

Women of Influence and Distinction



by Betsy E. Caram

**WOMEN of
Influence & Distinction**



Betsy E. Caram

“Women of the Bible”

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Chapter One

BECOMING A WOMAN OF GOD

Introduction

Women Are Important! It is very evident from Scripture that women are, and always have been, very much involved in the plan and purposes of God in the earth. From Genesis to Revelation, the significance of women is clear. Since the beginning of time when God placed Eve with Adam in the Garden of Eden, women have played a significant role in history. Bible women have helped shape not only the history of Israel, but also that of the world.

God is no respecter of persons. Women have been the instruments of God in the past, and He still uses them today to accomplish His ministry to a lost and dying world. God uses women—some in quiet ways, others in public positions of importance. God uses some women as team members working right along side of their husbands, while others give up the comforts and joys of a home and family to serve God more completely on the mission field as single women.

Why Should We Study Bible Women? It is very important to find out as much as we can about the women of the Bible. By doing so, we will understand what God's intentions are for women. We will discover what He plans to bring women into for all eternity. A study of Bible women helps to define more thoroughly a women's role, sets in order her proper God-given boundaries, and gives hope that she is important, even vital, to God's plan for the ages.

Some of the Bible women we are going to look at failed miserably. As a result, their marriages and families were destroyed or greatly hindered from fulfilling all that God had ordained for them. By careful study of these women, we can learn much from their sins and shortcomings. On the other hand, as God pulls back the curtain and allows us to see into the hearts of some of the great women of God, we can profit from their lives. Many of these gallant women, despite unbelievable obstacles, overcame mightily and triumphed in the midst of their difficulties.

The women we will focus upon in this study come from vastly different backgrounds and cultures. Bible women were as varied in personality, interests and desires as are women of this generation. Yet as we study the various women of the Bible, we will see that human nature has remained the same. The same characteristics of good or evil that we see in their lives are also found in women today. The Bible women who allowed God to work in their lives, who allowed Him to adjust their attitudes of heart and continually made right choices, were formed by the grace of God into godly women. Others, who became offended, jealous and angry, who refused to walk in the paths of righteousness and holiness, were brought to destruction because of their wrong choices.

From the purity of the Virgin Mary to a harlot named Rahab, from the splendor of Queen Esther to the humble services of a young slave girl witnessing to Naaman, from the nobility of selfless Ruth to self-seeking Jezebel, from the innocence of Eve to the heartlessness of Athaliah, we see Bible women living out their lives, creating good or evil in the world around them. It is the same today. In some great or small way, women influence those around them—their husbands, their children, their friends, their church, and their community. Women can either be *Hannahs*, instilling right principles, strong character and a deep love for God in their children and others, or they can be the mother of a *Judas* to whom his sin is directly attributed (Psalm 109:14).

In this study we will examine the lives of many different kinds of women. We will also consider the *special characteristics* which caused them to be recorded in the Bible's sacred pages. Their lives are a lesson to us, a mirrored reflection of those attributes of good or evil that reside within all women—attributes that can tear down or build up, that can help or hurt, and that can qualify or disqualify.

God is raising up mature spiritual parents in the Church in these last days. Therefore, may the lives of the women we are going to study have an impact upon us and cause us to be among those who *help* instead of *hinder* God's purposes upon the earth.

A Good Woman Is A Happy Woman

Deep within the heart of every good woman is a sincere desire to be the very best woman she can be. A good woman wants to be strong, stable, and have good character. She longs to be a person of substance, possessing all the qualities of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. Her goal is to be a wonderful wife and mother, and a faithful friend and neighbor. Most of all, there is a continual yearning within her being to bring delight to her heavenly Father. For every woman, this desire is the key to great victory and peace.

To achieve any kind of real and lasting happiness, a woman must put God *first*. The Lord must be her first love; and she must depend upon Him for everything. Her faith must be an active faith which she lives daily—not just on Sunday morning. Her daily prayer life must reflect her total dependence upon God to change her own heart, her husband, her children, and her circumstances. A wise woman understands that *human love* can never measure up to or take the place of her first love which is Christ Himself. She also realizes that her own love, even at its best, is inadequate unless she is drawing her resources from the One who is the very essence of love. This woman knows without any doubt that *true happiness* can only come from her deep love and dependence upon God.

The Bible has much to say about the qualities of goodness that must be woven into the heart of a woman of God. Bible women were not born good; they were *formed* into good women by many long, difficult trials, but only as they yielded, submitted, and allowed God to work deep within them. So, too, must it be with women of today. We cannot expect to attain unto the qualities of a good woman by our own strength. Only the qualities of Christ working within us can bring us into goodness.

A Happy Woman Is A Fulfilled Woman

Women function in many areas of life and do very well. But as we study the Word of God, we see a definite pattern emerging. Great Bible women (and also those of lesser position) usually had a supporting role as a wife, mother, or homemaker. It would seem, also, that in most cases, this was her greatest calling in life. This is the place where she received the most fulfillment, because this is the place God had chosen for her. Therefore, as we study women of the Bible, we can learn from them valuable lessons that will inspire, convict, and challenge us to become better wives, mothers, and homemakers.

God has created women for a specific purpose. In a positive way, she is to influence, encourage, produce, and nurture a *godly atmosphere* in her home. The world needs good, happy, fulfilled women who know and understand that they were born to bring pleasure to another; who gladly yield their own will and preferences when necessary, and who know what it means to sacrifice for the sake of others, even when it leads to their own discomfort.

A Fulfilled Woman Is A Virtuous Woman

True fulfillment comes from being a virtuous woman like the woman of Proverbs 31. This is a woman at her best. What is a virtuous woman? Virtue defined is a Hebrew word that means “strength, power, or stability.” It comes from the same root word that is used for the character of good judges. In the time of the judges, these men were able men, qualified for the business for which they were called. They were men of truth who feared the Lord (Ex. 38:21). So, too, is the virtuous woman. She is a woman of spirit, and her spirit has command of her soul. She is pious, industrious, and fears the Lord. She is a helpmate to her husband, and resolute and firm in the principles of justice.

Proverbs 31:10 asks, “Who can find a virtuous woman?” This suggests to us that virtuous women are hard to find, and that many who seem to be virtuous, really are not. Yet, the more rare, certainly the more they are to be valued. Proverbs chapter 31 aptly describes her. She has a value “*far above rubies.*” She is praised by her children who “*rise up and call her blessed.*” Her preeminence is clear, for Proverbs also tells us that among other women she “*excels them all.*” Her secret to spiritual success is that she is “*a woman who fears the Lord.*” This is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28).

- **What are the qualities of a virtuous woman?** First and foremost she is a good woman. She is a morally pure woman. The fear of the Lord completes and crowns her character. In all she does, she is truly a spiritual person who is guided and governed by God and His principles. The fear of God reigns in her heart and has become the beauty of her soul. She is proficient in all she does, and a diligent worker—“*she worketh willingly with her hands.*” She is prudent—“*she considereth ... and then buyeth.*” She behaves uprightly—“*strength and honor are her clothing.*”

- Secondly, a good woman is a good wife. She makes it her business to please her husband. Although she is a woman of spirit herself, her desire is toward her husband. She will desire to know his mind so that she may accommodate him and make him happy. She understands her husband’s role as the head of the home and welcomes this protection. She possesses a quiet spirit, and her husband is confident that she will speak and act appropriately on behalf of all of their affairs. She is discreet in conversations regarding her husband so that her husband is never damaged or reproached. She continually shows her love to him, not in just a physical way, but by not crossing his will or provoking his anger. She encourages her husband often, not just when she feels like it. By her cheerfulness, she makes him cheerful. She strives to be all that her husband needs her to be. She seeks her husband’s good—“*she will do him good all the days of her life.*” She keeps his confidence—“*the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.*” She aids his reputation—“*her husband is known at the gates.*”

- Thirdly, she is a good mother. She loves her home and has satisfaction in serving in any way she can. She hates idleness. She is careful to fill up her time so that none of it is lost. She applies herself only to the business that is proper for her, for she is submitted to her husband and that which he desires from her. She strives to work with her hands so that she can get the best and the cheapest prices for clothing and household items. Most importantly, she does all these tasks with cheerfulness and with purpose. She never thinks that being a homemaker is robbing her of liberty or individuality. She knows what skill she has that will bring the largest return back to her family. She does not meddle in the affairs of others, for she realizes that she has only enough time and energy to deal with her own. She dresses her family wisely: “*she is not afraid of snow for her household.*” She feeds her family well: “*she rises up and giveth meat to her household.*” She shops sensibly: “*she bringeth food from afar.*” She knows her labors bring benefits: “*she perceives her merchandise is good.*” She is never idle: “*she looketh well to the ways of her household.*” She loves her home and gives her all—“*her candle goes not out by night.*”

- Fourthly, the virtuous woman is a good neighbor. She is discreet and obliging in all conversations. She is dependable, honest, and not over-talkative. When she does open her mouth, it is filled with wisdom. She understands the need for a quiet spirit but also realizes that this does not always mean a quiet tone or a whisper. She is not a sheepish person, but aggressive in a good sense. At times the virtuous woman knows she must become as bold as a lion. Yet, she conducts herself by the rules of wisdom. She gives good advice to others, not with the authority of a dictator or as one who is always teaching others, but with the affection of a friend. She is also governed by the law of kindness which flows from her mouth continually. The law of love is written within her heart. Together, her wisdom and her kindness puts a quiet authority in all she does and says. She is confident and hopeful, and her words command respect as well as compliance—“*how forcible are right words.*” (cf. Job 6:26).

A virtuous woman is important and priceless to God. She is a rare treasure. Actually, God looks for these qualities in the lives of *all* His people. Christ is developing a bride for Himself. May God help us to model our lives after this woman who typifies the Bride of Christ.

Questions Every Woman Needs To Ask Herself

Ladies, I know it is your heart’s desire to become a virtuous woman! Before we begin this study, please read the following series of questions. They have not been included just to make you more aware of your shortcomings. Rather, they are included to show more vividly the beauty of character that God desires and calls for in any great woman of God. Hopefully, these questions will be thought-provoking and give insight into the qualities that are essential for the building up of a good woman.

If our goal is to please God and win Christ, these godly characteristics are not optional; they are essential. Yet, many of the women we will read about did not begin their lives with these attributes. Their beauty of character was something that developed over a long period of time through many varied trials and temptations. Their life was a process—a process of dedication to God, a process of obedience, a process of learning to put others before themselves, and a process of seeing themselves in God’s light. Many of the Bible women were able through much personal sacrifice to submit themselves to God’s dealings, while others failed or refused to try. As we study the consequences of their victories or failures, we also are faced with a choice: Either we may follow them unto victory, or sink downward with them into defeat, never experiencing the triumph of the Christian life.

The questions that follow are meant to challenge us to examine ourselves before we begin to examine the faults or fruit of the women in the Bible. In this way, we can be more in tune with the strengths and weaknesses that “make or break” a woman of God. They are also meant to provoke a positive action and response from those who desire God to birth these qualities deeply within their own being. Every Bible woman that we will cover in this study has either responded *positively* or *negatively* to her circumstances. In one way or another, each has struggled with these same questions. Some have lost much in their struggle, yet others have gained great victory through their yieldedness to God. It is our sincere prayer that as you read these accounts and determine in your heart to follow hard after a virtuous life, that you too shall be reckoned among those who have gained much.

1. Do I Have a Positive Influence On Others? In our study we are going to meet many different types of women who often found themselves in difficult situations and circumstances. By their actions or reactions, these women will either inspire and challenge us by their courage and fortitude, or they will repel us by their wickedness and lack of virtue. One thing is sure—their lives will influence us. An innate part of a woman’s purpose is to be an influencer. She is to influence, in a good way, her husband, children, family, friends, and associates. This ability to influence is a God given trait.

Often in the lives of many great Bible men we see clearly that there was a godly woman who had an influence upon him. It could have been his wife, his mother, his sister, or a grandmother, but there was a woman who helped him to achieve greatness. On the other hand, we see the terrible consequences that result when a woman's negative or wicked influence grips the heart of a man and causes him to follow a wrong or evil path.

Continually, we are influencing people for good or evil. No one is neutral, that is not possible. If you are alive there is going to be movement. It is as if we are a little pebble, and we are dropped into a pond, and the ripples just go out and out and out, far beyond what we could ever possibly understand or realize. Women have a tremendous power to influence for good or evil. A wife has a tremendous influence over her husband. She can turn him one way or the other. She can encourage or discourage him. Therefore, we must use this gift of God as He intended—to do good to all.

2. Do I Have a Meek And Quiet Spirit? A meek and quiet spirit is one of the most valued of all character qualities needed by a woman of God. This fruit, which is an in-wrought work of God's grace, is what makes us pleasing to Him. A meek and quiet spirit is highly treasured in His eyes, and the scriptures have much to say regarding this most valued virtue. Meekness means "no retaliation." It is the thought of a wild beast that has been tamed. The root meaning of meekness is "one who has been tamed and does not do his own will." A meek person bears God's chastening. Meekness is a holy acceptance of our circumstances with joyfulness. It is the opposite of an angry, demanding spirit. Meekness takes no vengeance in thought or deed. (See First Peter 3:4).

A meek and quiet spirit is free from hysteria, anxiety and frustration. As we examine the lives of a number of meek and quiet women of the Bible, we are able to see a picture of some who chose to lead a quiet, tranquil life, the foundation of which is settled and steadfast. In contrast, we will also be shown examples of women who were unable to place themselves in the presence of a tranquil life. They were unable to make a restful life their goal. Why? Because by their emotions they controlled their home and manipulated their husbands (i.e., by self-pity, anger, urging, pouting, and hysteria).

