. And there was the preparation for battle when his smaller, army of about 32,000 men was reduced to 300 men under the guidance of the Lord. Finally there was the great victory won by Gideon and his 300 over the host of the Midianites who were like "grasshoppers for multitude."

Gideon became so popular that the people wanted to make him king. This he refused saying, "The Lord shall rule over you."

Jephthah the Gileadite was a "mighty man of valor." He was the son of a harlot but he became judge. He was cast out as a youth because of his illegitimate birth and became a bandit chief. When the children of Ammon came to make war against Israel, the elders sent for Jephthah to come home and lead their forces in battle. This he consented to do if they would let him be their ruler. This was agreed and Jephthah vowed that he would offer up to God as a burnt offering of thanksgiving "whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me" (Judges 11:31). To his grief his only child, a virgin daughter, was the first to greet him. It is a very moving thing when you read this in the Bible. We read that she urged him to keep his vow, which he did.

Samson was born to his parents during their old age. His parents were instructed to bring him up as a Nazarite because in his life he was to do great things for God. In the days of his youth, Samson performed great feats of courage and strength. When he fell in love with a Philistine woman, he asked his parents to arrange that she should be his wife. When she betrayed him to the Philistines, Samson fought his way out of their clutches, and gave the woman to his companion to be his wife.

In further dealings with the Philistines, Samson roughly defeated them in various battles, while he

"judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years" (Judges 15:20).

Later Samson became involved with a harlot by the name of Delilah. She yielded to her Philistine friends to find the secret of Samson's strength. In a time of weakness Samson confided in her that the secret was in his long hair. By this trickery Samson was captured by the Philistines and made to serve as a slave. They put out his eyes and then put him to doing manual work as if he were a beast of burden. His captors mocked him.

On one occasion they planned a great festival at which time they expected to make sport of the blind Samson who had once terrorized them with his strength. In dramatic fashion Samson managed to get his hands on pillars supporting the seats of a great company of Philistines who had gathered to enjoy his shame and discomfiture, and by the help of God he was able to bring the whole structure down in ruins.

The life of Samson as a whole will cause many to have many various thoughts about the significance of this man but it is worthy of note that Samson is listed among the heroes of faith in the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews. This is a very sobering thought. The reality of the fact that a man can be a great man under God, so that God could actually use him for great things, and yet at the same time he could have weaknesses that are glaring, things that you really would not want to see happen can happen in the life of a man like that. It is a striking thing also by way of revealing the graciousness of God and the kindness of God because for one wrong deed, He did not disqualify Samson. He led him through in his lifetime and used this man in a great way.

The whole period of the Judges lasted about 400 years. Of this time it was written:

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

When we think about all the things that happened during this period of time in the history of Israel, we will remember how at the very beginning they had been told that there was to be no association with, they were to have no dealings with, the pagan people round about them. They were warned about this and they had failed to carry out their instructions. I know many of us will be concerned because of the fact that the Scriptures seem to indicate that God told Israel to destroy the Canaanites and we have a feeling that that is violent. It is. I am not going to go into it all the way except I would say this: while today we do not have that happening between person and person, something like that has to happen in a person's own soul, in his own life. As far as I would be concerned as a human being, seeking to walk in the ways of God, the new nature and the old nature are contrary one to the other. In their conflict the individual believer is asked to yield to that which is of the Spirit, and to deny that which is of the flesh.

How many there are who start out doing the things of the Lord but leave one aspect of their personality unyielded. There are so many things people hold out. They give everything over to God but not that one thing. And right there Almighty God, looking down upon my heart and yours, is actually displeased when I do not turn everything over to Him. This can follow in my affairs just as it did with Israel. That very thing that is allowed to remain in the heart and in the consciousness of the individual can become the very source of trouble that individual will have.

I am inclined to think that is what happened to Judas. In considering the life of Judas as a whole, I have been quite sure in my own mind that Judas never had in mind that he was going to betray Jesus of Nazareth. But there was one thing that Judas never did let go of: his love of money. And in the last analysis that was what got him. And for the sake of the love of thirty pieces of silver, he betrayed his own Lord.

And so with any of us: we must be careful to make sure that as far as our human nature is concerned that we do not leave anything out from our yielding to the Lord when we yield ourselves to Him. We must turn it all over to Him, good or bad. That may be one of the reasons why oftentimes there will be some people who have never been any good at all, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; and becoming godly persons. If the full story were known it is altogether likely that when they turned over to God, even though

their lives had been wicked and evil, they turned over everything, every part of it. The result was that God completely blessed them and brought them into His way. Remember these words at the very close of the book of Judges:

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

That is where the trouble came.

Chapter 7

Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon

The birth of **Samuel** is one of the stirring miracle stories of the Bible. After his mother Hannah had been for many years barren, her urgent prayer was granted and Samuel was born. In keeping her vow Hannah brought Samuel to Eli the High Priest while he was still a child, that he might serve in the Lord's house.

While he was still only a lad, Samuel was told by an angel that he should succeed Eli in the priesthood. Samuel, in due time, became a good judge. He served in this function as judge of the people and priest in their spiritual exercises for many years.

When the people clamored for a king, Samuel found and anointed Saul. When it became apparent that Saul would not qualify to please God always and permanently, Samuel found David and anointed him to take Saul's throne.

Samuel had not approved of the plans to have a king, telling the nation that God was their King. Israel did not need any man; they had God. But the people persisted. They wanted to have a king like the other nations round about them. God instructed Samuel to find them a king, and present him. Then he was to help that king in his office. This is a most interesting situation. Samuel's judgment, which was wise, and his opinion, which was sound and good, was to be set aside; and Samuel was told to share in a program that he did not approve, that he knew was going to bring trouble and disaster. He was not only to share in that program and work along with the people, but he was actually to help them avoid the very dangers that he knew were there. Can you see what humility this required in Samuel, to yield himself in this kind of situation? With his own judgment set aside, his own opinions ignored, yet his service was requested and desired and taken. That is the way it was with Samuel.

Samuel found Saul and anointed him to be king. When Saul became proud and disobedient, Samuel found David and anointed him to be king.

In a time of uncertainty and general confusion, Samuel stood out over all others as a man who had dealings with God. In a day of growing darkness, Samuel was a bright light seeming unshaken and unshakeable.

Saul was the first king of Israel. He was found and anointed by Samuel, and began his career as king with a display of humility, wisdom, and courage. Success in battle, however, made him vain. We all remember how the Bible describes Saul as a man of great physique. He stood head and shoulders above his companions. Apparently, he was a great personal warrior. He had good judgment and he had plenty of courage. He made, actually, an ideal king.

On one occasion when waiting for Samuel to lead in the worship of God before they were going to enter into a military campaign, Saul became impatient and forced himself to take Samuel's place in the ritual, so that he acted in place of Samuel in the exercise of the worship of God. For such irreverence, Samuel told Saul that his time on the throne would be limited, and that no one from his family would ever succeed him.

On another occasion, Saul failed to obey God. He had been instructed by Samuel to destroy all the Amalekites and their goods. But Saul had taken some of the booty, the spoils of war, for himself. He had spared the best of the cattle and the best of the sheep, and he had spared the life of Agag, king of the Amalekites. Samuel told Saul "To obey is better than sacrifice." But God did not moderate His judgment of Saul. Saul ended his life apart from God, as a suicide in the course of a battle in which his son, Jonathan, was killed.

David was anointed to be king of Israel by Samuel while Saul was still on the throne. He was too young to go to war, but David became prominent by killing Goliath. Even though he was only a lad, he became the one everyone talked about and sang about, because he had killed Goliath, the champion of the

Philistines. David became so popular that the jealousy of Saul, the king, was aroused and Saul tried to kill him. David realized this and ran away. He became a fugitive, but he remained faithful to Israel. Even in the days while he was being hunted from pillar to post, David was always ready to defend the Israelites against the enemy; he was always available for any service. Several times he had the opportunity to kill Saul but he would not do it. He said he would not raise his hand against the Lord's anointed.

When Saul killed himself in battle, David was crowned king over Judah, and engaged in a seven year war with the house of Saul before he was crowned king of all Israel.

At a time when kings went to war, David tarried in Jerusalem and sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. When confronted by Nathan the prophet about this sin, David repented. Nathan told him that he was forgiven the sin, but the sword would never leave his house.

In the days that followed, it was David's grief to realize that one of his sons molested one of his sisters, and was then killed by another son. Later Absalom, one of the sons of David, conspired to usurp David's throne, and was killed in the decisive battle that ended that rebellion.

David wanted to build a temple to worship God. He was not permitted to do this. However, he was permitted to gather the materials that his son might do the building. David was given a covenant in which God promised that one of his descendants would be King of Kings on his throne forever.

David was the greatest king Israel ever had. Before he died, David appointed his son **Solomon** to be king. Solomon carried out David's plan and built the temple, the most glorious building that Israel ever saw. When asked by God to name what he wanted to help him to perform his task, Solomon chose wisdom. This pleased God so much that God said He would not only give him wisdom but He would also give him prestige, fame and power. Solomon is noted in history as the wisest man. He actually brought into existence the most glorious age or era that Israel ever had.

Now we turn to the Scriptures to read the sad aftermath and this is the way we read it:

But king Solomon loved many strange women . . . For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods (I Kings 11:1, 4).

And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice (I Kings 11:9).

And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite: he was of the king's seed in Edom (I King 11:14).

It had been Solomon's achievement to live at peace with his neighbors. This peace continued until Solomon angered God by the way he turned away from worshipping God to worship the gods of the heathen. When this happened, God raised up an adversary, Hadad the Edomite. God raised up other enemies outside Israel, and later also opposition within the nation under a young man called Jeroboam. So the later years of Solomon's life are marked with conflict and strife.

You can sum up Solomon's career very simply by just thinking of "from glory to grief."

Chapter 8

Ahab, Elijah, Elisha, Jehosaphat, Jehu, Jezebel

Ahab was king of Israel. He knew the God of Abraham and of David, but he did not obey Him. He married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre, who worshipped Baal. Ahab built an altar in Jerusalem at which to worship Baal that he might please Jezebel, and so he encouraged Baal worship in Israel.