Emotions are part of being a woman, but God wants us to learn to be in control of them. A godly woman cannot allow her emotions to control her or her situations. In other words, she cannot allow her emotional slip to show at any time. (A lady's slip can be pulled up and out of sight, so that it can be used for the purpose it was intended!) Remember, God gave women emotions, therefore, He understands our struggles! However, when a woman carelessly allows her emotions to get out of control, they actually become to her like an outer garment—they become her covering.

Uncontrolled emotions change a woman's countenance, attitudes, and disposition. Thus, this covering affects her, her husband, her family, and all those around her. If these emotions are left unchecked, it is quite possible that she will eventually become like the contentious woman spoken of in Proverbs. Because of her emotional turmoil and this covering of anxiety, she could easily end up bitter, angry, resentful, and unhappy. That is why every godly woman needs the supernatural garment of a meek and quiet spirit so that she can guard against the natural tendency to be overwrought and out of control in her emotions.

For a woman of God, all life and learning must be seen and heard through the eyes and ears of a meek and quiet spirit. Otherwise, there will be a distorted image and an uncertain sound. Life must be seen through God's perspective or there will be a failure to measure up to His standards. If we truly desire to be a virtuous woman, a meek and quiet spirit is an absolute ingredient.

3. Am I a Woman of Wisdom? “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands” (Proverbs 14:1). As we study the various women of the Bible, we see this scripture literally fulfilled. Many Bible women built their homes on a good, solid foundation, while others destroyed them by foolish deeds. Rebekah took matters into her own hands and tore down her own home and marriage when she maneuvered Jacob to lie to his father and pretend to be Esau.

In Proverbs, wisdom is portrayed as a beautiful, virtuous woman. A wise woman is a pure woman. Wisdom is actually a spirit who yearns to be invited into a receptive heart so that she might produce her heavenly nature within us (Proverbs 1:20-23). Wisdom is more than an ability or skill. She has a personality that is made up of the seven divine characteristics (James 3:17). Wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, easily entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. These are the fruits of a life of wisdom, and a wise woman will make sure she builds her home and marriage upon these seven pillars. By building thusly, she will become a pure, peaceable, gentle woman, that is easily entreated, and without partiality and hypocrisy.

In Proverbs we are told to seek wisdom, understanding and discernment (Proverbs 2:1-7). Wisdom is a shield, a guard and a preserver (Proverbs 2:7-11). We need to pursue it, and we need to be clothed with it; for it preserves us from becoming a foolish, adulterous, immoral, or evil woman—which is the opposite of a wise and virtuous woman. What kind of woman are you? The book of Proverbs has much to say about the one who forsakes the pathways of God. This kind of woman is not building her house, she is plucking it down with her hands (i.e. her actions, words, attitudes, and responses).

Unfortunately, there is also another kind of woman spoken of in Proverbs. She is the contentious woman. She is angry, nagging, quarrelsome, faultfinding, and disagreeable. God’s Word tells us that it is better to live in a wilderness than to dwell with this kind of a woman (Proverbs 21:19). His Word also tells us she is like a continual dropping on a very rainy day (Proverbs 27:15). Unfortunately, this woman is not a vessel of honor, for all beauty of character is gone. In a very real sense, she is like a tin can—you can serve water from it, it is still useful; but it has no beauty. We must daily cry out to God for *wisdom* so that He will work it deeply within our hearts and keep us from tearing down instead of building up the lives of others.

4. Am I a Submissive Woman? Are you a woman under subjection? The word subjection comes from a root word that means “to place, or arrange under, to subordinate, to be brought under a state or influence, to render obedience.” Simply stated, it means that women should yield gracefully in love to the process of submission. This word does not imply a strong command to submit, but rather it is meant to imply a willingness to be placed under another.

God first created man, then he took woman from him. She was created for his pleasure. Because of the emotional makeup of women, they are also referred to in scripture as the weaker vessel. This should, however, not be taken to mean that they are second class citizens of the kingdom of God. Women need to see submission as a blessing, not a curse. Submission is for *protection*; it is not part of the fall or curse. Man was the head of woman before the fall.

God is an orderly God. In all of His universe we see the evidence of this order. In the home, on the job, in a marriage, there must be one head. Otherwise, there is chaos and disorder. Even in the Godhead there is a willingness to defer one to the other. The Holy Spirit never speaks of Himself, but only Jesus; and Jesus always points us to the Father.

Submission is a way of life, a structure of divine order. A woman should think of it as an opportunity to graciously honor someone above herself, and thereby defer that honor to another for the glory of God. When we understand it in this manner it becomes a willing, loving, and joyous submission to our Lord's perfect plan of divine authority. Therefore, it should not be difficult for women to seek the comfort, assurance, and protection of this divine order.

Ephesians 5:23 tells us that the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church. The word "headship" means origin or source. Woman was drawn from the side of man, so in a physical sense of origin, he is her source. In the same way, the husband is to be a source of blessing, encouragement, protection, and joy to his wife. In turn, the wife is to recognize her husband's headship. She is to respect, honor, adore, and yield to him. She is not to undermine him, be domineering, bossy, pushy, demanding, selfish, or filled with pride. These are trademarks of fallen woman.

As the legs of a table support and hold up the table, so, too, does a wife support her husband. The word *support* can be defined: "to uphold by aid, to assist as a subordinate character (one who functions underneath to uphold another), to be able to assist or further a cause, or to act as an aid or an attendant of someone or something." In movie productions there is a *leading* lady or a leading man, but there are also characters whose sole purpose is to be a *support* to the lead actors.

What is the job of the supporting actors? They are to make the star of the program look good! They are also there to help them perform at maximum efficiency. In essence, this is the role of a wife to her husband. As his vital support, she is to help him become all that God has ordained him to become. Many of the Bible women we are going to read about are wonderful examples of a supportive, submissive heart. Yet, many others allowed their own vain ambitions to destroy their marriage and their home. Some have chosen God's divine order, some have not. The happiness of a woman, however, is complete only when she walks willingly in the ways of God for her life; and a life of submission is the perfect way of peace and joy in Jesus.

5. Am I An Adaptable Woman? The first calling of a wife is to be a helpmeet to her husband. This word *helpmeet* means "one who adjusts and adapts to the one she is to help." Scripture shows us clearly that God has created the woman to adapt and adjust, not the man.

Whether married or single, many of the Bible women we are going to study were able, even with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, to adjust and adapt to their circumstances. This is the kind of flexible, adaptable woman we should strive to become for the glory of God. An adaptable woman is one who is available to her husband, family, friends, and associates. She is ready to be helpful, hospitable, receptive and responsible at all times, even when she does not feel like it! An adaptable woman is a yielded woman. She yields her rights, preferences, desires, and her own goals in order to adapt to the desires and wishes of another. This adaptable nature makes her more suitable for change, and she is therefore more able to accept life's ups and downs more easily, as she waits for God to work out the undesirable circumstances and situations in her life. The Lord wants to walk with each one of us, meet with us, and change us. Are we candidates? Are *you* a candidate?

6. Do I Create An Atmosphere Of Peace In My Home? A woman sets the tone, the climate, and the spiritual atmosphere of her home. How true that is! Her influence in the home is most important. In the original language of the Bible, peace is synonymous with unity. Peace really means to be in harmony and unity with ourselves, with God, with our family, and with our neighbors. A peaceful woman, one who is at peace within herself, will create a peaceful home. God's peace is inner serenity. It is calmness in the midst of the storm. Therefore, peace is a great stabilizing force.

A woman at peace is a thankful, happy, loving woman. She has conquered many enemies in the soul, especially alarmism. She is free from her own struggles and able to bring a calmness and a serenity to others for she has a well of life from the Lord springing up within her. For this reason, her peace sustains her soul even when everything around her is falling apart. A woman at peace with herself has won many battles and possesses a wholesome, God-given sense of self-esteem.

There are many scriptural examples of Bible women who did not allow this peace to permeate their hearts or their homes; therefore, the consequences of their lives were disastrous. We can only become recipients of God's peace when we yield to Him and allow Him to work those things within us that bring about His blessing. When we have a *holy resignation and abandonment* to the Lord's will, that is when peace grows and matures. We can only impart to others what we have ourselves. If we are unhappy and lack victory in our lives, that is what we will impart to others. On the other hand, if we possess the priceless peace of God (which is a fruit of the Spirit), others will look to us for strength in their time of need. May we be like those great women of God who by their peaceable ways, turned sons and daughters, cities and nations, and kings and kingdoms to God.

7. Am I a Productive Woman? Are you like the virtuous woman of Proverbs? She was a creative, talented, busy woman—always planning, working, and looking for an innovative way to help her family, friends, and community. This one understands well that she is serving an infinitely creative God, and because He lives within her, she is able to draw from the vastness of His creativity. Many of the women of God in Scripture are known for this wonderful female quality of a useful, productive life. It is very clear from Scripture that a woman's routine is very important to God. Much of what women learn spiritually comes in the midst of common toil, perhaps while she is washing the dishes, or vacuuming the rug, or doing her spring cleaning. Actually, God seems to delight in giving women revelation right in the middle of their most intense moments of productivity.

God loves to visit a woman who is on the ordinary road, doing ordinary things. Furthermore, He seems to honor that one who is not asking or even seeking sensational happenings, but is choosing rather to commune with Him during those times of ordinary work and duty. May we, like many Bible women before us, see the value and importance of serving, seeking and seeing God in the mundane, everyday affairs of womanhood. Let us purpose to be industrious, diligent, hardworking and helpful, for this kind of woman pleases the Lord.

8. Am I a Woman Filled With Faith? The scripture is very clear that reminds us, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb.11:6). A godly woman must see the tremendous importance of being filled with faith. Faith is a gift from God. It is imparted to us by God, and we must live by the "faith of the Son of God." Faith is also a spirit or anointing. Paul mentions the "*spirit of faith*" in Second Corinthians 4:13.

Faith is actually a substance that will strengthen, uphold and protect us in times of doubt and struggle. But in order for faith to work in our hearts, we must be actively seeking it. A woman's mind, will, and emotions must be wrapped up in her pursuit of faith. While her intellect can help her comprehend faith, a *willing and seeking heart* is the only thing that will help her apprehend faith. "Apprehend" means "to take hold of, seize, or understand." It also means "to learn by observation; or to discover by experience, and to become aware of, or have a perception of, by and through the senses." True faith comes only when we take hold of it. Even during those times when our circumstances seem impossible, we must seize this gift of faith with our whole mind and heart. We must cry out to God to impart *His* faith into our being.

We will be looking at a number of Bible women who had great faith. We will even see how that faith brought multitudes to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Their pathway of faith was long and hard. Yet their faithfulness was eventually rewarded by His faithfulness—as they received the promise in the end. Real women of faith need to have *a persevering spirit* in prayer and in patience. As we stay committed and steadfast in our petitions to God, He will impart His faith to our hearts and we will have those things for which we have earnestly prayed.

A Divine Dream

I would like to recount a beautiful story that depicts *the levels of faith* of three different kinds of women. As we study the various women of the Bible, and carefully examine ourselves in the process, this story will serve as a supreme reminder of our need for a growing faith. The following is the classic account of one Christian woman's dream as she saw three other women in prayer:

“As they knelt the Master drew near to them. As He approached the first of the three, He bent over her in tenderness and grace, with smiles full of radiant love and spoke to her in accents of purest, sweetest music. Leaving her, He came to the next, but only placed His hand upon her bowed head, and gave her one look of loving approval. The third woman He passed almost abruptly without stopping for a word or glance.”

The woman in her dream said to herself, “How greatly He must love the first one. To the second He gave His approval, but none of the special demonstrations of love He gave the first. The third must have grieved Him deeply, for He gave her no word at all and not even a passing look. I wonder what she has done, and why He made so much difference between them?” As she tried to account for the action of her Lord, He Himself stood by her and said:

The Interpretation

“O woman! how wrongly has thou interpreted Me. The first kneeling woman needs all the weight of My tenderness and care to keep her feet in My narrow way. She needs My love, thought, and help every moment of the day. Without it she would fail and fall. The second has stronger faith and deeper love, and I can trust her to trust Me however things may go and whatever people do. The third, whom I seemed not to notice, and even to neglect has faith and love of the finest quality, and her I am training by quick and drastic processes for the highest and holiest service. She knows Me so intimately, and trusts Me so utterly, that she is independent of words or looks or any outward intimation of My approval. She is not dismayed nor discouraged by any circumstances through which I arrange that she shall pass; she trusts Me when sense and reason and every finer instinct of the natural heart would rebel—because she knows that I am working in her for eternity, and that what I do, though she knows not the explanation now, she will understand hereafter. I am silent in My love because I love beyond the power of words to express, or of human hearts to understand, and also for your sakes that you may learn to love and trust Me in Spirit-taught, spontaneous response to My love, without the spur of anything outward to call it forth.”

The pursuit of the *faith-filled* life must be the desire of every woman of God. Above all, she must seek to please the Lord by apprehending this *third level* of faith. In the succeeding pages we will be challenged by the persevering faith of many great women of God. May the same Divine Spirit who inspired the Bible writers inspire us also as we study the lives of these Bible women. May we gain and not overlook *any* of the valuable lessons God intended when He breathed life into His Word.

Chapter Two

THE FIRST WOMAN—EVE

Meaning of Name: Life giver, life spring, mother of all living

Scriptures: Genesis 2:18-24, 3:20, 4:1; II Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:13,14

Characteristics: Trusting, Innocent.

As a man, Adam looked around and saw all the creatures he had named. Each animal had a mate, but for Adam it was not so. Adam was lonely. God knew he needed a counterpart to complete him. Thus, Eve was formed from one of Adam's ribs (Gen. 2:20-23).

From Scripture we see that woman was formed from the side of man. Modernists today do not like the idea of her being formed or created from Adam's rib. But this is such a beautiful thought. The rib is located under the arm, and the arm protects the rib area from harm. That is what the function of a husband really is. He is to protect his wife—his little rib. There is amazing symbolic beauty in the way God created a woman. Woman belongs at a man's side in order to fill the void that is created without her. God did not create her from Adam's foot, for she was not to be walked on. Nor was she created from his head to usurp or take the authority. Instead, she was taken from his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and close to his heart to be beloved of him.

And God "brought her unto the man." This is another very beautiful reality. The Lord prepared a woman, and when she was ready—He gave her to a man. He did not prepare a man for a woman, but rather a woman for a man. How important it is for the single ladies to understand this godly principle. How essential it is to allow the Lord to prepare you. Rest assured, when you are ready, God will present you unto your lifetime companion. It is not necessary to go out looking for him. Remember, God is preparing you—so let Him make you ready! He knows exactly what and who you need, and when, and He will be faithful.

Adam was thrilled when he saw what God had brought him. In fact, he was so happy that he exclaimed with much joy, "*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.*" Hence, her first title or name was called woman. From this verse we see that the word *woman* is really more of a designation of her gender. It actually denotes her sex. Literally, the word "woman" means *maness* (like hostess). She is the feminine of man. Eve was of mankind but she was not a man. She was first called *woman*, or *WO-man*, because she was taken from man. Actually the word *woman* means a man with a womb ... the one who can bring forth.

The second name she was given is found in Genesis 5:2. "*Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam.*" Both Adam and Eve together were called *Adam*. We see from this verse the clear scriptural basis for a woman to take upon her the surname of her husband. For a woman to receive her husband's name was actually God's plan and purpose from the very beginning of time. The implication in this name "Adam" is also very clear. This implies that God's plan for them was not merely to be a husband and wife. It goes much further than that. *They* were called Adam. In other words, they were two separate individuals, but they were called "one." In God's sight they were one, and they were always to be one. Therefore, this union should never be dissolved. God made them one flesh and He gave them one name, because they were one in His sight and *called to one purpose*. In marriage, God calls two people to hit a mark together.

The third name she was given was Eve. She was not called Eve in the beginning, but she was given this name after the transgression. It is interesting to note that Adam actually chose her name for her. In Genesis 3:16,20 we read, “*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee ... And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.*”

From this we realize clearly that Adam knew prophetically the future of mankind. He knew she was destined to become the mother of all living. The name *Eve* means “life, or life-giving.” Her life is in us all, and it has been passed down through the ages. She was and still is the mother of all living. Since Eve introduced sin into the world, Adam could have chosen to call her something that meant death. Yet he chose to call her mother of all living because he knew that out of the seed of a woman would also come the Christ of God. Mercifully, then, even though it was she who introduced sin to us, through her also came our Savior. Through a woman, Mary, a descendant of Eve, sin would one day be vanquished, and even death would be swallowed up in victory. So we see that even though she was the first to sin, yet also through her came salvation and the great plan of redemption.

Eve had many unique distinctions, some awesome and some sad. Eve was the first woman who lived upon the earth. She was the first created woman. She was never a child. She was fashioned as a lovely, complete and perfect woman.

One of woman’s most privileged titles was bestowed upon her. Motherhood is one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities with which women are blessed. Women shape the character of their children. It has been said, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” That is indeed true, and what awesome responsibility it places upon all of Eve’s daughters.

Eve was the first to be called a wife, for God said it was not good for man to dwell alone. God’s plan was for her to be “good for her husband.” The role of wife is a very important role in God’s sight. As a woman we want to be good for our husband spiritually. This is our number one priority. Then, if we do this well, we want to also be able to be an intellectual helpmeet to him. A very important part of a good marriage includes good communication. God never meant for a wife to be so intellectually inferior that her husband must speak down to her continually. Therefore, a wife should strive to be on an equal par intellectually with her husband, able to communicate and comprehend what is important to him. Eve must have been intelligent because we see that Lucifer’s temptation was directed at her thirst for knowledge. The tree was “*a tree to be desired to make one wise.*”

Another important first for Eve was that she was the only woman to be created without sin. This must have been a glorious state of being because she had no inherent traces of sin from her ancestors. As we all know, *we are who we are* because of our parents and grandparents before us. Unfortunately, we are born with a certain predisposition to particular sins because of various generational weaknesses. Dr. Brian Bailey had a vision that illustrates this truth very clearly. In this vision he first saw a very small weed, which became a bush, and then a very strong tree. The Lord showed him that what was just a little sin in the grandmother, was allowed to grow larger in her daughter because the grandmother had not dealt with it. It was not a good trait and it was passed on, but it became even stronger in the granddaughter. Consequently, this problem became like a strong tree in the third generation.

So we see the tragedy of Eve. Eve did not have this generational problem. She was created absolutely free. She was holy and pure. She had nothing to be concerned about. She had no sinful tendencies to overcome. She was perfect, and yet she was the first person to become a sinner.

Eve was created in the express image of God, and He fashioned her perfectly. Because of this, there is no doubt that she had marvelous beauty and grace both in mind, spirit and body. She was complete, and total, and right; yet she became a sinner. Now she has passed that sin on to every generation that has been born. Eve transferred that sin to her children, and to all the children that have followed. We have all become sinners (cf. Psa. 51:5). Therefore, even the most devout among us are prone to sin because of Eve's transgression.

She was also the first woman to be tempted and beguiled by Satan. In spite of all the beauty and grace that was given to Eve, it was spoiled by sin. Satan used the angels in heaven to rebel against God, and in the same way he used a woman on earth. His goal is to destroy the earth in the same manner he tried to destroy heaven.

God used Satan to test Eve, and of course we know it worked! Satan did not tell her to sin. He did not suggest anything to her openly. He was very clever. Lucifer, in all his subtlety must have fascinated or challenged her. He must have approached her in a way that was very smooth, because obviously she was very well provided for in the Garden, and there was no need for her to partake of that tree. However, this shows us clearly a revelation of her character. Eve is intelligent, she is beautiful, she is innocent, but she has a weakness. She is vulnerable and open to deception. She could be easily flattered and she is quick to believe a lie. Second Corinthians 11:3 tells us that "*the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty.*"

Eve had a simple, uncorrupted form of life in the Garden. She knew what it was to walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening. She had a loving husband. Together they ruled over the earth which God had created. She did not know fear, for she was living in a kingdom of perfect love, peace and harmony. She had a simple trust in everything and everyone. She had no knowledge of evil, and in her purity and innocence the Tempter came. Satan lied to her and she believed him. There was a simple trust in her heart, but Satan had betrayed that trust.

Through that betrayal, Eve lost her authority in Eden. She also learned what it was like to feel and sense fear. The perfect harmony between her, Adam, and the rest of the world was now destroyed. She no longer could fellowship with God every evening in the Garden. Eve's eyes were now enlightened. She knew now the difference between good and evil—but this knowledge had only brought sorrow with it. Out of that choice made by the first woman flows the consequences you and I live with today.

Through the ages, we have seen this same trait in the lives of Eve's daughters. We have all been in situations where women have fallen and have been deceived. We wonder and say, "How could she have done such a thing; she should have known better than to trust him!" Some of us are more easily deceived than others, but as Eve's offspring we must be quick to realize that we are all susceptible. We must never think we are above being deceived, for that is *the greatest delusion of all*.

Actually, the way Satan deceived Eve was to put a question mark by what God said. Still today, that is all he needs to do to veer us off course. All he needs to say is, "Did the Lord really say such and such?" Immediately, then, we begin to question, and we are thrown off guard. Then one thing leads to another, and to another, and to another, and finally we find ourselves entangled in something we should have totally avoided. Where and when did the confusion begin? When we began to question God's Word! Lucifer deceived the woman with his cleverness, and with his subtle undermining of God's Word. Satan simply made that slippery path down sound almost like it was going to go up. But this path would only lead down into destruction.

Her steps downward are clear from Scripture—she admired, she desired, and then she ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree. “*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to her eyes, and a tree to be desired ... she took of the fruit thereof ...*” (Gen. 3:6). Lucifer first got her attention, and she was then drawn into his spider web of deceit. However, James 1:14-15 shows us *how* we are drawn away. “*Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.*”

People just do not slip easily into sin. They are drawn away by their own lust. We must understand that there is something in us that responds to Satan’s varied temptations. When we look, we desire, and when we look and desire, then a seed is planted. And make no mistake, unless that seed of sin is uprooted it will produce iniquity.

So the fall was the result of Eve’s covetousness. Since that time, mankind has ever sought to cover his sin with little fig leaf aprons as Adam and Eve did when they realized their nakedness. They were coming short of God’s glory, so they made themselves the first clothing, and Eve therefore became the first seamstress.

As we have already said, Eve became the first mother, but she was also the first mother of a murderer. Murder came into the world because of her fall. Yet the Lord said to Satan as a result of sin that He would “*Put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, and it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel*” (Gen. 3:15).

This is God’s first spoken promise of the Redeemer to come, and both Adam and Eve heard it. This Scripture speaks to us of Christ’s redeeming plan of salvation, even of His resurrection. Jesus said He would totally defeat Satan when He arose from the grave. The Apostle Paul confirmed this when he said: “*Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Col. 2:15). When Jesus was on the cross and He cried out, “It is finished,” it surely was. However, if Christ had not risen from the dead, it would *not* have been validated.

Adam and Eve did not understand fully the words of God when He spoke this promise. Nevertheless, they knew that man would eventually be introduced to God’s definite plan of redemption and salvation. That is why Adam could call Eve, “mother of all living.” She was given this name in faith, as he anticipated the fulfillment of the prophecy God had given them—that one of their seed (Jesus) would bruise the serpent’s head.

Let us all who are daughters or husbands of Eve, realize from this study that we must be wise to Satan’s wiles. Satan ruined himself by desiring to be like God, and therefore seeks to infect the whole human race (beginning with our first parents) with this same desire because he wants to ruin us as well. Today he is not tempting us to eat fruit from a tree in the garden, and yet he comes to us in a variety of ways. He will still use the same smooth, clever way to try to tempt us to get off track, and on to the wrong path.

We are told in John that “*The thief cometh not but for to steal, to kill and to destroy.*” Satan will never be able to do us good. If we can understand this basic truth, we will not be deceived when Satan tries to paint his rosy picture. This has been his game plan since the beginning of time. In his subtle way he tries to convince us that his choice will do us good and we must try it. Satan teaches us first to *doubt* and then to *deny*. He makes us sceptics first, and then by degrees he makes us disbelieve God or His Word.

Satan is quick to discover all advantages, and equally as quick to attack the areas of our minds and hearts where we are the weakest. With Eve, he centered in on her *curiosity*, her *innocence*, and her *vulnerability* to deception, taking full advantage of her simplicity. On the other hand, Adam's rebellion in the Garden was not so. He was not deceived by the serpent. Adam was beguiled by the charms of his wife. Charm was one of her greatest attributes. Well did Solomon write about the mystery of the ways of a man with a maid. Eve had so enamored Adam, she had so fixed a hold on his heart, that he was as putty in her hand. Therefore, he knowingly and willfully disobeyed the commandment of God in order to please her.

So great is the influence of women, and nothing has changed to this day. How many men in history have fallen captive to women's wiles. Kings have abdicated their thrones, men have been brought to their deaths, marriages have been destroyed, societies have been broken down—all because men have been charmed by women to their detriment.

Satan, like a thief, has come to rob and steal from us, even as he did with Adam and Eve, our first parents. His desire for us is only death and destruction. It is Christ alone who comes to give us life more abundantly. He is the Good Shepherd, and if we follow closely behind Him, we will not be led into temptation. Remember, we are only drawn aside by our own lusts that war in the members of our body (Jas. 4:1). There must be something in us that *responds* to the temptation. Therefore, we must be careful when our eyes begin to wander, or we begin to desire or long for something. It is then that we must consider our thoughts to see if they pass the test. Will it bring us into the mercy and the grace and the abundant life of Jesus, or will it be a regression that will cause our foot to slip downward once again?

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Chapter Three

OLD TESTAMENT WOMEN

Old Testament women came from vastly different backgrounds and cultures than most of us today. However, we will see in studying these Bible women that human nature still remains the same. In Old Testament times the women of heathen nations were very misused. Yet in the nation of Israel, they were given a place of respect. The position of women in Israel was very superior to that of the heathen nations around them.

Heathen religions often included immorality and idolatry and the defilement of women. In Jeremiah 10:2, God warned Israel, “*Learn not the way of the heathen.*” The way of the heathen endorsed immorality which destroyed their worship of God. Not only did it destroy the true religion, it also destroyed Israel’s women. God set higher standards for the conduct of women in the nation of Israel, and all were expected to uphold these standards. When Israel’s women lived like the heathen, God sent them into captivity to cleanse them of evil, and often they were not treated well there.

Even today women are not allowed to walk along side of their husbands in some societies, but always behind them. In India, it was only in recent times that laws were passed that prohibited women from being thrown alive into fires at the funerals of their husbands. In countries where Christianity is given its rightful place, women can rise to prominence, and they are not trodden under foot as in the lands that do not honor the Lord.