Ahab promoted friendship with the king of Judah and enticed him to share in a joint campaign against Syria.

He was openly opposed by Elijah the prophet who predicted a long drought in the land as proof of Elijah's authenticity as a prophet of the Lord.

Ahab allowed Jezebel to urge him to take the vineyard from a poor man called Naboth.

He seems to have been a strong, able man but he was wicked, and led his people into sin. This is how Ahab was evaluated in the Bible:

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel (I Kings 21:25-26).

Elijah was a prophet in Israel at the time of Ahab. A prophet was a man who exercised himself to declare the Word of God to the people. Usually, he was a man who had personal spiritual communion with God and he would receive from God some message of authority that he would deliver to the people in God's name. Elijah fearlessly opposed Ahab for encouraging the worship of Baal. Because there was some question as to whether or not Elijah was really a prophet of the true God, Elijah announced that there would be no rainfall in that country until he said so. This introduced a drought that lasted three and one-half years, until God led Elijah to bring the whole matter of the faith of the people to a public test on Mount Carmel.

God showed openly there that Elijah was a true prophet by hearing his prayer and sending fire from heaven upon Elijah's offering in the sight of all the people. Elijah then led in the killing of the prophets of Baal who had opposed him.

When Jezebel heard what Elijah had done, she pursued him with her soldiers to kill him. After performing three last tasks assigned to him by the Lord, Elijah was taken up into heaven with chariots of fire.

Elisha was the prophet who succeeded Elijah. He had been called by Elijah to follow him, and he was present when Elijah was taken up into heaven. At that time, when Elijah was taken up into heaven, the mantle of Elijah was put on Elisha. (By the way would you mind if I gave you a very simple rule of thumb by which you remember which prophet is which? When you look at the word "Elijah" and look at the word "Elisha," notice that "j" in Elijah comes before "s" in Elisha. That will be enough for you to know that Elijah was the first one and Elisha was the second one.)

Elisha is famous for doing many miracles. I think of all the scriptural record in the Old Testament probably no man was involved in so many wonderful works as was this prophet, Elisha. He was a staunch prophet of the Word of God. Apparently, he feared no man and certainly no king. He warned Jehosaphat, king of Judah, against his fellowship with Ahab, king of Israel. Jehosaphat was a godly man. Ahab was wicked and Elisha confronted Jehosaphat and challenged his association with Ahab. He told him he had no reason to make friends with the enemies of God. Elisha predicted the retreat of the Syrians from the siege of Samaria. When the wicked king of Syria pursued him to kill him, Elisha prayed to God to open the eyes of his young servant that he might see how the hosts of the Lord encamped round about his servant.

Elisha anointed Jehu to be a king of Israel, and encouraged him to take over the throne that he might

do the will of the Lord.

Jehosaphat was king of Judah and was a good man. He was king of Judah at the time of Ahab and afterward. He was a godly man whereas Ahab had been wicked. He served the Lord, and we read he walked "in the first ways of his father, David" (II Chronicles 17:3). He instituted a program of religious education that was amazingly modern in its form, sending public instructors throughout the land to teach the law of God to the people, that they might know what they were to believe.

Jehosaphat had one failing: he made friends with ungodly persons. He represents one of those strange sights you will sometimes see: a real good man being friendly with a scoundrel, not because he gives in to the scoundrel's wickedness, but because he is just the kind of a person that is gentle and kind. When Jehosaphat joined Ahab to make war against Syria, he was warned by Micaiah, the prophet, not to do it, but he did. Only by the grace of God was Jehosaphat spared in battle.

Jehu, grandson of Nimshi, was anointed by one of Elisha's assistants to be king of Israel, to take over. He was an energetic, violent man who moved with dispatch to take over the government. The wounded King Joram was in Jezreel when Jehu came upon him. His cousin, King Ahaziah of Judah was visiting him there. Jehu killed both kings, King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah, and went on into the city to find Jezebel. She taunted him as being the servant who had killed his master, but we do not read that Jehu even answered her. He simply commanded his soldiers to throw her down from the upper room where she was. She was thrown down upon the stone and then he drove his horses and chariots over her killing her, and the dogs licked up the blood of Jezebel from off the stones as the prophet had predicted. After this Jehu arranged the killing of the seventy sons of Ahab. Finally, he lured all the worshippers of Baal into one large assembly where he killed them. It is a bloody story. It is a rough, mean story, but in II Kings this amazing sentence is written:

Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel (II Kings 10:28).

In this sharp fashion Jehu performed the amputation in Israel's affairs. Baal worship was permanently destroyed.

Jezebel is the notorious pagan daughter of the king of Tyre, who married Ahab to become queen of Israel. She worshipped Baal all her life: she never gave it up. She brought the priests of Baal and of Ashtaroah to Jerusalem to lead the people of Israel in the worship of these heathen gods. She encouraged Ahab to oppose Elijah, the prophet of God, and pursued that prophet to kill him after he had overcome the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. She prompted Ahab to arrange the violent death of Naboth, that he might confiscate that poor man's vineyard.

Jezebel was the mother of Athaliah who married one of the king's sons in Judah. During that time in the history of these two nations these two ruling houses (families) became so friendly with each other, they intermarried and you will find many of the same names in each family tree making it very confusing to read. When Athaliah's husband was killed by Jehu, Athaliah moved quickly to kill all the rest of the royal family and to take over the throne. As a matter of fact, she missed one boy whose nurse hid him out and in time the priest Jehoiada produced the boy as Joash to be king at seven years of age. Jezebel was a wicked woman, and by herself was responsible for much of the grief suffered by Israel in her time.

Chapter 9

Hezekiah, Isaiah, Amos, Hosea

Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king of Judah. He seems to have deliberately set himself to serve God to the fullest extent of his ability. It is a refreshing thing to read of a young man doing this sort of thing.

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city (II Kings 18:3-8).

This is the strong record of a young man who set his heart to serve God.

The first work Hezekiah undertook was to repair the doors of the temple. It is obvious that if the doors of the temple were in a state of disrepair people were not going in and out. The house of worship had been long neglected. Hezekiah restored it as it should be. He then prepared the priests to be worthy to lead in worship. After that he called on all the children of Israel in both Israel and Judah to come to the temple and observe the Passover. This shows that he ignored the division of the nation. He knew that all the people of Israel had one God, and he called upon them all to come to worship. Many treated the invitation with scorn. But some heeded and came from the northern kingdom as well as the southern kingdom to join in the worship of God. Those who gathered, entered into a joyous celebration and we read:

So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem (II Chronicles 30:26).

At the time that Hezekiah came to the throne, Assyria conquered the northern kingdom, Israel, and carried those people away as captives. When the Assyrians approached Judah, Hezekiah paid tribute to Assyria in silver and gold to avoid military conflict. But he was unsuccessful in that plan. The Assyrians besieged Jerusalem.

Hezekiah then sent to Isaiah the prophet for advice. Isaiah told him not to yield, to put his trust in God. The Assyrians sent a letter to Hezekiah demanding surrender. Hezekiah carried the letter into the presence of God and laid it before the Lord in the temple. He was assured that God would help him. That very night a plague struck the Assyrians and they returned to their own country.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death (II Kings 20:1).

Isaiah came and told Hezekiah his time had come; Hezekiah was to die. The king turned his face to the wall and wept. He pleaded with God to give him additional years to live. God heard his prayer and directed Isaiah how to treat the illness of the king. At the same time, God turned the shadow on the sun's dial backward ten degrees to show that this was a real genuine case of the Lord hearing and answering prayer. This miracle became very famous. People came from far and wide to see the sundial where the shadow had been turned backward ten degrees.

When some messengers from Babylon came to bring congratulations to Hezekiah and to see the evidence of God's blessing by looking at that sundial, Hezekiah became vain and proudly displayed to them all his wealth, his gold and silver. Then Isaiah came and met Hezekiah, asking him who those men were. Hezekiah told him they were visitors and that he had shown his wealth to them. Isaiah told Hezekiah that those men actually were spies and that Babylon would come and destroy Jerusalem and the

nation. Every single thing that he had shown them, he was going to lose. This is a classic example of folly on the part of a believer. Hezekiah's record would have been without blemish if he had just let God have His way and had died fifteen years sooner, when God wanted to take him out of this world. As a matter of fact, it was during that time that Manasseh was born, and Manasseh became the most wicked king that Judah ever had. It is true that in his later life Manasseh repented; but it is still a matter of record that because of the sins of Manasseh Judah was eventually to be destroyed.

Hezekiah had been foolish after such a remarkable start and a great record. Then he had been so eager to stay on after his time. During those added years occurred the event that blemished his record.

Isaiah had been called the prince of the prophets. A prophet is a man who learns to know the mind of God that he may declare it to the people. At the time of the deterioration of Israel and Judah, when Baal worship had been tolerated, God raised up mighty prophets such as Micaiah, Elijah, Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. These men were fearless to declare the mind of God and to bear witness to the truth.

Isaiah preached during the time when Assyria destroyed Israel. He advised his king, Hezekiah, how to face the threat of Assyria. The book of Isaiah is the longest of the prophetic books: it has 66 chapters. His special burden was the sin of the people of God. In his call he was given insight into the holiness of God, and he was overcome with a consciousness of the sin of his people. He preached sternly that devotion to God must be inward and genuine. In his time public worship was largely a matter of empty form. Isaiah tried to warn the people of the peril of apostasy.

Isaiah revealed much truth about the remnant who would inherit the promises of God to Israel as a people. God had promised Israel that He would keep them and that He would bless them. Now Israel had become so wayward they were to be destroyed, but there would be a remnant. Some people would believe, and these would be the ones who would inherit the promises of God. Isaiah described the coming kingdom of the Messiah, and predicted what Messiah would do. Much of the book of Isaiah can be well understood as a message to the remnant which Isaiah received and wrote by way of prediction of what was to happen.