It is clear that Old Testament women took a less prominent role than women of today. Yet there were many women of distinction who remain for us an eternal reminder that women can live within their limitations and still have victory. The Old Testament is filled with examples of women who were restricted in their movement and purposes, yet they found ways to accomplish God’s will and widen their influence upon their peers and superiors for good.

Because of these *God ordained* restrictions upon them, women have struggled with difficult choices from the very beginning of recorded time. Some have surrendered their own desires with a willing heart, but others have wrestled continually against them. Some have allowed their desperation to drive them into the jaws of destruction, while others have found strength, grace and peace in the loving arms of a holy God. The choice is always ours!

Some Old Testament women made wise choices, others made selfish and foolish ones. Eve partook of the fruit of the tree which brought about the devastating consequences of the Fall. Esther chose to risk her life for her people, and saved a nation. Orpah shed many tears and kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth chose to *cleave to her mother-in-law and take care of her*, and in so doing, became an ancestress of the Messiah.

Life is filled with decisions, and sometimes we do not know when we are being tested by God. Every day we are confronted with good and evil, right and wrong, and we have to make our choice! Throughout the stories of these Old Testament women, we will learn (by concept and by example) how to make wise decisions that will bring us into rest. Best of all, we will learn that the struggles in these women are not new, they are as old as life itself. Just knowing this will help us to choose the right path for our lives, by the help of the One who has gone before us, our Lord Jesus Christ.

SARAH

Meaning of Name: A female noble, princess, queen (Sarai means dominant, head person)

Scriptures: Gen.11:29—23:19; Isa. 51:2; Rom. 4:19, 9:9; Heb.11:11

Characteristics: Submissive, Faith, Obedience

The account of Sarah's life is recorded in Genesis, chapters 11 through 23. We are first introduced to her when her name is Sarai, meaning *dominant*. This name also carries the suggestion that she was contentious and argumentative when she was younger. However, when Sarai was the ripe old age of 89, God changed her name to Sarah, which means princess (Gen.17:15,16). Sarah lived another 38 years, and enjoyed the fruits of a submissive nature rather than a dominant one. This example of God dealing with Sarah, even when she was old, should give us all hope that God has a plan and purpose for our lives too. Though His plan takes time, He will perfect that which concerns us!

“And God said unto Abraham, as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her” (Gen.17:15,16). Here we see the promise God made to Abraham and Sarah. This is God's confirming promise that Sarah will be the mother of nations and kings. But how did she get from being a dominant woman to that of being royalty—the mother of kings?

The answer is really quite simple—Choices! Along her pilgrim way, Sarai made choices. Some of these choices were good, some were very bad. Yet, Sarai *learned* from her failures and mistakes. Sarai learned submission and she learned to have faith in God. Sarai learned to yield her way and to let God be God on her behalf. This is the reason her name was changed to Sarah.

Sarah gave God room to work things out. She allowed Him to be her defense. A woman can defend herself or she can let God defend her. She has that choice. God, however, will not defend her while she is determined to defend herself. The Lord desires a woman to be of a meek and quiet spirit. God's woman will never arrive at that goal if she is constantly defending and justifying herself and her ways. This is a basic foundational truth of becoming a pure and holy woman of God. Sarah is a shining example of the transformation that is possible (even in old age) if we are willing.

Submission to God's plan is not a matter of a woman being a doormat, with no rights, no opinions, no input. She is not a second class citizen in God's eyes. She simply lays down her rights willingly, yielding them in love to God. Then God will fight for her. Although this process is difficult, this is how a natural woman is changed into a supernatural one. If she pushes and shoves, she won't change. This is the true beauty of character that God wants to work into every woman's life.

There is much said in Scripture about Sarah's outward beauty, but it also commends her for something more, an inward beauty that was blessed of God. There is so much stress on the outward beauty of a woman, but God uses the following biblical illustration to show us His heart on the matter.

“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands; Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement” (1 Peter 3:3-6).

We must take note of that special phrase, “*Whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.*” In order to be called a “daughter of Sarah,” we must walk in her footsteps. If we want to have our name (and nature) changed, we must respond as Sarah of old. Every woman must learn to trust in God and conquer hysteria and fears; she must never take matters into her own hands. This ability to be still comes about as faith and obedience are developed. Women must possess a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price. If a meek and quiet spirit is of utmost importance to God, it ought to be for us as well!

Sarah’s name was not changed on a whim. It was not even the result of her own choosing. It was changed by God. The name change was a sign of His purpose. She was to be the mother of nations. It is also important to realize that this name change was preceded by a process that took a long, long time. Remember, her name was not changed until she was 89. In her walk with God, choice after choice confronted Sarai, and she did her best to respond rightly to God’s dealings in her life. Sometimes she passed the test, and sometimes she failed. In the pain of her barrenness, Sarai failed a very important test by encouraging the union between Abraham and Hagar, her maid servant. As a result, Ishmael, a child of the flesh was born. Though a child was born, the promise of God remained unfulfilled because the Lord had not sanctioned that union. What a lesson for all of us—our own efforts to assist God always result in trouble and pain. It is only as we trust in the Lord’s faithfulness that life can come forth.

Yet through it all, Sarah was showing God that she wanted to fulfill her destiny. She wanted desperately to become a princess. (The root word *Sar* means princess, or source of nations. It is only the endings that change the meaning. Therefore, she knew what she was destined to become!) Even though her name was Sarai, dominating one, she was taking steps of submission and faith because her desire was to become Sarah, a princess.

Some of those obvious steps of yieldedness and submission are clear from scripture. Genesis 12:5 tells us that Abraham took Sarai his wife. There is no record that Sarai had a revelation from God. She simply followed her husband. She obviously had the attitude like Ruth, “Where you go, I will go.” Abraham received a call from God. Sarai, without a direct word from God, moved with him by faith, as she left her home in Chaldea and Haran and went down into Canaan where there was a famine in the land.

As they moved into Egypt, she found herself in the house of a heathen king. Because of her beauty, Abraham requested of her to tell the king that she was his sister, (which, in fact, was only a half truth because she was only a half-sister.) Sarai obeyed! The Apostle Peter notes that she even addressed her husband as “lord” as a sign of submission (1 Pet. 3:5-6 cf. Gen.18:12). Sarai could have said, “What! I am not going to tell him you are my brother.” But again she followed Abraham. In these decisions, Sarai made choices that pleased the Lord, and turned His heart toward her to do her good.

Isn’t it wonderful to know that we serve a God that looks upon the heart of a person (1 Sam.16:7)! He looks beyond the failures and weaknesses and sees the desire of those who want with all their hearts to fulfill their destiny in Him. This should give us much hope as we press on in Him.

“*Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children*” (Gen. 16:1). This was Sarai’s difficulty. Barrenness was the tool God used to work in her life. This was what brought her to her knees. Ultimately, this barrenness was what God used to bring her into a meek and quiet spirit, so that her name could be changed to “princess.”

In Bible times in the Middle East, it was a reproach for a woman who could not bare children. She was not considered blessed by God if she was barren. In those days, a woman was considered wealthy, important and blessed by the amount of children she had, especially if she had sons. To be childless was a reproach, and we can be assured that Sarai felt that reproach keenly.

Because barrenness was the obstacle in her life that she wanted to overcome, Sarai was forced to learn to live with unfulfilled desires. This is the thing God used to teach her to wait upon Him. Yet God had given Sarai and Abraham a promise that their seed would inherit the land. He had told them that they would have an heir.

Sarai at the age of seventy six grew tired of waiting, and gave her handmaid to Abraham to bear a child (*Genesis 16:3*). Sarai had waited a long time but now she had grown impatient. She had done so well, but now near the end of the waiting she took matters into her own hands and acted in the flesh. In a time of waiting, while we are being tested, *the end is always the most difficult*.

However, if we want to inherit the great purposes of God in our lives, there will always be times of waiting. Sarai, unfortunately, chose not to wait. She had made a hasty decision, which she later regretted. We need to learn a valuable lesson from this illustration. Like Sarah, if we are hasty, we may have to eat the fruit of that hasty decision for a long time to come. We desperately need to *wait* upon God and give our desires to Him. If we are hasty and feel the pressure of the moment, we will go the wrong way. God is not in a hurry! Remember, Satan wants us to be hasty because he wants us to lose our inheritance or mar it in some way. We must come to a place of faith in God's promises irrespective of how long we have to wait! God's marvellous blessings are for those who wait for Him (cf. Isa. 64:4).

Sarah speaks to us of those who live by God's promise, whose promise is fulfilled because of His tremendous faithfulness to us. May we be ever grateful for this excellent example of a mother in Israel, and strive to become like her and be called her daughters. Women can only be called her "daughters" if they follow her footsteps and conquer fears, unbelief, and a dominant spirit.

HAGAR

Meaning of Name: Flight

Scriptures: Gen.16:1-16, 21:9-17; Gal. 4:24,25

Characteristics: Loneliness, Pride

The first mention of Hagar is found in Genesis chapter 16. Often we think of her in a very negative way because of her opposition to Sarah. Paul depicts her as a type of the Law (Gal. 4:21-31). She also represents a striving in the flesh. However, as we consider Hagar we glean certain truths from her life which are important to all of us. Sarah had probably obtained Hagar as a slave during their visit to Egypt. Growing discouraged and tired of waiting for the promised son, Sarah brought Hagar to Abraham's attention, persuading him to take Hagar as his wife. Hagar became pregnant and pride took the ascendancy. Hagar despised Sarah and she showed it openly. Of course, this angered Sarah and she was not very kind to Hagar. In fact, Sarah dealt so harshly with Hagar that she ran away.

We could be tempted to think in this situation, "Good riddance to bad rubbish." But God is very gracious. He does not think the way we do! When she was alone and lonely, sitting by a spring, probably wondering where to go or what to do, God came to her. Here she was, a stranger in a strange land with only the wilderness ahead. Gently, God told her to return to her mistress. Yet before she returned, He gave her certain promises, even naming her unborn son. In wonder, Hagar named the place where she was Beer-lahai-roi, which means "the well of Him who lives and sees me."

This same tender loving care is shown to Hagar once again when she and Ishmael were driven out into the wilderness because of their bad attitudes toward Sarah and Isaac (Gen. 21:9-21). We have here a picture of the tender mercies of God. She came from Egypt, symbolic of the world and the world's attitudes; yet God showed her mercy. She represents a type of spiritual outcast. She is a type of those who constantly dwell in the wilderness, experiencing little of the real blessings and benefits of the Gospel. Yet, in their extremity, their cry is heard and God comes to meet with them.

Perhaps at times, many of us have felt like Hagar—outcast and downcast. Maybe we have felt lonely and isolated from God and man. Perhaps we too have felt misunderstood, confused, and rejected. Like Hagar, we can even picture ourselves sitting alone by a spring. We remember sadly how we used to experience the presence of God, and we wonder what we are going to do next. Then God comes on the scene just like He did with Hagar, and hope is imparted in just one instant. But then we too hear the command: "Go back! Go back and submit to the person or that situation you fear, dread, and even hate." Obviously, it was not what our flesh wanted to hear, but as we obey the command, we find new life and hope again. This is the lesson in the life of Hagar.

Hagar is not a good example to follow. Yet most of us can identify with her at one point or another in our lives. Therefore, she reminds us that God does indeed see us in our wilderness experiences. Her life assures us that He will surely bring hope and encouragement to us during those times we feel most alone and forsaken. We must also realize that it is God who brings us into those wilderness experiences. Stop blaming Satan. Stop blaming your circumstances, or your spouse, or your children, or your employer. It is God! Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit. His experience there was necessary. Are we any different than He was? Hagar ran and she was not stopped until she was in the wilderness. She was not stopped until she was weary, worn, and glad to have clear water with which to refresh herself. Yes, it is God who brings us into the wilderness, but then He meets us there!

LOT'S WIFE

Meaning of name: Name not given

Scriptures: Gen.19:1-29; Luke 17:32

Characteristics: Worldly, Discontented, Unbelieving

Lot's wife is a pathetic figure in Bible history; she is forever immortalized as a pillar of salt. Although not truly wicked in the sense of a Jezebel or a Herodias, she signifies those who have their hearts and affections set on the things of this world. Because of this, they lose their own lives and the lives of their children. Lot chose the plain of Sodom for his home. Viewed naturally it seemed a good choice. However, the city was not a desirable place in which to dwell because the men of Sodom were wicked, and it was ripe for judgment. Yet, Lot chose to move from the plains into the city itself, and we find the family living there when judgment on the city was declared by the two angels. The angels then compelled Lot, his wife, and their daughters to flee from the city, warning them not to look back.

Here we see the nature of Lot's wife. She had been warned to flee and not look back. Sodom was going to be destroyed. Perhaps her looking back seems like a small thing. Yet, by the punishment, we are certain it was a great sin. She was in love with that ungodly place! Lot's wife also disobeyed an express command from the Lord. Her root sin was unbelief. Turning back meant she was questioning. Perhaps she was wondering whether Sodom would actually be destroyed. Perhaps she even thought she might still be safe there instead of fleeing toward the unfamiliar. Maybe it was due to the regret she felt in her heart because she was being forced to leave behind all that she loved. We are not expressly given the reason why she took that one last, *longing*, disastrous look, but whatever the cause for her hesitation, she disobeyed the warning and instantly became a pillar of salt. Salt is a symbol of death. Nothing can live in the Dead Sea because it is filled with salt.