Amos is known chiefly as the writer of the book which has his name. He was a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea and Micah. He was a herdsman with no training as a priest or a teacher. He is an example of a man who was called to serve God by preaching, even though he did not want to do this. He preached a heavy message of judgment because of his burden that the social injustices so prevalent in Israel and Judah were sinful in the eyes of God. He used the figure of a plumbline to show that God wanted His people to be upright.

Hosea also preached in the time of Isaiah, Amos and Micah. He is famous because his own domestic life was overruled to serve as an object lesson to the people of God. The actual remarkable story of Hosea is that after Hosea's wife had lived with him for a time, she forsook him for other men, and became a harlot. When her beauty was gone so that no one would hire her as a harlot, Hosea went out on the street, bought her on the open market, and brought her back to his home and reinstated her as his wife. It is not remarkable when you come to think of it that there are many students of the Bible that try by one means or another to explain this away as if it had not happened. It is hard for righteous men at times to believe that such a thing could be true, but the better thing to do is to read it and believe it.

Hosea used his own family life to preach to God's people that even though they had forsaken God, even as Hosea's wife had forsaken him, to whom they had been betrothed God would yet receive them and bless them. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" is one of the remarkable statements he made. God would take them back to be His own.

Throughout the generations this truth has actually seemed incredible to many earnest students when they look at it in Hosea's own actual experience, but there seems no ground to doubt that this is just exactly what Hosea lived and preached.

Chapter 10

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel

The servants of God who were called the prophets, who brought the Word of the Lord to the people, were often involved in the very situations which beset God's people at that time. The fortunes of the people would rise and fall in the course of events, and the men who wrote the Scriptures would be called upon to interpret the situation faithfully in whatever was happening.

The history of Israel as a nation had its pioneering days during the exodus from Egypt. The nation became established in Canaan and developed with strength under a succession of kings. Priests, prophets and kings shared in the leadership, but the relationship of Israel with God deteriorated. Religious practices became routine, formal and insincere. Sin grew rampant in spite of the prophets and the efforts of good kings.

Jeremiah has been called "the weeping prophet." There is no doubt that the book of Lamentations indicates the general tone of his ministry. But to understand this, one needs to recognize the times in which he lived. Jeremiah loved his people; he loved Jerusalem. There is no indication to suppose that Jeremiah was a sick man, or that something was bothering him that a somber tone of his message came out of his own personal being. Jeremiah lived through the final collapse of Judah. He loved Judah. That nation was crumbling. He was there when Nebuchadnezzar captured and destroyed Jerusalem. He loved Jerusalem and he saw it destroyed.

Jeremiah foresaw what was happening. He knew the time had come when God would permit the Babylonians to conquer the land. He could not urge the people to resist. He knew that resistance was hopeless. But he knew, too, that their captivity would be temporary, seventy years to be exact. He bought property and recorded the deeds of transfer registering his ownership because he or his heirs would be back in the land and living there again as a nation.

When Jeremiah was called to prophesy, he shrank from the responsibility. He knew that hypocrisy prevailed in the land, and that there was much sin among the leaders. If he were to become a prophet of God, he would have to tell it. He would have to set it out. He made the excuse to God that he could not preach because he was only a child. But God said:

Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

In the course of his lifetime God guided Jeremiah never to marry because he was not to be responsible for bringing any child into the sad state of affairs that existed in the world.

Nebuchadnezzar appreciated Jeremiah's open honesty at the time of his conquest of Jerusalem. He offered Jeremiah favorable quarters in Babylon, the capital city, but Jeremiah refused this privilege, choosing to stay in Jerusalem with the Jews in their poverty, because he could minister to them there.

When the Jews planned to escape from Babylon by moving to Egypt, Jeremiah preached against it. He warned them that the Babylonians could go down into Egypt and bring them back which actually in fact happened. But when the people went down into Egypt, Jeremiah went with them that he might minister the Word of God to the people. Jeremiah was a kindly, considerate, compassionate man who wanted to help his people, but who had the sad duty of being the one who should bring in the death sentence. He told his people they would be destroyed because they had disobeyed God.

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet to a group of displaced persons. When Babylon captured Jerusalem and destroyed it, they took many of the Jews captive to other parts of the Babylonian empire. Some of them were taken into the Euphrates valley where they lived in a colony. Ezekiel was in such a place. The people were in despair and bitter. They liked to hear Ezekiel preach because they said he had "a silver tongue." Evidently he had an energetic delivery. We read that he was told to "clap his hands and stamp his

feet" when he preached. But the people would not believe him. God told him the foreheads of the people were hard, but He also told Ezekiel He would make Ezekiel's forehead harder than theirs. They would butt their heads together but Ezekiel was not to retreat. He was not to compromise any part of what God had revealed to him. The people in Ezekiel's time were pessimistic and skeptical. They felt that God had failed them. God showed Ezekiel the truth. He showed him by a number of insights in visions what the situation in Israel had actually been.

The vision in Ezekiel's opening chapter is an eloquent representation of the truth that "the ways of God are past finding out." You can look at that vision and read it through, but I would defy you to imagine what that looked like. This is what Israel saw. The ways of God are past finding out. Later Ezekiel was shown in a vision that it was the Jews in Jerusalem who had actually secretly turned to pagan ideas in worship, that God was dealing with. God would not honor such people with His presence. It might be true that God had not blessed them, and for that reason they were taken captive, but the fact was it was their own responsibility for the way in which they had been doing.

Throughout the whole book of Ezekiel, there is much light and Gospel truth. One can read the book and be blessed by many aspects in it but there is much in there that will remain obscure because it is written in figurative language which deals with a time and a culture with which we are not acquainted.

Daniel was a captive Jew in a foreign land in Babylon. This is the third person in difficult circumstances. Jeremiah was in Jerusalem at the time of its destruction. Ezekiel was a prisoner in a foreign land in a colony of displaced persons dealing with people who had become pessimistic in despair. Ezekiel's way of dealing with his situation was by telling them, "You personally did not do the will of God. You actually turned away from God and He is dealing with you accordingly."

Daniel was a captive Jew in Babylon. He was chosen by a system of competitive testing very much as we have today aptitude tests in deciding whether or not a person is able to manage the program of a university. Daniel passed the tests with top honors. He was put on a government scholarship to study programming in government affairs. He became the chief coordinator of the federal civil service of his day. He served in that civil position through three administrations: in the time that Nebuchadnezzar was king, and in the time that Belshazzar was king, and he continued to serve when Cyrus the Persian conquered the country. Cyrus kept Daniel as his administrator.

At one time Darius was tricked into passing a law that required everyone in the empire to worship no other god but the king. Daniel had never concealed the fact that he worshipped the God of Abraham as the one true God; and so in due time it was found that he continued to pray three times a day to the God of Jerusalem. In due time he was cast into the lion's den. That is one of the heroic stories of the Bible.

As Daniel read the prophecy of Jeremiah, he noted that the time of the captivity was to be seventy years and that the seventy years had elapsed. He began to pray that God would lead the Jews back to Judea where they would have the privilege of rebuilding the city. God answered that prayer, although in so doing he did not use Daniel as one of the leaders.

Chapter 11

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The history of Israel as it is recorded in the Bible gives us the story of the downfall, the deterioration, of that nation. First, the nation was divided into Israel and Judah. The collapse of the northern nation, Israel, before the hosts of Assyria took place first. The collapse of the southern nation, Judah, before the hosts of Babylon took place in the time of Jeremiah. He had predicted that Judah would remain in captivity for seventy years and then would be restored to their own land. During this period of the captivity, Persia conquered Babylon and became the ruling empire.

Persia followed a different policy in seeking to become a strong, unified nation. Instead of moving people away from their ancestral lands to live in new places where they might be integrated with all the others into one homogeneous group, Persia decreed that the ethnic groups should return to their own portions of the country. Thus we read that Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Judah and to rebuild Jerusalem. Not all the Jews wanted to return. In the course of seventy years I am sure a good many of them had become established in the new surroundings. A large company of Jews under Zerubbabel returned and began to rebuild Jerusalem. This aroused opposition from traditional enemies and the work was stopped for a time.

But research revealed the decree of Cyrus, and so Darius authorized the work of the rebuilding to continue, and actually contributed provisions for getting the work done. When the temple was rebuilt, there was great joy among the people. But some older people remembered the dimensions of Solomon's temple, and they wept when they saw how much smaller this new, rebuilt temple would be.

Ezra was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses." He came from Babylon to the rebuilt Jerusalem to establish the public worship of God. We read:

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments (Ezra 7:10).

He received a letter of authority from King Artaxerxes, and prepared a contingent of Jews who had returned with him to Jerusalem.

Ezra was mortified to find that some of the Jews who had come back to Jerusalem had become friendly with and had intermarried with other nations contrary to the principles which they had adopted. He called the people together for a time of confession and repentance and humbly cast himself and his people upon the mercy of God.

Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, we have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it (Ezra 10:1-4).

In this way, Ezra was challenged to take action in leading the people to get right with God. This he did. The people responded with humble contrition to seek God's favor.

Nehemiah was a young Jew in the service of the king of Persia in the palace at Shushan. He was interested in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but when he heard of the dilapidated state of the walls and gates, he became burdened. He felt that he wanted to help to restore the walls, so that Jerusalem would not appear so disreputable.

He prayerfully requested permission from the king to go back to Jerusalem and to try and help in

rebuilding the wall. He was given that permission, and given authority to secure materials for the work. He came back to Jerusalem and carefully organized the people so that everyone worked on rebuilding the wall in front of his own house. The work was started with vigor. Opponents tried to discourage him first with ridicule, and finally with guile. They tried to entice him into some form of activity that would delay the work but Nehemiah was resolute, and pushed the work to a successful conclusion.

He shared with Ezra the leadership of the great assembly when the people were gathered to hear the reading of the law of God. We read:

And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose {Nehemiah 8:4}.

Then again another passage gives this record:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:8).

It seems obvious that our public services would undoubtedly be greatly benefited if this could be carried out by those of us who are in the pulpit today. Just think of it. "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." You could not get a better description of what a faithful minister of the Word would do.