Perhaps some would consider her punishment too severe. Who of us would not have been tempted to look back at our home that was perishing in flames? But this account is written for our admonition. The Lord makes this clear in Luke 17:32, when He said: "*Remember Lot's wife.*" By this graphic example in Scripture, the wicked, like those in Sodom, are warned to turn from their wickedness. On the other hand, this story is also a warning to all the righteous not to turn from their righteousness.

Lot's wife lived a luxurious life in the middle of extreme wickedness and corruption. More importantly, she was *content* to do so. We are told that Lot was a righteous man, whose soul was vexed by the evil around him (2 Pet. 2:7-8). However, we find no such statement being made about his wife. Apparently, she became indifferent to the wickedness around her. It is also obvious that she did not teach her daughters moral principles, for later in Scripture we see that they made their father drunk and became pregnant by him. Sodom corrupted the morals and integrity of Lot's wife and children. We see no evidence that Lot's wife mourned over the evil of the city, but instead looked back longingly over the loss of all she held dear to her heart.

All who call themselves Christians must renounce the world and the flesh. We must purpose to set our sights upon heaven, always pressing toward that wonderful goal to win Christ and be found in Him. Lot's wife reminds us that God takes no pleasure in those who draw back. "*Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it*" (Heb. 4:1). She is forever a memorial of the heartbreak of one who failed to obey, one who failed to instill godliness within her children. As we consider her life, let us purpose afresh to guide our lives and our children's lives unto that perfect path, determining with all our heart not to ever look back.

REBEKAH

Meaning of Name: Flattering (in the sense of pleasing in appearance.)

Scriptures: Gen. 22:23; 24:1—28:5; 49:31

Characteristics: Industrious, Strong, Deceitful

Rebekah's story begins in Genesis chapter 24, where we are introduced to a beautiful and sweet young girl. When her story closes in Genesis chapter 27, however, we see her as a sad and bitter woman. What caused this dramatic change? How did someone so sweet turn toward bitterness?

Abraham, seeking a wife for his son, Isaac, carefully instructed his servant to find God's choice for him (Gen. 24:1-9). Then we are shown many wonderfully, positive things about Rebekah. We are told that she was beautiful, pure, strong, and willing to go the extra mile to be helpful and considerate (Gen. 24:16-20). This beauty of character brings her to Isaac. Willingly, she left her family, her familiar surroundings, and her own comfort to travel to a far country to become the wife of someone she had never seen. Her willingness of heart is seen so clearly as she declared resolutely, "I will go." That takes faith! It takes a submissive heart as well. As she departs, the last words she hears from her family are a great encouragement to her. "*Thou art our sister, be thou the Mother of thousands, of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.*" However, after nineteen years of marriage, Rebekah and Isaac still had no children.

What happened to that word she was given? She was told she would be the mother of thousands, of millions. Was it those long years of waiting and the reproach of barrenness that caused bitterness and despair to rule her? We are not told what changed Rebekah's character, but the transition is clear. One thing we are told is that Isaac loved Rebekah and prayed for her to conceive. When God granted that request, there was joy—but also turmoil. It was then that Rebekah discovered she had a problem. She could sense strife in her womb as her twin children struggled within her. When Rebekah inquired of the Lord, not only did God listen, but He spoke directly to her and gave her the answer. She was told that she would have twins and that the elder would serve the younger. From this, we see that Rebekah had a love and faith in God that kept her in times of trouble. Also, she had a hearing spiritual ear.

Now let us look at Rebekah as a mother. Suddenly, we see the shift from loving, dutiful wife to a conniving, scheming mother. Why? What caused the change? Was it in her parents? We know from the story of Jacob how deceitful Rebekah's brother, Laban, was. It would therefore seem logical to assume that Laban and Rebekah inherited this iniquity from their parents. Rebekah had a relationship with God, therefore, she believed God's promise that the elder would serve the younger. Jacob, the younger, was a peaceable man. Esau was wilder, and he loved to hunt. The mother's heart went out to one child, the father's heart went out to another. Rebekah saw that Isaac, if left to himself, would cause Jacob to serve Esau, so she plotted to bring God's purpose to pass. Thus, we see a family divided as the parents choose sides, letting strife build between brothers who also sought favor by devious means.

If Isaac and Rebekah had been one in spirit and looked to God to bring His purposes to pass, things would have been so different. It is the same today. Our problem may not be that we have a favorite son or daughter. Yet how many Christian men and women plot and scheme to help God out when difficult situations arise. Maybe a son or daughter has rebelled and made a wrong marriage. How many parents figure out how they can rescue their beloved from such a disastrous marriage instead of trusting God to work things out for good?

Perhaps one of our children is in a financial struggle, and we know by pulling a few strings here or there, or doing something not quite right, we can get them out of the mess. We deceive ourselves into thinking there is nothing wrong with it, that everyone does it. How many of us constantly fix things for a wayward child so that our dear little son or daughter won't suffer too much.

God loves uprightness of character and He wants to remove any deceit and manipulation from our lives. Unfortunately, Rebekah learned the hard way. She plotted and schemed to obtain the birthright and blessing for Jacob, but in so doing she lost him. He had to flee for his life and she never saw him again. As a result, Rebekah's last days are bitter, sad, and weary.

What ever happened to that beautiful, pure, courteous, strong girl of Genesis 24? Proverbs 14:1 tells us, *“Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”* This dear woman of God did not build her house, she destroyed it with her own hands. How? By taking matters into her own hands! Rebekah's foolishness caused separation and brought unhappiness to her and her family. She manipulated her favorite son Jacob into lying to his father. Not only was she teaching him deceit, she was betraying her husband too. Her actions in Genesis chapter 27 divided the home. Jacob had to run away for twenty years, and his brother nearly murdered him. Her husband was betrayed, and Rebekah was the instigator. May this story ever be a warning to us!

What started out as an ideal marriage, a marriage made in heaven, ended with separation and sorrow and futile suffering. Isaac shared part of the blame too. He was a man of the stomach. He loved venison, and imparted that lust to Esau, his favorite son. Isaac taught his son to love sport, temporal values, and his stomach. Later when Isaac was going to pronounce the prophetic blessing, he asked for a great feast first. The apostles fasted and prayed when they needed direction and the laying on of hands for prophetic guidance (Acts 13:1-2). Thus, Isaac had grown spiritually dull and was dominated by his appetites.

Both parents shared one common flaw. They were partial. One parent loved one son, the other parent loved the other son. We can see that there had come a breakdown in communication over the years because the parents confided more in the children than they did in one another. Isaac's dullness was also obvious for three other reasons. He was still going to give Esau the blessing, in spite of the following serious flaws:

- 1.) He ignored the fact that Esau had bartered away his birthright, and was profane (25:34).
- 2.) Esau had married ungodly heathen women who vexed both Isaac and Rebekah (26:34).
The rebellious children from these marriages would have carried on the Messianic line.
- 3.) He disregarded the prophetic word to Rebekah that “the elder would serve the younger” (25:23).

Rebekah, seeing that Isaac was determined in spite of these facts to still pass on the prophetic blessing to Esau, took matters into her own hands. She did not believe God could work this out without her help. Thus, she manipulated Jacob to lie and deceive his father. Let us always remember that God is well able to bring His promises to pass without our help, especially by deceitful tactics.

RACHEL

Meaning of Name: Ewe

Scriptures: Gen. 29:6—35:19; 48:7; Jer. 31:15; Mt. 2:18

Characteristics: Jealousy, Love, Faith

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had barren wives at first. Rachel is the third barren woman mentioned in Scripture. Laban is Rachel's father, and Rebekah is her aunt. Scripture tells us that Rachel was very beautiful (Gen. 29:16,17). In Rachel, we see two basic elements at work—love and jealousy. Rachel was greatly loved by Jacob, and she loved him in return. How difficult it must have been for her to participate in her father's treachery as she watched her older sister become Jacob's wife. In one week, however, she also became his wife. Unfortunately, this arrangement was not without a price. Rachel was forced to share Jacob with her older sister. It was indeed an intolerable situation. All through Genesis chapters 29-31, we read about the striving and jealousy between these two sisters. No wonder all the children were filled with jealousy and strife, growing up in such an atmosphere!

Leah had one advantage over Rachel. *“Now when Rachel saw that she bare no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said to Jacob, give me children or else I die” (Gen. 30:1).* Leah bore Jacob children, but Rachel was barren. How often God seems to use barrenness in women as a real tool to draw them closer to Him. This is eventually what happened to Rachel, but not before she experienced some real tests. In her distress and reproach, Rachel put the blame for her barrenness upon Jacob. Yet he rightly pointed her to God, and through his prayer she triumphed. *“And God remembered, Rachel, And God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son: and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son” (Gen. 30:22-24).*

Surely we can understand Rachel's heartache. Leah now has four children, but Rachel is still barren. Perhaps it never occurred to Rachel that weak-eyed Leah would ever surpass her in anything, but this unfortunately is when the competition really started. Rachel's maid, Bilhah, is given to Jacob to have children. By custom, these children would become Rachel's children. Bilhah had two sons. Leah, in turn, gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob, and two more sons were born. Genesis 30 shows us vividly how each woman tried to gain love and favor by their own plans.

In the lives of so many women, we find this same theme repeated over and over again. Often, those who have experienced disappointments and heartache try to gain love and assurance through their own will and ways. While there is often not a conscious effort on their part to gain love through selfish, self-centered motives and choices of action, they find themselves in the same trap as Leah and Rachel. Though it may not be intentional, the end result is still the same—destruction, misunderstanding and strife in the heart, which ultimately affects a marriage, or perhaps an entire family. God is a gracious God, but He expects us to examine our hearts. He requires us to remove all wrong motives that would keep us from close communion with Him and others. Rachel and Leah's lives are written for our admonition. We would do well to heed the lessons learned from their mistakes.

This story is, however, a clear picture of how God often dispenses his gifts in order to keep a proper balance in our lives. Rachel wants children, but she is blessed with her husband's love. Leah wants love, but she is only fruitful. Surely, the Lord is wise and righteous in all His dealings with us. Yet we all too often question His judgment and kick against our circumstances! When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He granted her fruitfulness as compensation for her trouble.

As we move on in the story, we see that at last Rachel had a son of her own named Joseph. Her reproach was now taken away. Even in the midst of strife, there is triumphant faith in Rachel's heart. So much so, that Rachel understood from God that she was going to give Jacob another son. Therefore, she named her first son, Joseph, which means “adding.” Thus we see that in the least promising of circumstances, the faith of God can triumph. It really does not matter what our home situations are or how dark our circumstances, we can triumph by faith and be fruitful in the kingdom of God. This is the lesson we want to learn from the life of Rachel.

Rachel failed in many ways. Jealousy of her sister, Leah, certainly was an outstanding weakness. However, we see that Rachel had another very serious problem. We know from Scripture that she was also guilty of stealing her father's idols when she and Jacob, Leah and all their families left to return to Canaan. We are not told the reason for this deception, nor do we ever discover if she was caught in her sin, but it is certainly a disappointing indictment of her lack of character.

Why would she ever do such a thing? It is clear from Genesis chapter 31, that both Leah and Rachel were resentful of their father's dealings with them and with Jacob. Perhaps it was the resentment in Rachel's heart that caused her to feel justified in her actions. When we understand the background of these idols, however, we know the truth of her motives. These gods symbolized authority, power, and influence. Therefore, whosoever possessed them was the priest or the head of the family. By stealing these idols, Rachel was making sure that her son Joseph would be the heir. The contention and jealousy with Leah was so strong that Rachel wanted to be sure that her seed (not Leah's) had the blessing. There was a bit of Aunt Rebekah in her. From verses 32-34, we can see that Rachel *hid her idols* so well that even her husband did not know she had them. She was sitting upon them. This signifies that the idols were well hidden in her heart. This obviously permitted a spirit of idolatry to enter into the lineage of Rachel, which, although it passed over the spotless life of Joseph, it surfaced in his descendants, especially Ephraim.

The “hidden idolatry” of Rachel's heart is such an important truth for all of us. Perhaps many can boast that they have not been deceptive after her manner. They do not steal, lie, covet or connive. But, oh, how many of us have *hidden idols* in our hearts that we are sitting on, and not allowing God to deal with! The tragedy is that often we have concealed these idols so deeply in our hearts that, unless we have a meeting with God, we will not receive the multitude of blessings He has planned for us. Hidden idols will cause us to lose much. Therefore, we need to ask God to reveal those hidden things of the heart that could eventually destroy us or our family. Hidden idols are anything we use to bring about our own purposes. The truth here is this—because they are hidden, we often become *blind* or calloused to them. That is why we need a meeting with God, for He alone is the One who can reveal all the wrong, hidden motives resident within our hearts. Paul said he had “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty” and not walked in craftiness (2 Cor. 4:2).

Yes, Rachel had her problems. Yet she was not altogether unlovely. Rachel does stand out as the mother of Joseph, the man who saved the world from starvation during a famine. There is much amiss in the contest and competition between these two sisters, yet God brought good out of this evil. The seed of Abraham was about to be increased and multiplied upon the earth. Jacob's family would have twelve sons, and they would be the beginnings of many thousands of Israelites from whom the celebrated twelve tribes of Israel would arise.

LEAH

Meaning of Name: Antelope

Scriptures: Genesis 29:16-35; 30:9-21; 31:4-18; 33:1-7; 49:31

Characteristics: Jealousy, Acceptance

When we turn to Genesis chapter 29, we meet two sisters, Leah and Rachel. These two women are co-wives, sharing a man named Jacob. How wicked of their father to have ever arranged such marriages. Laban had violated the law of God. This was clearly a breach of the Mosaic Law for a man to marry two living sisters. In fact, it was an act of bigamy. Polygamous marriage to living sisters was forbidden under the Law (cf. Lev.18:18).

Rachel, the younger one, was the apple of Jacob's eye. Leah was not loved at all. She was resented by both Rachel, and Jacob. How intolerable her situation must have been. She must have watched time and time again as her sister got all the attention and preeminence from Jacob. Can you imagine what it would be like to live with a man who does not love you?

We first meet Leah as a pawn in someone else's deception. Her father Laban tricked Jacob into marrying her. Jacob, believing he was marrying his beloved Rachel, awoke the next morning after his marriage and discovered that Uncle Laban had given him Leah instead. The Scriptures are silent as to Leah's degree of involvement of this devious plan, but it is obvious that she bore the brunt of it.

Our first reaction is to side with Jacob in this situation, but we must remember that he was a pretty shrewd fellow himself. He had stolen his brother's birthright; he had lied and deceived his father at his mother's request. For a moment, let us consider what that first morning must have been like for Leah. More than likely, she overheard the loud and resentful cry that came from the lips of Jacob as he argued with his father-in-law about this wicked deception. If Leah had ever hoped for Jacob's love, if she had ever dared think that she could compete with her beautiful younger sister, all illusions were dashed when Jacob displayed his obvious displeasure that morning. Leah was unloved, that was for certain. Jacob had not sought her, and he had no desire whatsoever for her. All she had was seven days until she was displaced by Rachel. In this light, Leah is to be pitied.

At first, many cannot seem to relate to this particular situation. However, when we think about it, deception of one sort or another has been a very definite part of many relationships. Many relationships are marred by deception or disappointment. As sinners, we live in a sinful world. We bring our sinfulness into our relationships. And yet, God who is the Just One, comes on the scene and shows mercy despite our awful, fallen nature. This He certainly did for Leah. One of the sweetest words in this sad story of Leah is found in Genesis 29:31. "*When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son.*" (NKJB)

God was not blind to Leah's needs. He saw the ache in her heart, and He did something about her situation. He saw Leah's need and He moved by His Spirit to meet that need. I believe He will do the same for you and me! This presents to us an obvious question: Why would God wait until Leah was the unloved wife of Jacob before he blessed her?

We will answer that question with another question. If God had made her equally as attractive as Rachel, what are the chances that Laban would have pawned her off to Jacob? If not, Jacob would never have had the particular sons that were ordained of God for Israel and the world.

We are dealing here with a principle of God. God often works in our lives, not by giving us a perfect situation, but by showing His goodness and love in our very imperfect situations and relationships. God is a master when it comes to turning bad situations into good ones. It is for His pleasure, and for His glory. Thankfully, we are able to reap the benefits of that process. Therefore, men and women must not run from the challenges of a difficult marriage. Instead, they must allow God to work within the confines of that relationship. We must believe with all our hearts that He is a fair and just God who will ultimately reward us according to our positive responses.

A beautiful woman is often thought to be beautiful inside as well as outside. However, this is not always the case. Because of that outward beauty, people tend to overlook the character flaws and imperfections of women with charm and good looks. Jacob was no different. One look at Rachel and he had eyes for no one else. To him Leah did not even exist. However, Leah loved Jacob. She saw in him all the things she most admired in a man—strength of character, a diligent worker, intelligence, and faithfulness. Who could not love a man like Jacob, the anointed of the Lord? And yet, Leah loved him only to see him look with longing at her younger sister.

Yes, Leah was unloved. But God saw that and opened her womb. Not once, but at least seven times. Every time Leah held a tiny new life in her arms and named that child, we get a glimpse into her mind and heart. The Lord was gracious to Leah. He allowed her to give Jacob six sons and a daughter. Each time a new child was born she hoped it would cause him to love her, but it did not. Jacob could never forget her part in the deception. We are not told the reason, only that she remained unloved throughout her life with him. What a disappointment that must have been to her heart. However, it does give us insight into her character.

The suffering that Leah went through did not embitter her, it enriched her. We see her character progressing through the birth of her sons. The first two she named in hopes that Jacob would love her; the third one she declared that she and Jacob would finally be joined. By the arrival of the fourth son, she simply declared, “I will praise the Lord.” Although she still longed for her husband’s love, it was no longer an obsession with her. In her lifetime, Leah and her children were always given second place to Rachel and her son, Joseph. However, it is interesting to note that in death, Leah was given her proper place of preeminence. She was the one buried with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob. In life she was separated from him emotionally, but in death they were united.

God saw the character of Leah. She truly loved God. Unfortunately, Rachel had a love for position and for other things. This is substantiated by the fact that she stole her father’s idols. Leah became the mother of the biggest portion of God’s chosen nation, a position she earned through suffering and having a lowly place in this life. How we need to have developed in our hearts an acceptance for the lowly spot, an appreciation of the day of small things. By doing so, we can be prepared for that great day of promotion, whether it comes in this life or the next. This creates such hope for us!

What can we learn from this woman’s experience? Because we are flawed vessels and in the process of being remolded, we still may not have that total and unblemished union with our spouses. Our needs, blindspots, and unresolved conflicts get in the way of perfect harmony. Many times we are guilty of quenching the spirit of our spouse and we are unaware just how and when we are doing it. Leah had to accept the fact that the reason Jacob had a hard time loving her was because of the way she got him! Jacob was not able to love her because of the way that relationship began. Leah had to learn to put herself in Jacob’s place. Suppose Leah had been deeply in love with a handsome young man, and on the wedding night, his less attractive older brother took her! How would she feel?

Leah had to learn to accept her share of the responsibility for Jacob's closed heart toward her. It was imperative for her to understand just how she had quenched the spirit of the man she was married to. Leah could not look at things only from her own point of view. She had intruded into the life of a man who was in love with someone else. Now the love and acceptance she so desperately needed and had been deprived of from a man had to be drawn from God. This is one reason Leah's story is so important to us.

After all that she had been through, observe what she named her fourth son. She named him Judah, which means "praise." She said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Now in the perfect purposes of God, in this awful process of becoming a woman of God, Leah has *turned* from expressing her yearning for Jacob's love to an acceptance of God's love. Leah's focus has now shifted. She is no longer looking longingly at what she cannot have. She is now eternally grateful for what she has been given by God. Nothing had changed between her and Jacob. He still loved Rachel and not Leah. She could not change her situation but she could change herself. She could change her focus and attitudes. Most importantly, she could recognize the hand of God in her life that could give her worthiness when she felt none from Jacob. She could feel the love of God seeking her out, even if she could not feel love coming from her husband. In a marriage where a spouse does not feel properly loved, this is the most important step. A person must change his focus from what he does not have to what he does have—the love of God!

Out of Leah's personal sadness came rich blessings for Israel. It was Leah who gave birth to Judah, from whom came Israel's greatest king, David, and from whom came the Lion of the tribe of Judah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Out of a very difficult situation, Leah lived and survived. In a number of ways, some of us are like Leah. We find ourselves in undesirable situations, with scars because of the pain of our past. Life seldom comes to us in a way that totally satisfies. Like Leah, we have a choice. Our life is always about choices. We can decide to focus on our lack, or we can decide to focus on what we have. When we make that conscious decision and begin to walk in it, God will move heaven and earth to meet our needs. Be assured that He will work a miracle through our sadness or lack, touching our world with a tremendous blessing as we yield our life to Him.

Accepting affliction (whether we have brought it upon ourselves or whether we are innocent) is part of the price we have to pay to walk with the Man of Sorrows. In one of his books, Paul Billheimer gives us an accurate description of the value and purpose of suffering. He states: "All affliction is intended to drive one to God. It is intended to work a fuller submission, a more utter devotion, an increasing patience, a greater beauty of spirit, a more selfless love toward both God and man. When it accomplishes this, then it may be classified as suffering with Christ and for His sake, because it has enabled Him to achieve His end and purpose in that individual."

Leah's life shows us how affliction drove her onward into the arms of God. We saw her beauty of character blossoming forth even in the midst of her pain and suffering. This is what God wants from all of us—a response of utter devotion even when the road is long and rough. Leah, unloved and unwanted, had a difficult life (partly because of her own doing), but her overcoming spirit is a testimony to us that God's grace can, in fact, bring us through to total victory. May we learn well this lesson from her life.

DINAH

Meaning of the Name: Vindicated

Scriptures: Gen. 30:21, 34:1-31

Characteristics: Indiscreet, Attractive

Dinah was the only daughter of Jacob and Leah. The narrative on her life is given in Genesis 34, where she is the cause of much trouble between Jacob and the Shechemites. In this chapter we read of Dinah's fall into the snare of moral impurity. It started when she "*went out to see the daughters of the land.*" Dinah chose wrong friendships and this was the beginning of her downfall. Dinah was probably in her teens at this time. She was being rebellious, and this is what leads to immorality. Unfortunately Jacob and Leah were not close, and this strengthened the rebellion in their daughter. She wanted to leave the covering of her father's house to be with worldly girlfriends. While she was with the wrong companions, she was also in the wrong places. Dinah attracted the attention of a certain young man who seduced her, defiled her, then petitioned Jacob for her hand in marriage.

Now we see how her second tragic mistake ended in total disaster, as her brothers learned of the affair, and were very grieved and full of wrath. With guile, the brothers spoke up when the young man and his father, Shechem came to offer Jacob a dowry for her hand in marriage. Telling them that it was not customary to see their sister marry and dwell among those who were uncircumcised, they encouraged the Jewish practice of circumcision. Thus, these men, as well as the entire village consented to circumcision (Genesis 35:13-24).

After the whole city was circumcised, on the third day when they were still sore, Simeon and Levi came boldly with swords and slew all the men of the city. After retrieving Dinah, they completely confiscated all of the wealth of the city. After the treachery of Simeon and Levi, Jacob feared that the other inhabitants of the land, which greatly outnumbered them, would take vengeance and destroy them. Therefore, God instructed them to move to Bethel. This is the trouble that came to the house of Israel because of a wayward daughter. It began with rebellion and walking with worldly girlfriends. From there, Dinah fell into sin. This provoked her brothers who committed mass murder. Can we see how one sin leads to another! How wretched rebellion and disobedience is, and how destructive it is to the world around us.

Oh, how we need to protect and guard our young women. The Shechemites were idolaters and evil people. The young man that defiled Dinah was said to be more honorable than all the rest of the men, so it is clear that their moral standards were very low. Why did she yield to this temptation? What could have helped her avoid this tragedy?

We live today in a world of great immorality. Filth and pornography everywhere bombards our minds and vision. In the malls and on the streets we are often confronted with lewd and immoral graphics. Vile language flows readily even from the tongues of young children. Oh, how we need to watch our children and guard them from the companions of their youth. As spiritual leaders, as parents, as guardians, we need to warn them about where they go, what they watch, and with whom they spend their time. So many Christian young people have been lost to the world. It starts when they "envy the wicked" and desire to be with them and like them (Prov. 23:17, 24:1). They become backslidden because their parents and leaders were not faithful to warn and protect them in this area. Our children are priceless treasures. May we truly be ones who guard them from the contamination of wrong friends and wrong places that would lead them astray from the pathway of righteousness.

JOCHEBED

Meaning of Name: Jehovah is glorious

Scriptures: Ex. 2:1-10, Ex. 6:20, Numb. 26:59

Characteristics: Faith, Initiative

Our story of Jochebed opens in the second chapter of Exodus, where we are told she bore a child called Moses. Acts 7:20 refers to him as “exceeding fair,” which means he was beautiful to God. From the very beginning of his life, his mother knew that Moses was a “goodly, proper, and exceedingly fair” child. She also knew that she must protect him from the edict of the Egyptian king who was determined to kill all the firstborn of Israel. Faith was her outstanding characteristic.

Consider the life she led. In Israel, both men and women worked hard as slaves for the Egyptians. Jochebed already had two children when Pharaoh decreed that all male children were to be slain. Fear must have tried to grip her “mother’s heart,” but we are told in Hebrews 11:23 that she did not yield to it. Her faith in God and the value of her child caused her not to dread the penalty of disobeying the commandment of Pharaoh. Instead, she managed to give birth to her son, and then hide and closely guard him in her house for three months.

When the time came that he was too old to be concealed in the house, she devised a cunning plan. She made a waterproof basket, placed her small son within it, put it among the reeds on the river, and gave her daughter Miriam the responsibility of guardianship over him. We are not told how many days she sent the two little ones out with prayer and faith and a mother’s concern before Moses was discovered by the princess of Pharaoh. Yet, forever she shall be an example of one whose supernatural faith overcame her natural fear. Faith in God will *always* set us above the ensnaring fear of man!

We all have situations that cause us anxiety. For many, it is a daily battle as we try to find a way out or a way through our trial. We need to learn a great lesson from Jochebed—we must learn to cast our particular concern upon the river of God’s love. By faith, we need to believe that He will see us through the darkness of our situation. We need to continually commit our problems and concerns to the Lord daily. We need to trust him as Jochebed did. We can be sure that she did not go and check on her son’s safety hourly. She committed his keeping to God, relying only upon His care. We need to truly cast our cares upon Him until we see our problem resolved.