Esther was a Jewish maiden chosen by the king to be his queen. Her uncle, Mordecai, was an important man in public affairs.

When Vashti the queen displeased the king, she was put away and Esther was chosen to take her place. At first Esther did not reveal that she was a Jewess.

Haman was promoted to be the king's chief deputy. He became offended at the way in which Mordecai the Jew refused to be impressed by the importance of Haman. When Haman knew that Mordecai the Jew did not recognize any other god but the Lord God of his fathers, Haman conceived a scheme to get rid of Mordecai. He influenced the king to sign a decree that at a certain date everybody in the kingdom would be required to bow down to the national god on the command of the king with the peril of being destroyed if he did not do so.

Mordecai knew what this decree meant. It meant that all the faithful Jews would be massacred. Putting on an old garment, Mordecai outside the palace attracted Esther's attention who was living inside the palace by begging at the palace gate. He managed to get a personal message through to Esther telling her of the impending threat of the king's decree and told her:

Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape In the king's house, more than all the Jews (Esther 4:13).

Esther sent him word to get his folks together to pray for her. She and her maidens would fast and pray and then she would venture to go in to request the king for relief for the Jews, "and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

As matters turned out, the king issued another decree which gave the Jews respite and Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built to destroy Mordecai.

This book is notable because it is a classic description of the situation where there is animosity and hatred of the Jews in another country. We remember now that so far as the Jews are concerned, for many generations they have been in a world where they had no homeland of their own and were always strangers in a foreign land. Esther has become an honored name in Jewish culture. Hadassah was the Hebrew name for Esther, and there are Hadassah clubs and societies among the Jews everywhere to this day.

The name of God does not occur in the book of Esther which was written at a time when the Israelites were living in a society where God is not honored, and they were under control of the authorities and apparently they did not want to agitate the persecution that would follow.

Chapter 12

Zacharias, Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary

Zacharias was a priest in the days of Herod, the King of Judea. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron.

And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years (Luke 1:7).

One day an angel of the Lord appeared unto Zacharias "standing on the right side of the altar of incense" and said to him:

Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John (Luke 1:13).

Zacharias could not believe this, and was stricken dumb because he doubted God's message. In due time the child was born, and was named John. This one was afterward known as John the Baptist.

Elisabeth was the wife of Zacharias, the priest and became the mother of John the Baptist. She was the cousin of Mary of Bethlehem. When Mary received the astonishing news from Gabriel that she would give birth to a child before she had been with her husband, she went immediately to Elisabeth to confide in her. This indicates the close friendship between these two women.

Elisabeth recognized at once that Mary was "blessed among women." When Elisabeth's child was born, the people wanted to name him Zacharias after his father, but Elisabeth said "No! His name is John."

Joseph was a direct descendant of David. It seems he was the legal heir to the throne of David, though it appears he was barred from that privilege by a curse that had been pronounced upon Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:30). Nevertheless, even if that curse is recognized, it would appear his heir would have the *legal* right to the throne. Since Jesus of Nazareth was not born of Joseph's seed, and yet was the firstborn in the family, it follows in a rather neat way that Jesus of Nazareth had the legal right to the throne as the firstborn in Joseph's household; and also was eligible as one of David's seed.

Joseph was betrothed to Mary of the house of David. Before he had taken her as his wife,

... she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:18-20).

After the child was born,

The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him (Matthew 2:13).

Joseph went down into Egypt with his wife and the young child, and was there until the death of Herod.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life (Matthew 2:19-20).

Joseph did this, finally settling in the city of Nazareth. When Jesus of Nazareth was known in public, He was spoken of as a Nazarene.

When Jesus of Nazareth came to be presented at the temple at twelve years of age, Joseph was still living with Mary as her husband.

Mary was of the house and lineage of David. While she was betrothed to Joseph and before their marriage was consummated, Gabriel the archangel appeared to her personally, and told her she had found

favor with God: and that she would give birth to a child and that that child would be the Holy One of God (Luke 1:31-38).

Immediately Mary went to visit with Elisabeth. Elisabeth recognized Mary as the one who would be the mother of the long awaited Messiah, and assured Mary,

Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord (Luke 1:45).

Mary visited with Elisabeth about three months and returned to her own house. At that time there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, "that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1). All went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. Joseph with Mary went up from Galilee unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:6-7).

Angels came to herald the birth of this child. They appeared to shepherds watching their flocks by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:9-14).

The shepherds told everyone what had happened to them and what was told them concerning this child but we read this record, "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

When Jesus of Nazareth was twelve years old, He was taken up to the temple to worship. When His family started home He was not with them, because He stayed behind to talk to the leaders there. When Mary and Joseph came back, they found Him in the temple. Mary chided Him for lingering behind. He went along home with them and was subject unto them.

At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, Mary came to Jesus and told Him, "They have no wine." Then she told the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." It would seem from this that in some way or other Mary seemed to know that her Son, Jesus of Nazareth, had unusual powers. He was able to do things that others could not do. When she came to Him and told Him that they had no wine, it appears that she felt that He could do something about it. When she told the servants "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it," she seemed to feel that He would do something about it.

When Jesus of Nazareth came into open clash with the Pharisees, because He told them that they were superficial and insincere, a great disturbance was caused among the people. His mother, Mary, sent word to Him that she and His brethren wanted Him to come home with them. He sent word back to her that those who did the will of God were His mother and His brethren. This might seem to indicate that Jesus of Nazareth had perhaps turned away from Mary, but when He was hanging on the cross, the last thing He did was to assign His mother to John for her keeping. Apparently, Joseph was not any longer with them at that time. Jesus of Nazareth called John up to the cross and said to him, "Behold thy mother." He called His mother over and looking at John said, "Behold thy son." Taking care of her was one deed He did not neglect even when He was dying.

When the disciples were gathered for prayer in the Upper Room after the resurrection, we read that Mary the mother of Jesus was in the company.

Chapter 13

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the son of Zacharias, the Priest, and Elisabeth. He was born in their old age. His birth had been announced by an angel. Because Zacharias could not believe what he had been told about the birth of this child, he was stricken dumb until John was born.

John lived the life of a Nazarite, and grew up in the country. His clothing was that of a peasant, and his diet was that of a poor man. He began preaching at an early age, and was already widely known by the time he was thirty years old.

His mother was a cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. Before John was born, the angel Gabriel had told Mary that she would bear a son before she was married to Joseph. When Mary heard this she immediately came to visit Elisabeth and spent three months with her.

When John began to preach, he called upon his hearers to repent. He did not discredit the temple ritual, but he emphasized that the worshippers must be sincere. He knew he was to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah. He did not know who Christ was, but he was convinced that Christ was coming; and that when He came, John would recognize Him. The theme of his preaching was "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent ye and believe the Gospel."

John the Baptist was so famous that it is written "All Jerusalem went out to hear him." He called for practical response. When the people asked what they should do, he replied "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." To the publicans he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." To the soldiers he said "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." With such plain, direct preaching John reached to the very heart of things and he himself said that the axe now would be laid to the root of the tree.

Herod the king was much impressed by John's preaching, but he put John in prison because John criticized the king because of his domestic life. During his imprisonment, John sent two disciples to seek out Jesus of Nazareth and to ask Him "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Many interpreters have understood this to indicate that John had begun to doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was really the Christ. But such a view seems to be untrue.

Peter wrote that the prophets of the Old Testament time were uncertain in themselves about the coming of the Messiah. They searched in themselves diligently:

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:11-12).

The Old Testament Scriptures predicted that Messiah would suffer, as in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah: He would suffer unto death. The Old Testament Scriptures also predicated that the Messiah would rule as King of Kings and Lord of all. The interpreters, the rabbis, could not understand how this would be. The prophets themselves could not understand how this could be. At the time of John the Baptist many rabbis thought that the only way to interpret the Scriptures was to understand that there would be two Messiahs. The first one would come to die as a servant, and the second one would come to rule as a King. John the Baptist had identified Jesus of Nazareth as "The Lamb of God." He would die for the sins of the people. It was in that sense that He was a Lamb. He would be the sacrificial Lamb. John was now interested in whether this same Jesus of Nazareth would also be the King to rule.

Jesus of Nazareth took the two disciples of John with Him as He went out to minister. Then in their sight He did works of wonder which the Old Testament said Messiah the King would do. These miracles were proof that He was truly the King of Kings, the Lord of all. Then Jesus of Nazareth added speaking to these "committee members," these "delegates," that when they went back to John they were to tell him the

poor have the Gospel preached unto them. That was another mark of the Messiah. This was also one of the signs of the King. We can be quite sure that John the Baptist went to his death in the joyous realization that he had truly prepared the way for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

While John was in prison, Jesus of Nazareth said about him that John was more than a prophet.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater one than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:11).

John the Baptist lived and died before Pentecost. He could be confused about Old Testament prophecy saying that Messiah would suffer unto death and also that He should rule forever, because he had not seen the resurrection. Today we know that the Lamb that was slain is the One that sits on the throne of glory. Also, in John's time the Holy Spirit had not yet come, as He did later at Pentecost.

In Paul's travels as an apostle, he came to a group of believers in Ephesus, who had been won to faith in the Lord by the preaching of Apollos. Upon inquiry Paul learned that these disciples did not know about the Holy Spirit. He further learned that they had only the truth as far as it had been known by John the Baptist. That was what Apollos had. Thus they would know that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the "Lamb of God," because John the Baptist said He was. They would know that if they repented they would be forgiven. But they would not know of the Holy Spirit having come on the day of Pentecost, so they could live in His grace and power, because John the Baptist died before that happened. Apollos only had the teaching of John the Baptist to go by. What John the Baptist knew was true, but it was not all the truth.

Many feel that the Scripture which says "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5) is emphasizing that the ministry of John the Baptist (who baptized with water) and the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (who baptizes with the Holy Spirit) are both involved and essential in sound spiritual experience. "Repent and believe the Gospel" seems to be the two pronged thrust of the Gospel. The soul must repent in confessing sins and realizing that the worshipper is a sinner, and then the soul must believe in Jesus Christ as the One who gave Himself as sacrifice for sins. He is the crucified One, and He is the risen Savior and the reigning Lord. Believing in Him leads one through to that.