In the case of Jochebed, God’s answer by the hand of Pharaoh’s daughter seemed *the most unlikely solution* to the problem. Often it will be that way for us as well! Just as He did Jochebed, God will often require a response of faith from us that may seem absurd to our minds. Yet as we respond obediently, He will accomplish His greater purposes in our lives. In times of greatest difficulty, it is right and good to depend upon the purposes of God, and commit all our ways unto Him.

How wonderfully Jochebed was rewarded for her faith and foresight. As the story goes, her son was returned to her, and she had the honor and privilege of teaching and training him in the ways of God for a number of years. A child’s beginnings are so important. A mother’s influence upon them is so crucial. How clear it is that Jochebed did her job diligently. All three of her children became great leaders in Israel, and her son Moses, who inherited the faith and boldness of his mother, became perhaps the greatest leader of all time. We too must covet this same gift of faith so that it may be imparted to all of our natural and spiritual children. We should desire to become a mother in Israel who will nourish and guide those young ones that God places in our care.

MIRIAM

Meaning of Name: Bitterness

Scriptures: Ex. 2:1-10, Ex.15:20,21; Num.12:1-15; 20:1; 26:59; Micah 6:4

CHARACTERISTICS: Leadership, Responsibility, Jealousy

As we are first introduced to Miriam in Exodus chapter two, we are told that she is Moses' sister. In chapter fifteen, she appears as "Miriam, a prophetess" who was well known in Israel. When we consider women in the Bible as having a role in leadership, our minds leap automatically to ladies like Miriam or Deborah. It is at the Red Sea that we see Miriam standing out so prominently. She was a joyful, spontaneous woman, leading the women of Israel in a dance of praise and celebration on the shores of the Red Sea. Miriam played the tambourine and sang to the glory of God. Through history, this beautiful song of Moses and Miriam has been thought to be one of the most splendid, natural, spontaneous songs that has ever been written.

From a young girl, Miriam knew responsibility. The infant Moses was under her care when he was placed in the basket among the reeds of the Nile river. She was the one who quickly ran and called her mother to act as a nurse for the princess, placing her mother in the proper position with her own son. How happy she must have been to see her baby brother grow up and eventually lead the children of Israel out of Egypt in such a glorious manner.

Yet this talented leader had a serious flaw—her heart became lifted up with pride and criticism. Miriam's name signifies obstinacy and rebellion, which seems to indicate a part of her character that she did not allow God to change. Miriam, known for her prophetic ministry in praise and worship, is also known for her tongue of criticism and impure motives. Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses, supposedly because of his marriage to a non-Israelitish woman, but in reality it was because they were jealous of his position. God was angry with Miriam and Aaron, but evidently Miriam was the instigator because God judged her, not Aaron, with leprosy (Num.12:1-15). God was very displeased with her verbal attack against the leader, and reminds Israel of this episode a generation later in Deuteronomy 24:9. It was only through the prayers and pleadings of her brother Moses whom she had wronged that God changed His mind and healed Miriam.

In this story we see another side of God's character—we see His righteous anger. As Christians, we know that God is a loving and caring Father who has constantly seen us through our many failures. Sometimes, however, we are tempted to think that He excuses all of our sins and shortcomings because of His lovingkindness. The lesson portrayed here in the life of Miriam teaches us otherwise, and it should cause a new anointing of the fear of God to fall upon us. God means business. There are consequences for our sins, regardless of our degree of repentance, or shame and sorrow for them. Even though He is a merciful God, there are certain things He will not tolerate. One sin He abhors is criticism hurled against God-ordained leadership. Miriam's criticism was like a deadly virus that could have spread throughout the camp, causing a terrible plague of discontentment, rebellion, and even insurrection. God's prompt action of judgment against Miriam stopped that deadly virus before the whole congregation was contaminated with it.

It is the same in our own lives as well. God's anger cannot be abated and there will surely be retribution when we find ourselves in a constant mode of complaining, murmuring and criticizing those who are over us. Whether it is our pastor, our boss, or our husband, the words that we speak against them will not go unnoticed by God.

Like Miriam, His face will be against us, and our lives and ministry will not be blessed. Certainly God understands that it is not always easy for women to be under authority, especially when some men are very dictatorial in their approach. Notwithstanding, rebellion and criticism is never the proper response. Therefore, we should heed the serious warnings contained in this story of Miriam.

Miriam's account in Scripture should have had a happy ending instead of a sad one. She could have responded differently and kept herself in check. She had a wonderful position as a leader. Her ministry had been blessed of God. In a good sense, Miriam walked with God and she heard from Him. She was called a prophetess, and she was used by God to speak forth His counsel. It is in Numbers 12:1-15 that we read the account of her and Aaron's rebellion against Moses. Through these scriptures it is plain to see that Miriam is the instigator of this rebellion, for it is Miriam that God holds responsible, not Aaron.

"Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses, has He not also spoken by us?" (Num.12:2). We see very clearly what Miriam's real problem is. It is jealousy and ambition. She wanted joint leadership. She wanted to be equal. The same evil that filled Lucifer's heart and caused him to lead an insurrection in heaven was that which had *infiltrated* Miriam's heart. The good influence of leadership that she once had was now deteriorating into an evil influence. The virus was about to become a plague. For this sin, God struck Miriam with leprosy. Are we aware of the damage we can do with our tongue? Satan divided all of heaven with his venomous tongue! Most sins we commit are with the mouth.

Many of God's people have this same problem. How often do we hear some of the unsanctified saints saying, "Who do they think they are? I can tell them a thing or two, I hear from the Lord too!" Whenever we take this attitude, or hear it, or even think it, we must quickly go to God and ask Him to cleanse us immediately. If we fail to do so, the end result will be bitterness of soul. With Miriam, this sin of criticism was not just something that "happened." This was *a habit* that had developed over a period of time. We do not just stumble into the pathway of sin all of a sudden. This criticism was a pattern. It was an attitude of heart that she had managed to keep well hidden, perhaps even from herself. One day, the meditations of her heart became loud spoken words of criticism and bitterness. Truly, it is "out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks" (Lk. 6:45).

Like Rachel's "hidden idols," Miriam had been sitting upon the hidden idol of pride. Her heart was full of it, and God had to judge her harshly for it. Certainly God must have spoken many times to her, but she had not listened. Instead of falling on the Rock to be broken of her iniquity, the Rock had to fall upon her. There is an easier path. If God is speaking to us about our tongue or our motives, may we pray right now for God to rid us of these ugly sins that He hates so much. In this way, we shall escape His wrath, as we humble ourselves and walk softly before Him (see 1 Kgs. 21:27-29).

Failure came to Miriam at a time she least expected it. Through this *habit* of criticism and jealousy, she had labored *against* her mission in life. She was called to be a supportive leader with Moses, yet she rose up and fought against him. We are told that she died in the wilderness of Zin. Furthermore, after her rebellion, Scripture is silent about her ministry. As far as we know, she performed no more notable works. What a sad end for one who had been given every advantage to be great in God's kingdom. May her story serve to remind us of the wickedness of striving for power and position that does not belong to us, or has not been given to us by God. Happiness and fulfillment are only found when we stay in the boundaries of our divine call. We can *never* be blessed outside of them.

ZIPPORAH

Meaning of Name: Bird

Scriptures: Ex. 2:21,22; 4:20-26; 18:1-6

Characteristics: Dutiful, Devoted

Zipporah was the wife of Moses. The Bible records little about her. We do know that she was a Kenite, a tribe in Midian, the daughter of a priest named Jethro. She was a good and dutiful wife to Moses. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt, she was willing to take her children and go with him, even through many difficulties.

Zipporah probably helped her husband greatly during his forty years in the wilderness, during a time of many crushings as he was being molded into “the meekest man in all the earth.” However, one important issue surrounding Zipporah has a number of Bible scholars in somewhat of a disagreement. Some believe that she apparently withstood Moses on the rite of circumcision (Ex. 4:24-26). Others believe that it was Moses who was solely to blame for the neglect of such an important covenant. Whether this was the direct result of Moses deferring to Zipporah’s emotional or religious preferences or not, still it is clear from Scripture that God was angry with Moses, not Zipporah. It is also clear that Zipporah’s actions to circumcise her own son saved Moses from death.

All Israel knew they were to be circumcised. Genesis 17:7-14 tells us that God had promised Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan by covenant. The token of the covenant was *circumcision*. Everyone who ignored this command to circumcise, not only was denied inheritance in the land of promise, but was to be cut off from among the people. God had commanded Moses to circumcise all of his household; yet his second son was not circumcised. Thus, Moses was grievously erring in this most important area. In effect, by not observing the covenant of circumcision, he was making a denial of his own message. What was his mission? It was to bring the covenant people into the land of promise, and the qualification for inheriting the land was that every male child must be circumcised. In his own family there was uncircumcision; yet he continued to preach the blessings of circumcision to the children of Israel. No wonder God was angry with him!

Like Moses, many well known men of God have a very successful ministry outwardly. But has the sword of the Lord been able to circumcise their own hearts, or the hearts of their family? May this story of Zipporah serve as a warning that we must allow God to make us our message. How can we have a *life message* for others unless it has first become life within our own lives and homes? Certainly, this account is there to remind us that a life of total obedience to God is essential. There comes a time in our lives when circumcision of heart must be realized, and we cast aside everything that is hindering us from following God wholeheartedly. God may put us in a desperate situation, even as He did Zipporah, so that we will allow Him to cut away anything that prevents a full fellowship with Him. The circumcision of Gershom released both her and Moses into the purposes of God for their lives. Let us also release whatever would hold us back from complete surrender to God’s will.

From all we can assess from Scripture, it seems that Zipporah was much more a help to Moses than a hindrance. This, of course, is the way it ought to be. As wives, we should always seek to be a support and help to our mates, especially when they are experiencing difficult times, even as Moses did in the wilderness. If we should discover the displeasure of God because of a husband’s disobedience or negligence, like Zipporah, we must learn to act quickly in obedience so that God’s wrath might be turned away. In this way, a wife can indeed become a *source of life* for her husband and family.

RAHAB

Meaning of Name: Large

Scriptures: Joshua 2:1-22, 6:17-25; Mt.1:5; Heb.11:31; Jas. 2:25

Characteristics: Fervency, Vision, Faith

The story of Rahab is found in Joshua chapter two. She was a Gentile woman and a member of what is commonly referred to as the “oldest profession in the world.” She was a prostitute. This is not a very promising start for someone who would desire to count for something in the kingdom of God. However, Rahab holds a very special place in the purposes of God. She was only one of five women named in the genealogy of Christ. This is a special honor indeed. Thus, we must examine those passages that are recorded about her so that we can see what God would show us about her life.

In Joshua chapter two we see that two spies from the camp of Israel were sent to Jericho. They spent the night at Rahab’s house, which was near a wall. News of their arrival spread throughout the city and men were sent to arrest them. When this was discovered, Rahab hid the spies and told the men of Jericho that they had left her house. Probably if they had gone to any other house, the two would have been betrayed and executed without mercy. Yet God knew where they would find a friend that would be true to them. Surely, God guided them with His eye and hid them (cf. Jer. 36:19,26).

Rahab then obtained a promise from the spies that they would spare her and her household when Israel conquered the city (Josh. 2:14). The spies responded by instructing her to gather all of her family into her house. They gave her a *scarlet* cord to hang from a window to identify her house (2:17-21). She was to make sure it could be seen clearly by the Israelite army. As she did this, all her family would be spared. The fact that it was scarlet speaks of the blood of Christ. It was the blood of Christ that protected her and her household from destruction when judgment came.

There is another lesson we can see here. Those who show mercy are the ones who obtain mercy. In this case, she not only sought protection and mercy for herself, but for her entire family. This is certainly a very commendable quality that Rahab possessed. Her love for family, and her need for their lives to be spared shows us another facet of her character. She had a great capacity to love those to whom she was joined by blood as well as destiny. She may have been a harlot with a bad beginning but God saw her heart. Rahab cared for people, and wanted another kind of life.

Rahab did as she was told. When the spies returned they rescued everyone in her house (6:17-25). Then they burned the city. When she betrayed her own people and her own land, it shows us that she knew her obligations to the God of the whole earth were higher than her obligations to any other. Her faith in the God of Israel so changed her that she later became the wife of *Salmon*, a descendant of Judah, who became the father of Boaz, the great-grandfather of King David (Mt.1:5, Ruth 4:18-22).

Rahab was a prostitute but she had remarkable faith because she had a heart that was inclined toward the Lord. She is listed in Hebrews chapter eleven, along with all the other heroes of faith (Heb.11:31). Hers was an active faith. All the inhabitants of Jericho were terrified of Israel. They all believed that Israel was going to capture their city. Yet Rahab put action to her faith. She was courageous enough to do something to save herself and those she loved. This indicates a wholehearted, true faith.

Sometimes our faith is only a passive submission to what we have heard. We believe God heals, but we do not have active faith to receive healing for ourselves or our loved ones.

We know God can meet our financial needs, but we settle for less because we don't stir ourselves up to grasp hold of what God has already provided for us. We know God answers prayers concerning the salvation of our loved ones, but often give lackadaisical, halfhearted, wishful prayers, instead of exerting ourselves in active, faith-filled prayers. How we need to be fervent in prayer and active in faith, taking hold of all that God has purposed for our lives. By His grace, we must break through into the seeking, asking, and knocking realm of prayer and faith. This is what distinguished Rahab. She did not have a weak, lazy character. She was strong in faith and good works which caused her to be among the godly ancestors of Christ. Her faith was counted unto her for righteousness.