When his disciples came to John the Baptist and told him that Jesus of Nazareth was drawing "all men unto Him," so that more people were listening to Jesus of Nazareth than listened to John the Baptist, John rejoiced. He told them that the friend of the Bridegroom rejoices when he hears about the Bridegroom. Then he went on to use these remarkable words: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

John the Baptist remains for all time a wonderful symbol of the necessary separation from all that is worldly for the coming of the grace of God into the heart. Today believers have in mind that in and through Christ Jesus they are going to receive the grace of God. They have in mind that God will help them, that God will bless them. God will work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. This is what they expect from Him. They need to remember that according to their faith it will be unto them. So they must believe the promises of God to be blessed.

What are these promises of God? Christ Jesus will save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. How would anyone be inclined to come? Only when that person is ready to confess that he is a sinner, and understands that in himself he is sinful, that he is unable, that he needs reconciliation with God. He needs his former sins to be carried away, and he needs grace and strength now to look up to God and to walk with Him. The believer needs help. Christ Jesus came to help. This is the part of the Gospel that has the glory in it.

Chapter 14

The Disciples

(Peter, James, John, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea)

Peter is properly considered the classic example of a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. His occupation was that of a fisherman. He is often closely associated with the brothers, James and John, who were partners with their father, Zebedee, in a fishing enterprise.

When Andrew his brother brought Peter to Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord said "Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). When it is known that the word "Simon" means "sand " and the word "Peter" means "rock " it can be understood that Jesus of Nazareth was predicting that this man would be transformed from an unstable, vacillating, impulsive person into a dependable, strong, faithful servant of God.

There is something significant in comparing sand with rock. Chemically, they can be pretty much the same. As a matter of fact, sand is rock that has been ground up, being disintegrated into pieces. Sand is just little bits of rock. Yet the physical consistency of the two is different, as is indicated by the Lord using the illustration of the difference between a house that is built on sand and a house that is built on rock. What is the difference? The house that is built on sand does not have a solid foundation, because sand will not stay put. Sand will give way under pressure. The rock stays put, and will hold up.

This seems to be an intimation about the nature of this man called Simon Peter. First he was called Simon which means sand; and one can think of him as impulsive, uncertain, vacillating back and forth, for and against, confused oftentimes. That is the way he was: unstable. No one could put any weight on him. He would give away. But he was to be transformed into a dependable, strong, faithful servant of God, who would not give way, even under pressures.

In the building process sand and gravel are often used with cement to make concrete. Concrete is just like rock, only it is stronger. It seems that if a block of concrete is broken, it breaks through the little stones that are in it. It does not break through the concrete, because the concrete between the stones is stronger than the stones themselves. This is very suggestive. When the Lord came into Peter's heart, he became strong, solid; men could lean on him.

There is no record of how much Peter heard Jesus of Nazareth as He taught in Jerusalem and in other cities around in that part of Judea. There is no way of knowing how often Peter heard Him. Jesus of Nazareth was about thirty years of age when He began His public ministry. No doubt He had lived among people and had acted out His own character. We can expect that He was honest, straightforward, reverent, respectful to authority, considerate of other people, charitable to the poor. No doubt all these traits were there. Why should we think that? Because such is the righteousness that is in the law. In Jesus of Nazareth there was no sin at all. Obviously He did everything He was supposed to do. No doubt Jesus of Nazareth talked to people about God and it is quite possible that Peter heard Him. We have no record of that but I do not doubt that he did and apparently he was intrigued and impressed. There was a day when Jesus of Nazareth was talking to a crowd of people gathered at the seashore, and stepped into Peter's boat. He asked Peter to pull away from the shore a little so that He could get a better perspective on the crowd in front of Him. When He was finished speaking, He turned to Peter and said:

Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake (Luke 5:4-6).

This was action taken in faith. It was taken in obedience, not because he had any expectation. I do not think Peter had any expectation at all. He was shocked and overcome by the fact that they caught so many fish they could not pull them in. Peter was overwhelmed. In that situation Jesus of Nazareth called Peter to

follow Him to become a fisher of men. Peter responded and became the devoted disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus of Nazareth dealt with the rich young ruler, He taught His disciples that a rich man may have real difficulty in entering into the Kingdom of God, because he may be reluctant to yield all he has to God which will always be a prerequisite. A rich man can have a hard time doing this. Peter spoke up to ask, "What do we get? We have forsaken all to follow thee? What do we have now?" Jesus of Nazareth assured him that anyone who has forsaken anything to follow the Lord will receive many blessings in this life, and in the world to come he will have eternal life.

The career of Peter is often marked in the public mind by his denial of the Lord Jesus Christ on the night of the betrayal. But a true grasp of this servant's record, to really know Peter, is not complete without remembering the Mount of Transfiguration which is recorded in Matthew 17:1-8. Only once did Jesus of Nazareth reveal His real glory while He was here in the flesh. That was on the Mount of Transfiguration. This revelation was given to only three persons, one of whom was Peter. We should not discount this man. He was close to the Lord and he was a real believer.

The story of his denial of his Lord is well known. But it should not be overlooked that after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus made a special point of asking that Peter be told to come with the others to meet Him in Galilee. Tradition reports that when Peter was to be crucified by the Romans, he requested that he be put on his cross head down, because he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord because he one time denied Him.

James and John were brothers, fisherman by trade. They were close companions with Peter. James seems the least notable of the three. He is scarcely ever mentioned apart from John. He does have one mark of distinction: he was the first of the apostles to be put to death for his testimony of faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 12:2). Herod put James to the sword. Apparently, these two brothers, James and John, were much more forceful in their personalities than appears in the record, for it is written of them that Jesus of Nazareth "surnamed them Boanerges, which is, the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). At one time the mother of James and John asked Jesus of Nazareth that her two sons should sit next to Him, one on the right hand and the other on the left when He came into His Kingdom. He took this occasion to teach His disciples:

Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (Matthew 20:26-27).

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews who came to Jesus by night, to inquire into the meaning of His doctrine (John 3:1-21). He was told plainly and definitely "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus pressed his question from the natural point of view, and received the clearest emphasis in Scripture: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

As a member of the Council, Nicodemus was present when the Council debated what should be done with Jesus of Nazareth. Nicodemus raised the point that this man should not be condemned before He had the privilege of answering the charges made against Him. But he was silenced by the other members of the Council.

At the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, when Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus of Nazareth that he might arrange for burial, "Nicodemus "brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." Thus he shared in this last gesture of esteem toward Jesus of Nazareth. All the disciples had fled, but these two laymen, Joseph and Nicodemus, stepped forward to show honor to their Lord.

Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, who was a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth (though secretly for fear of the Jews), who had not consented to the decision of the Council to seek the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing is heard of him until Jesus of Nazareth had died on the cross. Then when all the disciples had fled, and the mob had vented their fury on the Savior of the world, this man, Joseph of

Arimathea, who had never openly confessed his faith for fear of the Jews, came boldly into the presence of Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus of Nazareth. He intended to prepare it for burial in his own new tomb "wherein was never man yet laid."

Pilate granted his request. When Joseph of Arimathea proceeded with this task, he was aided by Nicodemus who brought a hundred pounds of spices to embalm the body. In a time of darkness and gloom, when even the sun was hid, these two men shine as "stars in the firmament." Jesus of Nazareth, "who came to seek and to save the lost," who now "gave His life a ransom for many" and who was now despised and rejected by men, was honored in this black hour by two laymen, who stepped forward and at least openly admitted to the whole wide world that they believed in Him! He was their Savior and their Lord.

Chapter 15

Caiaphas, Pilate, Mary Magdalene

Caiaphas was high priest in Jerusalem at the time of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The temple as an institution of religious leadership among the Jews was a strong governing factor among the Jews. The civil government of the country including Jerusalem was administered by the Roman Empire, whose soldiers maintained order and enforced imperial decrees. But Rome permitted local communities to have their own government which supervised local affairs including religious practices.

The government of the Jewish community was structured under the leadership of the temple, where the governing body was the Council. Members of the Council were chosen under certain definite guidelines, but not all the members thought alike. The two major schools of thought among the Jews were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were distinguished by their adherence to Scripture. They esteemed the Scriptures of the Old Testament as being the Word of God and held themselves responsible to obey every detail. Where the meaning of Scripture was not clear, the Pharisees would heed the guidance of some famous rabbis who had written their opinions and judgments to aid others to know. The Sadducees on the other hand did not accept the Scriptures as being literally true. They did not think there were any angels, or spirits, or resurrection. And yet they were an active, strong, body of people in the Jewish community.

Caiaphas, the high priest, was a Sadducee; which indicates his frame of mind; which would mean that he had no confidence in the supernatural events of the testimony of the Gospel. He had no confidence in the reality of heaven. He did not believe in the resurrection and he did not believe in the reality of angels nor of the Spirit. Yet he was high priest. Paul, who later became the great apostle, was a Pharisee. A number of the Pharisees are reported in history to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, but no Sadducee was ever reported among the early Christians. I personally am very much impressed by that fact. We have people among us today who do not think that the Bible is the Word of God. They do not think the Bible is authoritative. They think it is useful and helpful as a book of suggestions, but they do not take it to be real. They have no confidence in the actual resurrection from the dead. They do not count that Jesus Christ is living today. They do not think of the reality of heaven as being actual now, and they do not believe in angels. They do not believe in spirits. Yet they are counted among the believing people in the church. Often they can hold offices in the church, and they can become prominent in the church despite the fact that they do not believe in the miracles in the Bible. They do not believe in the resurrection; they do not believe in the virgin birth; and still they can be prominent officers. Such a man was Caiaphas but I am soberly impressed with the fact that the New Testament does not record any Sadducee that ever came to faith.

When tension began to mount in the days of Jesus of Nazareth because of His claim that He was the Son of God, the Council of the temple, the leaders, debated what should be done with this man. Caiaphas recommended that He should be put to death, even though he may have been innocent of the charge that had been leveled against Him. Caiaphas argued this on the basis that it was expedient for one man to die rather than that the nation should be destroyed. He felt that if this one man continued to preach and teach it would create a disturbance. Such a disturbance would draw the attention of the Roman government who in order to rid the situation of any disturbance and turmoil might just take away the local authority which the Jews had. He thought it would be a whole lot better that they just have this one man put to death and so end the matter. Then the nation would not be destroyed.

Nothing is known about the person or the works of Caiaphas. There is no report about him otherwise, beyond this one fact, he was the high priest. He lived in Jerusalem and held public office in Jerusalem all the time that John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth were preaching. He actually saw and judged Jesus of Nazareth personally, and he committed himself to a course of action in which he deliberately maneuvered

affairs in such a way that Jesus of Nazareth was ultimately tried in court and crucified.

Pilate was the Roman governor in Judea at the time when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. Crucifixion was the common practice of the Roman authorities when a man was to be put to death. Very much as today in some parts of our country, being put to death is administered by the electric chair. In some parts of the country a man is put into a gas chamber. In my native land, Canada, it was ordinarily a matter of hanging the man. Among the Romans at this time the custom was that if a man was condemned to death by the government, he would be crucified. Jesus of Nazareth Himself was crucified between two other prisoners who were crucified because they had been condemned to die.

Pilate is a splendid illustration of an enterprising business man who has achieved success. He had become governor, and that was quite a mark of distinction. He was no doubt alert to all political signs and aspects in any given situation. There is no evidence that Pilate knew of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth before he actually confronted Him, but it is quite possible that he had heard of Him.

Because of the system of control that Rome maintained in the Empire, the Jewish Council had authority to judge and to sentence any misdeeds in religious practice. The Council tried Jesus of Nazareth and found Him guilty of blasphemy, for which the penalty was death. But that court did not have the authority to put a man to death. So the Council sent Jesus of Nazareth to be tried in the Roman court, under Pilate. There the charge against Him was that He was guilty of treason, for which the Roman law prescribed death as penalty.

Pilate had no personal animosity toward Jesus of Nazareth. He did not really think Jesus of Nazareth was guilty of the charge laid against Him, but he was being pushed to take action for political reasons. His wife sent him word, "Have nothing to do with that just man." Actually, he tried to get Jesus of Nazareth to defend Himself. Then he offered the people a choice between a known murderer, Barabbas, and Jesus of Nazareth. To his dismay, the people chose Barabbas. "What shall I do then with Jesus that is called Christ?" We always think of this as Pilate's dilemma.

Mary Magdalene was one of the women who followed Jesus of Nazareth as a disciple. She came from a community called Magdala, where she got the name. Jesus of Nazareth had cast seven demons out of her. She may have been an immoral woman of the street, but this is not a matter of record.

There are at least five women in the New Testament by the name of Mary. Some students think that this Mary was the woman who washed the feet of her Lord with her tears, but this is not clear.

The place of women in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ has been a matter of moot discussion throughout the history of the church. But the record shows that it was the women who displayed exceptional devotion to the Lord while He was here on earth. It has been said "Women were the last at the cross, and the first at the grave."

To Mary Magdalene belongs the distinction and the honor of being the first person to whom the risen Lord showed Himself. One can read this in the Gospel of John.

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher (John 20:1).

Then again:

But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master (John 20:11-16).

Chapter 16

Stephen, Philip, The Ethiopian

Stephen was the first martyr in the Christian church.

When the believers were gathered together as a congregation in Jerusalem, the poor became the concern of the more fortunate.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need (Acts 2:44-45).

It is not surprising that the practical details in distributing this voluntary charity among the hundreds and thousands of people needed supervision.

The apostles directed that the congregation should choose out seven men to whom this supervision would be entrusted, and the apostles would ordain them to perform this task. These were to be "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). One of the men so chosen was "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."

Though he was chosen to aid in the administration of details, was given something practical to do, Stephen was an effective evangelist. We read: "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). In his witnessing for Christ, Stephen entered into dialogue with men from different parts of the world. No one was able to "resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Nevertheless his opponents persisted in their opposition.

Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:11-15).

As Stephen faced his accusers before the Council, he did not speak in defense of his conduct, but used the occasion to outline the scriptural basis for faith in the Gospel. His address found in the book of Acts in Chapter 7 is a classic review of Old Testament history, to show how God had always had in mind that His people should obey His voice as they served Him. At the close of his address, Stephen

. . . being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56).

This was more than the people that were accusing him could stand. The mob refused to listen further. They stopped their ears and stoned him to death. Stephen was calling upon God and cried out with a loud voice: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and again we read that he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." One of the touching things in the actual record is: "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." The Greek word that is used there for "he fell asleep" can be translated "he fell on slumber," which is the word you would use if a baby fell asleep in its mother's arms. While this man was being stoned to death, he was crying out, praying for his accusers and resting in the Lord.

Philip was also one of the deacons, chosen at the time when Stephen was chosen. Philip seems also to have been a great preacher, especially as an evangelist.

When the disciples were scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, Philip went down to Samaria.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did (Acts 8:5-6).

It is impressive to note that the ground for the attention that Philip gained was not in his speech. It was not in the words that he said, nor the way in which he said them. The people paid attention because they "gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." Even today we appreciate the men who are in the pulpit, and we appreciate a clear, faithful statement of the truth as they preach, but we realize how often it is true that we pay especial attention to the man of whom we know in his life he is actually committed to the very things he is talking about, and that God is using him. The pastor who has an effectual ministry among his people is the pastor whose words from the pulpit have additional weight. These people had actually been enamored by a sorcerer named Simon. They had been listening to him, but now they listened to Philip. Many believed and were baptized. Then Simon believed also, and followed Philip.

When Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch, there is a classic story of witnessing to Jesus Christ. Philip was directed to go on a certain highway without knowing what was going to happen. Many people travelled there. When he was on that highway, the Holy Spirit directed him to join a certain chariot in which the Ethiopian was sitting, reading the prophet Isaiah. When Philip got into that chariot and saw what he was doing he asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The Ethiopian answered "How can I, except some man should guide me?" And so Philip began to talk to him. The place where the man was reading was the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and we read that Philip began at that very Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. When the man said, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip answered him "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." So it was done.

In the course of his travels, Paul spent some time in the home of Philip. Apparently they were known to each other; both apparently being Greek speaking Jews.

The **Ethiopian Eunuch** was a man of importance in his own country. He held an office there like our Secretary of the Treasury. Apparently he was a Jewish Proselyte who had embraced the Jewish faith. He had come to Jerusalem to worship in the temple and was on his way home when Philip met him.

The story reveals the Ethiopian as an earnest, sincere man who wanted to understand the Scriptures. He listened with interest to Philip's witnessing about Jesus Christ and was so genuine in his reaction to what Philip told him that he wanted to share in the blessing of God through Christ at once.

When the Ethiopian had been baptized Philip was led away by the Holy Spirit, so there was no further fellowship between the Ethiopian and Philip, but we read the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

The Ethiopian Eunuch is a type of those who are hindered from blessing through Jesus Christ because of ignorance and this problem is easily solved. All that is needed is information and when this is supplied the difficulty is gone.

Chapter 17

Saul – Paul

Paul the apostle is one of the most important men in the Bible. He started out in life as Saul the Pharisee. He was brought up as a Pharisee. As a young man, he was zealous in his religion, and profited in the Jew's religion beyond many of his own equals. He could say later that he served God with a clear conscience throughout his whole life.

As a young man Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen, consenting unto his death. He was authorized to act as an agent for the High Priest in going to arrest any Jews who witnessed as believers in Jesus Christ. He was on his way to Damascus to do this very thing when Jesus of Nazareth in glory stopped him on the highway.

Saul the Pharisee is an illustration of persons who are hindered in coming to faith because of prejudice. In his case God personally dealt with Saul. In the short book of Acts the conversion of Saul is told in detail three times. Paul himself considered this to be a demonstration to the whole world of the way the grace of God works in bringing a soul to himself:

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (I Timothy 1:16).

Saul was stricken blind by the vision of the living Lord which he saw while on the road to Damascus. Ananias, one of the disciples in Damascus, was sent to baptize Saul and to tell him that he was to be a chosen vessel of the Lord in his witness over the whole world. Saul went directly to the synagogue and preached that Christ is the Son of God. When the Jews in Damascus planned to kill Saul "the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket" (Acts 9:25). When he arrived in Jerusalem the disciples there were afraid of him because of his reputation as an opponent of Christ. But Barnabas brought him to the apostles, and told them of how the Lord had appeared to him, and of how he had preached boldly at Damascus.

After this Saul apparently went into Arabia for three years. It is commonly thought by Bible students that this was a time in which he thought through the implications of the Gospel. Many times when we are seeking to help people today be guided in their preparation for service for the Lord, we encourage them to have in mind that there might well be a period of time during which they are not giving out much, but are receiving a lot in the matter of preparation. Here we have Saul greatly affected by seeing Jesus Christ, openly testifying to that fact, affecting many others because of the sincerity of his witness and testimony, then withdrawing for three years. He is unheard of, during which time we can be sure he thought through all his Old Testament Scriptures and all of his personal experience to understand what was really involved in the coming of Jesus Christ.

When the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to confirm the faith of many converts who had come from the Greeks, Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Saul and to bring him to Antioch. Saul came, and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul taught much people "and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Many of us have the feeling that this is quite an indication of what Paul must have emphasized. The chances are that Paul talking to them and teaching them was so focused upon the person of Jesus Christ that as his listeners talked about his message, they were given that nick- name and others referred to them as "Christians."

The Holy Spirit directed the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul to go as missionaries. "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3). These two took Mark with them, and eventually sailed to Cyprus. Here Saul came into spiritual conflict with a sorcerer, who was stricken blind at the word of Saul. When the mission went on to other cities Saul was now called Paul, and began to take more of the leadership of the missionary group.

While in Antioch in Pisidia Paul gave a masterly address in the synagogue emphasizing the truth of the resurrection. When the Jews rejected the message, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles where many believed and became disciples. Having completed their tour of that region, they returned to Antioch and reported to the church all the Lord had done.

At that time some of the church who had been Pharisees and had emphasized the law, protested that many of the Gentiles who accepted the Gospel were not properly prepared to follow the Lord. The contention was that all Gentile converts should be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas agreed to take this problem to the church in Jerusalem where a conference of the leaders should decide. This seems quite significant. If anybody knew that circumcision was unnecessary Paul did. It would be hard to think that Paul had any uncertainty about that. Yet he went to Jerusalem to the church to have the whole matter discussed. It seems that here is an indication of a certain statesmanship from the part of Paul. He wanted the whole church to come to this view, and probably realized in a very practical way that they would need to think it through for themselves. This brought the whole problem before the church in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas agreed to take the problem there where a conference of the leaders of the Christian church should decide. The result was that the whole mass of believers were involved and they were led to see that rules and regulations of the Jewish religion were not involved in the new life that was in Christ Jesus.

When Paul and Barnabas were led to resume their missionary activities, Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them again. But Paul was not willing, since Mark had turned back on the first journey. The contention was so sharp, that they went out as two parties: Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas. It is not necessary to assume that there was any fault in either Barnabas or Paul. There can be a very real difference in opinion as to procedure among various people who are all believers. Believing in the Lord is one thing, but testimony before the world is another. One person will give his testimony in one way, while another person will give it in another way. When they separated in this fashion what resulted was two missionary parties: Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas.

On this journey Paul came to Athens where he presented his witness on Mars' Hill. The book of Acts thus presents three addresses by Paul under variant circumstances demonstrating the flexibility in Paul's methods. In Acts 13 he addressed the synagogue. These were Jews acquainted with the Scripture, and his message was based entirely on Scripture. In Acts 14 he addressed the people of Lystra with a message that was based on the facts of the natural world. These people probably did not know the Scriptures, but they would be aware of the witness of the natural creation. Paul drew attention to how God showed Himself in nature. In Acts 17 he addressed the Greeks on Mars' Hill with a message that was philosophical in tone, quoting no Scripture but actually making use of Greek literature. (These people did not know nor esteem Old Testament Scripture, but they were philosophical in their conversation with each other and so Paul was philosophical in his presentation to them.) In each mode so illustrated, the apostle presented the reality of God and of His judgment, varying his approach according to the people whom he was addressing.

Paul made at least three missionary journeys. He became known as the Apostle to the Gentiles. His enemies accused him of being one of those who had "turned the world upside down." Many will remember that he had some affliction which he spoke of as "a thorn in the flesh" and about which he had asked the Lord to be delivered several times. But he was told by the Lord that affliction had been given him to keep him humble and useful as a servant of the Lord. He then boasted of his infirmities saying, "When I am weak, then am I strong." Paul regarded himself as the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle, but his fame is as wide as the Gospel is preached.

Chapter 18

Ananias, Barnabas, Cornelius

There are two well known men by the name of **Ananias** in the Scripture. When the early church, as led by the Holy Spirit, responded to the indwelling Lord and practiced sharing worldly goods with believers who were destitute, appreciation and honor were naturally shown to those who gave to the poor members in this way. Ananias and Sapphira sold some property to share in this program of charity. But they kept part for themselves and brought in the remainder of the sale price to the treasury, as if it were the whole amount.

Led by the Spirit, Peter exposed this sin of deceit and hypocrisy and in the course of being confronted with his sin, Ananias dropped dead. Later his wife also, when she was confronted with her sin, fell dead. The fate of these two was understood to have been a matter of discipline. They serve to this day as a warning to all believers, that integrity is essential for blessing from the Lord.

There is another important man named **Ananias** who was involved in the spiritual regeneration of Saul. When Saul was stricken blind by the light from heaven on the Damascus road, he was taken to the house of Judas where he fasted and prayed for three days. The Lord then appeared to Ananias, and sent him to find Saul that he might pray for Saul to receive his sight. Ananias hesitated to go because Saul was notorious for his persecution of believers, but the Lord encouraged him to go and to tell Saul what his mission would be as a servant of the living Lord. This Ananias did. When he had laid his hands on Saul and prayed for him, Saul's sight was restored. Thus we have two persons by this same name of very different testimonies. The first one who by his deceit was a sinner in the early church, and the second one by his courage became useful in the matter of bringing Saul through to his full understanding of the Gospel.

Barnabas "was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:24). He is the first mentioned as the one who "having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostle's feet," where it would be used for charitable purposes sharing with the poor members of the congregation (Acts 4:37).

When Saul the Pharisee was converted on the Damascus road, he began witnessing for Jesus Christ in the Synagogue in Damascus. He excited so much violent hostility on the part of the Jews that he had to flee from Damascus for his life. He went to Jerusalem. Then we read:

He assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:26-27).

When the church at Jerusalem heard that a great number of the Grecians in Antioch had turned unto the Lord, they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. This was the custom of the church at that time. They would send an outstanding minister to where the new converts were gathered, to instruct them in the Gospel. When Barnabas saw how the grace of God had worked in these new converts, he was glad "and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul. He brought him to Antioch and for a whole year they taught the new converts. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

As we think about this, we can understand the wisdom of this man Barnabas who did things in this way. He himself naturally was a Jew and from Jerusalem at that, and this was in another city called Antioch where many of the Grecians had become believers. While Barnabas would be able to talk to them and would be able to show them the Gospel, he knew that Saul had been brought up in a city where Greek was the common language. He had been brought up in the city of Tarsus. Saul was, you might say, a Greek speaking Jew, so Barnabas brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they taught the new converts.

When we read the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, we will always remember that this helps to establish Antioch as a very important center in the early church.

When certain prophets and teachers were listed as being in the church that was at Antioch, Barnabas was named first of five and Saul was named last. The Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Thus Barnabas and Saul began their missionary work. During this mission, as the evangelists began to deal with the inhabitants of the various cities, Paul became more and more dominant, but Barnabas continued to be considered the senior member of the team.

When the church met in Jerusalem to consider the issue of the Gentiles becoming disciples, Barnabas shared with Paul in reporting what the Lord had done in blessing His Word through their ministry. After this Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go again to visit the places where they had gone on their first mission. Barnabas wanted to take Mark along as a co-worker but Paul did not agree, because Mark had turned back on that first journey. We read:

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus (Acts 15:39).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells of the trip when he and Barnabas, with Titus, went up to Jerusalem. There a controversy arose about Jews and Gentiles fraternizing in the congregation. Paul seems to have taken the lead in insisting that there should be no difference noted between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Later when the missionary party came back to Antioch, the controversy broke out again. Peter himself, and later Barnabas also, was influenced by certain brethren who had come to visit from Jerusalem, to withdraw from fellowship with the Gentiles. Paul reports:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed (Galatians 2:11).

Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea. He was a devout man who "feared God with all his house." He gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always. He was instructed in a vision to send to Joppa to invite Peter to come to his house that he might learn what he should do to be blessed.

Peter had been prepared by a vision from God that he should be ready and willing to go with the messengers from Cornelius, even though in so doing he was transgressing one of the regulations by which Jews and Gentiles were prevented from socializing, from mingling together in a social way. When Peter came to the house of Cornelius, he was moved by the Spirit to tell them the Gospel. Cornelius believed and the Holy Spirit fell on those in the house as He had come to the disciples at Pentecost. Peter baptized him in the name of Jesus Christ, and then reported to the church that God had also granted eternal life to the Gentiles.

Chapter 19

Timothy, Lydia, Aquila and Priscilla

Timothy was "the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:1). When Paul came to Lystra he called this young man to come with him in service.

There are many reasons probably why Timothy, generally speaking, among Bible students is not rated as being a very important person. It seems that if a man has never been involved in controversy, or has not had any big exciting thing happen in his life, we are inclined to think of him as ordinary. And yet in the case of Timothy, we could make a great mistake.

Paul said about him:

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel (Philippians 2:20-22).

Paul spoke of him "as his own son in the faith." On the basis of what Paul said as we have just now noticed, we probably should consider Timothy one of the outstanding Christians in the New Testament record. Just think of those words again; think about Paul saying about a man: "I have no man likeminded." Paul considered Timothy as outstanding and I need to remind myself one does not have to be involved in controversy and one does not have to do any big desperate thing to be strong or great in the Lord; but to be faithful is what counts and this is what Timothy was.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul tells Timothy:

I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (II Timothy 1:3-5).

This enables us to understand why there is no account of any conversion in Timothy's life. In the book of Acts there are a number of striking conversions mentioned, but Timothy is simply referred to as one who believes. Being brought up in the home of a believing mother and grandmother, it seems that Timothy would serve as an example of those who are the children of believers, who were "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and who as little children were brought to the Lord and had their baby hands put in His hand. These are persons who never have any other thought than that Christ Jesus is their Savior and that they belong to Him.

When I first became a Christian I could not fully understand this. It was not easy for me to believe that such people could really belong to the Lord, but later I came to know people like this. In fact, I married one of them, who could never remember the day when she became a believer in the Lord, because she always believed as far back as she could remember. I remember one of our early conversations when I asked her one time rather impatiently, "What did you think when you first heard of the Lord?" She said, "I don't remember. I expect what I thought was 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'" That is the way she put it. I long since learned to know that she is one of any number of those who have been greatly blessed in having been brought up by a father and mother who believed in the Lord. About Timothy, this conclusion is strengthened by Paul's further word in writing to Timothy:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:14-15).

Now lest I be misunderstood let us say clearly now, there is not anybody going to be in the Lord Jesus Christ who is not born again. We understand that. There is nobody born naturally of father and mother

into this world who is born a child of God: "Whatever is born of flesh, is flesh." But there is no indication in Scripture that a child could not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. You will remember how the Lord Jesus Christ said when the little children were coming to Him: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16). We all need to remember that much wonderful work can be done in teaching the children about the Lord. Their experience may be like Timothy; it never may be striking; it never may be amazing to other people; it may seem very natural, and yet it can be very real and very true.

Lydia was the first convert in Europe, when Paul's party came over from Asia Minor to Macedonia, and preached in the city of Philippi. Lydia lived in Philippi, the chief city in that part of Macedonia, where she was a seller of purple. This seems to indicate she was what we would call a business woman. Paul met her at an outdoor prayer meeting by a riverside "where prayer was wont to be made." Paul and his company of witnesses sat down and "spake to the women which resorted thither." Lydia heard the apostle. It is written of her:

. . . whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us (Acts 16:14-15).

Her record is revealing. It is wonderful to think that a person can be brought just that way.

We are glad to proclaim that the Gospel is free. It is our joy to say anyone may come; but in faithfulness, we need to say but not in any way. The Ethiopian Eunuch had been worshipping God in Jerusalem and was on his way home reading and studying the Scriptures when Philip joined his chariot and told him about the Lord. Saul, the Pharisee, was a zealous, sincere, concerned, mistaken person who thought he was doing God a service by seeking to discourage believers in Jesus Christ. Paul was wrong but he was sincere. When God called him, stopped him on the road and revealed Himself to him, Paul was not just any ordinary person. He was a person acquainted with Scripture, and acquainted with things of the Lord. Although he was dead set in the wrong way he still believed God was real. Here we see a woman, Lydia, attending prayer meeting, listening to the witness of the apostle, being inwardly blessed by God so that she could grasp the truth of the message and believe. This is not a casual listener. I am trying to share this idea. We are not to think that just any woman, anywhere, any man anywhere, any time, can suddenly have somebody snap a finger, and suddenly become believers. It is not like that. There will be history in every case. We should seek to help people, all people, to be sober, when it comes to the things about God, and sincere in their attitude toward God and the Gospel, even before they become Christians. They can actually do themselves a service by being honest and sincere in their attitude.

Aquila and Priscilla were husband and wife. They were Jews who were born in Italy. When Claudius the Emperor decreed that all Jews should depart from Rome, this couple migrated to Corinth in Greece. On one of his missionary journeys, Paul came to Corinth and apparently lived with Aquila and Priscilla, "because he was of the same craft." And we all know how we think of Paul as being a tentmaker. That is what Aquila and Priscilla were. Apparently, they moved later to Ephesus where they were when Apollos came to that city. Apollos preached and taught the Scriptures "knowing only the baptism of John." It is written "whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). These people who would be counted as laymen actually were able to, and had the courage to, bring this brilliant young orator, Apollos, into their home, and show him things that he did not know about the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Apparently their witness to Apollos was fruitful, because Apollos won the confidence of the disciples who commended him to the believers in Achaia. Apollos was effectual in his ministry there and helped the believers:

. . . much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced, the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:27-28).

That which was lacking in the message of Apollos, which Aquila and Priscilla had noted and about which they apparently shared more fully with him, can be felt when the record in the next chapter is read. When Paul came to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-12) he found certain disciples who had come to faith under the ministry of Apollos. When Paul asked them if they had "received the Holy Ghost since they believed" they admitted they did not know the Holy Ghost was available. When Paul asked "Unto what then were ye baptized?" they said "Unto John's baptism." This was all Apollos knew when he was preaching to them. Paul did not deny the truth of John the Baptist's ministry. He reminded them that John had said that One was coming to follow him who would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Apollos had not known about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and so of course his hearers remained ignorant of this important and vital truth. It took Aquila and Priscilla, these tentmakers, dedicated laymen who had had Paul in their home for over a year and a half, to show this brilliant preacher the truth about the Gospel.

Chapter 20

Apollos, Titus, Epaphroditus, Silas, Mark

Apollos was a Jew, born at Alexandria, which was a city in North Africa at the mouth of the Nile. That city had been established by the Greeks and was named after Alexander the Great. Apollos was described as

. . . an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures . . . This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24-25).

This would mean that he understood God's plan of dealing with human beings all through the revelation in the Old Testament, and so far as New Testament times were concerned, up to and including the testimony and the witness of John the Baptist. He preached that way. He came to Ephesus, and evidently gathered a group of disciples, who believed according to his teaching.

When Apollos went on to Corinth, he came in touch with Aquila and Priscilla who took him unto them and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." You will remember so far as Aquila and Priscilla are concerned that it was in their home that Paul lived as a roomer or boarder for a year and a half. It is no surprise that Aquila and Priscilla would understand the Gospel well. When they heard this eloquent young preacher preaching, they recognized that there were some things about the Gospel he did not know.

Evidently, Apollos eventually joined Paul's missionary group after Aquila and Priscilla had shown him the Gospel and he had been preaching it. The church at Corinth had some internal dissension with reference to their loyalties to former ministers, and they compared Paul, Apollos and Peter and argued among themselves as to which of these were the greatest. When Paul wanted Apollos later to visit Corinth, Apollos chose not to go, possibly unwilling to add any fuel to their arguments about personalities. Paul writes:

As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time (I Corinthians 16:12).

When he was at Ephesus, Apollos had preached a message that went only as far as John's baptism. He believed in God, the law of God, reality of sin, the necessity for repentance, Jesus of Nazareth as "the Lamb of God," and that forgiveness was possible through faith in the Sacrifice. Apollos did not know of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, nor of the fruits of the Spirit.

Titus was a Greek who became a member of Paul's missionary group. He accompanied Paul on his visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas, some seventeen years after Paul was converted. When Paul asked Timothy to join his group, he had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews, and because Timothy's mother was a Jewess; but when the Jews wanted to insist that Titus be circumcised Paul opposed them obstinately because Titus was a Greek. There was no social custom requiring the circumcision of a Greek as there had been with Timothy whose mother was a Jew. On the basis of this development, Titus became an illustration of this principle, namely, a Gentile did not need to become a Jew to belong to Christ, nor to serve Him. Titus was sent as Paul's representative to the church at Corinth where they were having internal problems in controversy. Apparently, Paul had much confidence in Titus and he sent them over there to help them out. The report that Titus was able to bring to Paul was most comforting and heartening because Titus could assure Paul of the spiritual fervor and strength of those believers in Corinth.

Titus was also charged to encourage the congregation at Corinth to share liberally in sending financial relief to the poor believers in the church at Jerusalem. Apparently, he was gifted in the function of leadership. When Paul had something that needed to be done, Titus was the type of man he could send.

Much later he was assigned by Paul to the task of organizing the congregations on the island of Crete. He seems to have won Paul's confidence as one who could guide other believers in their life and service. Paul's letter to Titus, in which he directed Titus in the matter of teaching the people, shows that Paul felt he could entrust Titus with the responsibility of guiding believers into fruitful obedience to the Lord.

Epaphroditus was a member of the congregation at Philippi. He became a member of Paul's missionary team, probably as a representative of that congregation in helping Paul in his daily ministry. He had been sent from Philippi with some gifts for Paul while Paul was in prison. He evidently stayed with Paul that he might help Paul in his ministry. Apparently, he became very sick while he was serving Paul. In fact, Paul said about him that he was nigh unto death because of the way in which he worked to try and do what he could for the ministry and in serving Paul.

Paul thanked the church at Philippi for sending this humble, faithful man who worked so hard to do what Paul wanted done. I have often thought to myself it was a strange providence that allowed the name of Epaphroditus to be such a big heavy hard name to say, because when you came to read about Epaphroditus you cannot help but feel he was a wonderful man, a faithful, humble servant who worked himself almost to death to help other men in their ministry.

Silas was a prominent member of the church at Jerusalem. There is not a great deal said about him but we do know that he was one of the leaders and at the time of the Church Council when they met to consider the issue of Gentiles being received as fellow believers without being circumcised as the Jews were, Silas was chosen by the church to go with Paul and Barnabas to bring the letter of their decision from the church at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch. This would mean to me that Silas was the kind of man that going along with Paul and Barnabas gave the mission an air of authentic authority. The whole thing would appear proper and would appear important if the church at home sent Silas along. Later when Paul and Barnabas separated, after the contention about taking Mark as a helper on their next missionary journey and Barnabas personally took Mark, we find that Paul chose Silas as his fellow worker. This seems almost surprising in a way because nothing had been said about Silas so far as his testimony was concerned or his witness or his conversion. But we can recognize here that when Paul went out on a real hard missionary journey, he wanted Silas as a man to work alongside him.

When Paul was arrested and imprisoned at Philippi, Silas was with him. It is Silas and Paul together who joined in singing praises to God at midnight in the Philippian jail. Apparently, he was a staunch believer, and continued as an active member of Paul's team of workers for some time. The name of Silas remains high in the rank of those who served the Lord in the time of the New Testament.

Mark was a nephew of Barnabas. We have heard of Barnabas before and greatly appreciated that grand good man, but here was his sister's son, Mark. He was called John Mark, sometimes he is called John, sometimes he is called Mark, and sometimes John Mark, but commonly called Mark. Evidently, he grew up in a religious home. When Peter was cast into prison by Herod the king, the believers expected Peter would be put to death, for James had been put to the sword. The believers met in the home of Mark's mother for an all night prayer meeting. That would indicate the kind of home it was in which Mark grew up.

When Barnabas and Paul went on their first missionary journey, they took Mark with them as an assistant. After they had been in Cyprus some time and planned to go inland, still further into the interior of the island, Mark forsook the mission and returned to Jerusalem. Later when Paul suggested that he and Barnabas plan another trip to visit the converts they had won on that first trip, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along again. Paul did not agree with this, and the result was that Barnabas took Mark and went to Cyprus, the very region from which Mark had turned back; while Paul took Silas and started out in another direction. Apparently Mark proved himself to be a worthy witness, because later Paul wrote to Timothy and asked him to bring Mark with him "for he is profitable unto me in the ministry." It is reassuring to think that Mark was able to win Paul's confidence in the passing of the years.

The accounts seem to show that Mark and Peter were closely associated. It is very interesting to learn that traditionally it is believed that the Gospel which we call Mark is really the testimony of Peter which he dictated to Mark to record.