Her life also teaches us that the greatness of our sin, if it is repented of, will not bar us from the pardoning mercies of a loving, faithful God. Rahab was forgiven and she was made righteous because of her active faith and prayers. She was made righteous because she responded to God. The story of Rahab brings to mind the verse found in Revelation 19:7,8. *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage supper of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the Saints.”* Rahab “made herself ready” by responding to God. She triumphed in Christ.

Everything that Christ has to offer is granted only to those who will come—to all those who will accept His invitation of salvation. The Gospel of Christ is simple. If we come, He will come. By faith, Rahab discerned this truth and she acted upon it. By accepting Christ's invitation to come, she was reconciled to Him. Reconcile means *to exchange*. It means a change on the part of one party, induced by the action of the other party. It is restoration to favor; it is ceasing to be angry with another. Sin had made a breach between Rahab and God. There was broken fellowship and friendship, but now she was once again restored to Him. Rahab was different now. Her focus, her outlook, her goals, her ambitions—everything had changed! She was a different woman. Her goal now was like the Bride of Christ mentioned in Revelation 19:7—“to make herself ready.”

May we also respond to God's command to *“make ourselves ready”* that we will also be counted among those who have been granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.

DEBORAH

Meaning of Name: A Bee

Scriptures: Judges 4 and 5

Characteristics: Upright, courageous, A servant

Deborah's name signifies a bee. From her industrious nature and great service to God's people, we see she is aptly named. The account of her life is in Judges chapters four and five. At this time in the history of Israel, we find that Deborah, a prophetess and wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel. She is a shining example of a woman whom God equipped to serve Him and lead others. As a judge, we are told that Deborah held court under a palm tree and the Israelites came to her to settle daily disputes.

We see that she was given much responsibility by God. She is first referred to as *a prophetess*. A prophetess is a person who speaks the words of God. Their purpose is to strengthen, encourage and comfort. Secondly, she is referred to as *a wife*. Actually, we know nothing about her husband apart from the fact that he married Deborah. Yet this tells us that she was not a single woman who could give her whole life to the ministry. She had a husband to care for and be subject to, and she could not ignore the tasks that take up so much of a woman's time and energy. Thirdly, we are told she was *a "Mother in Israel"* (Jud. 5:7). The Word of God does not tell us that Deborah had natural children. Yet we see that there was a real joy in her heart over all the spiritual children that God had given to her. Fourthly, Deborah is referred to in Scripture as *a judge*.

In early times, "capable men from all the people" were appointed to serve as judges (Ex.18:25,26). As the tribes of Israel settled in Canaan, judges became known primarily as military leaders that came to power in times of national crisis. In one sense, they were generals more than judges. Yet they were also leaders who had risen to power because they had wisdom and were able to rule justly in matters of family, tribe and nation. In those days, unfortunately, a pattern repeated itself many times. With no stable central government, and no king, each tribe "did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25). It was a time of anarchy and apostasy. The Israelites absorbed pagan worship practices from their neighbors, and these rituals replaced the worship of Jehovah God. As a consequence, the different tribes of Israel were conquered by these neighboring powers, and forced into slavery or financial servitude in the form of exorbitant tributes. As a result, the tribes pleaded with God for deliverance. Moved with mercy and compassion God would raise up a judge and give him wisdom and insight to act as a military leader to overthrow the oppressor. Some judges were better than others, but it is clear from Scripture that Deborah had all the best qualities overall. We know she did well because the Israelites came to her from all over the land to seek her help and judgments.

Thus, we get a small glimpse into the life of one of Israel's great judges. She spoke to God and for God to the people. What was the key to her success? Perhaps it is hidden in Judges 4:5. "*And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim.*" The palm tree speaks of being straight, having an upright life and being full of integrity. It says she lived there. In other words, many of the hours of her day were spent there as she helped solve other people's problems. Her daily life was one of uprightness. The place where she dwelt was under the palm tree of *Deborah*. This referred to another Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, who had died while on the journey with Jacob who was going back to his old home. She was buried there in Bethel (*Gen. 35:8*). We know little about Deborah the nurse. What we do know is that she was loved by all, and there was a great weeping at her death. Here we see Scripture identifying together these two Deborah's. Could it be because they had the same spirit—the heart of a servant!

Deborah served her people by faithfully judging Israel. The other Deborah had faithfully served her mistress Rebekah, even going with her beloved son Jacob into exile. May we also have the heart of a servant, being willing to lay down our lives for the Lord and for His people.

As a servant, Deborah was content to judge and rule her people under the palm tree. However she could not ignore the plight of her fellow citizens up north. On one particular day, it was clear that Deborah had heard from the Lord regarding Israel's enemy. Therefore, she took courage, and went in faith with the word of the Lord to Barak, saying "*I will deliver [Sisera and King Jabin] into your hands*" (Jud. 4:24). Deborah knew that God had prepared Barak to lead His people in victory against the army of the Canaanites. Therefore, she went to him with God's command and commissioned him to do the work of the Lord. Barak accepted the commission, but he refused to go unless Deborah went with him into the battle. Such was the respect he had for her and her influence with God. Some Bible commentators paint a picture of Barak as a coward, but this was not the case. Barak was wise enough to understand that Deborah had the word of the Lord, and if he had her prophetic guidance with him, he knew he would win the battle. He knew she was a praying woman, and, of course, he needed that too. God used Deborah to give Barak the motivation to move against his enemies. The Lord gave him supernatural aid. The angelic hosts from heaven helped him (Judg. 5:20), but Barak still had to finish the job! He had to lead the Israelites into battle. This he did valiantly!

Our story of Deborah ends in Judges 5:31, where we learn that the land had peace for forty years. What a legacy for a woman named Deborah. In a time of terrible trouble, Israel's future rest was the direct result of the influence of this mighty woman of God. Certainly, Deborah shatters some of our stereotyped thoughts of the role of women in society and even in leadership. From this account of Deborah, we must conclude that it is God's prerogative to use whomever He chooses. Yet we must also recognize the qualities that brought this woman to a place of power and prominence among God's people. Her uprightness motivated and tempered all of her actions and thoughts. In other words, she used her power and influence rightly—to glorify God. In modern times God used a woman named Kathryn Kuhlman to heal and bless over five million people during her many years of ministry. Miss Kuhlman was very human, yet she possessed an extraordinary ability to deflect all praise and honor to God. This was the secret to her success and power.

Deborah had a special humility that enveloped her. She was careful to encourage Barak to lead the Israelites into battle, even though she agreed to be at his side. In an unusual turn of events, God was now using a woman as the head, and a man as the hand to accomplish his purposes—a reminder perhaps that no flesh may ever glory in his presence. But her humility was always evident. She made sure that everyone knew that her words were from God. She took no credit to herself for the divine guidance of God. Deborah repeatedly let everyone around her know that she had no confidence in herself. Her confidence was in God.

Deborah also understood the value of praise. Her song in Judges 5 shows us that she praised the Lord as the One who enabled Israel to conquer their enemy. Deborah was a true worshiper of God. That worship enabled her to be victorious in her ministry. It also enabled her to deflect any praise from herself, giving all the glory to her Creator. Deborah had gifts that brought her to the forefront. Yet she accomplished this with a meek and quiet spirit. As women of God, this is always to be our emphasis. Whatever our task or role, whether we are brought to the forefront in a leadership position or in a supporting role in the background, we must endeavor to do all in a spirit of humility. We must not strive for ministry, or seek to be out front. We must never seek credit for what God chooses to do through us. Whatever gift He grants us must be used to only bring glory to Him, not ourselves.

ACHSAH

Meaning of Name: Anklet

Scriptures: Josh.15:15-19; Jud.1:12,13

Characteristics: Encourager, Virtuous, Humble, Seeker

Achsah was the daughter of Caleb, one of the two spies who had faith in God when the rest of Israel failed. He was the only one of their generation besides Joshua who completed the journey into the Promise Land. When Joshua was dividing the land, Caleb asked for the mountain city of Hebron for his inheritance. Although he was eighty-five years old, he was strong in body and strong in faith. While many of the younger Israelites delayed and did not press in and wholly claim their inheritance, Caleb began the battle at once and dispossessed three sons of Anak who were giants. He then faced another strong city, Kirjath-sepher. He called for assistance saying that he would give his daughter Achsah in marriage to the one who defeated that city. His nephew Othniel won the victory and also won Achsah as his bride. (See Joshua 14-15 & Judges 1, 3:8-11).

Caleb used this request as a dowry for his daughter. Perhaps this may seem strange. Most people ask for sheep, cattle, goats, or money. But Caleb knew his daughter. He knew what kind of person she was and what kind of a man she wanted as a husband. Achsah was of the same spirit as her father. She would need a husband to match her boldness. In effect, Caleb said, “Whoever is brave enough, strong enough, courageous enough, and has the power in battle to conquer Kirjath-sepher—whoever is willing is the man who has the kind of spirit I want for my daughter.”

Achsah was a partaker of the strong faith of her father, for shortly after she became Othniel’s wife, she came to her father with a request. Caleb had given them the city Othniel had conquered as their inheritance, but it was in the south where water was in short supply. She wanted the springs of water nearby to make their lands more productive. The word tells us that “she moved her husband” to ask for the upper and lower springs as an additional inheritance. This word “moved” does not mean that Achsah was nagging or complaining. She had a meek and quiet spirit that “moved” not only her husband but her father as well. Achsah was not satisfied with dry and barren land. She asked for something better. These springs of water are symbolic of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Achsah wanted something better in the spiritual as well as the natural. Her discernment was of great benefit to her husband, causing him to also want God’s best. Women are known for *moving* their men—either in a good direction or an evil one.

“And she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?” This verse tells us something about Achsah’s spirit of humility. She knew instinctively how to move the men in her life. She knew she had to come down. This is a valuable lesson to learn for ourselves! As we are brought down, we will “move” others by our attitude of humility. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Achsah was not content with a barren field. We all have barren, dry areas in our lives where there are no fruits and flowers, just a wilderness. Perhaps we feel this barrenness in our relationship with the Lord or with others.

Like Achsah, we must not be content with just a barren field. Achsah wanted springs of water, and this should be our cry as well. God has much to offer each of us—but we will get what we cry out for. Being silent and passive is not to be equated with humility! If we do not ask for anything, we will not receive it. We need to cry out for springs of water, for refreshing, for fruitfulness.

We need to cry out for revival. It is true that God sometimes puts us in dry places because dry ground develops something in us that well watered places of revival cannot. Dry ground develops strong roots. Rainy climates cause growth quickly, but the roots are shallow. Without rain, without water—without the blessings of the Holy Spirit we will die!

Achsah reminds us of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31. She is a wonderful woman to pattern our lives after. *Virtue* comes from the Hebrew word that means strength, power or ability. Certainly, Achsah fits that description. Within her sphere of influence, Achsah behaved herself very wisely. She displayed a strength and beauty of character that would cause any woman to want to emulate her. Achsah's ability to discern the “best” is a quality sadly lacking in today's society. Achsah was glad for what she had, but she wanted something better for herself and her family. She had a dissatisfied satisfaction. And we need that too!

Even as the virtuous woman, Achsah did only good to her husband and for her husband. Because of her, Othniel was blessed abundantly. She was an industrious woman, busy about the needs of her household and interested in all the details of the house and farm. This story shows us clearly that as Achsah saw a need, she did her best to meet it. Her husband, Othniel, was the first judge of Israel. He was a godly and courageous man, ably assisted and blessed by this godly daughter of Caleb. Without her virtuous qualities, he would have been hindered, incomplete, and perhaps unable to complete this high and holy calling.

Leaders, whether pastors or politicians, are often hindered by the type of wife they have. It is a good prayer to ask the Lord to become an “Achsah.” It is also good for men to pray that God would give them an Achsah for a wife, for she will be one who is trustworthy and full of faith. She is the kind of woman who will “move” her man in the right direction.

DELILAH

Meaning of Name: Delicate or dainty

Scriptures: Judges 16:4-20

Characteristics: Sensual, Deceitful, Greedy, Traitor

Most of us are quite familiar with the story of Delilah, that terrible woman that cut off Samson's hair and took away his strength. Her name means "delicate or dainty," but we will see that her character is very unlike her name. Delilah was a heartless woman who loved riches. She will forever be known throughout all eternity as the woman who betrayed her husband or lover for money. Actually, we can compare her to *a female Judas* in the Bible. She was extremely covetous. She is known to all as a woman who would use her beauty and charm to lure Samson into physical and spiritual destruction.

In Proverbs we are warned against this type of woman. (See Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:3-20, 7:4-27). The book of Proverbs repeatedly instructs us to seek wisdom, but Samson did not. In his foolishness he followed Delilah. As a result, he was destroyed. Wisdom is a shield. It is a guard and a preserver. Unfortunately, Samson did not seek the counsel of God in his relationships. He needed to be delivered from "*the strange woman, even the stranger that flattereth with her words: Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God, For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None who go unto to her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life*" (Proverbs 2:16-19).

Regrettably, this scripture gives us an accurate description of Delilah, his betrayer. The story of Delilah is summed up in chapter sixteen of Judges. We know how Samson was captivated by her beauty, how the Philistine lords bribed her to find out the source of his strength, and how she betrayed Samson when he revealed it to her. What a detestable woman! What a beguiler and betrayer. She must have been a woman with great natural charm. Most certainly she cast a web of deceit over Samson. Can you imagine any man in his right mind revealing the true source of his strength to a woman who was obviously setting him up for capture? He should have known that she would try it again! But she had cast a spell over him. Delilah was a human snare. In actual fact, Samson did know better but now he was controlled by her. He had sold himself into bondage by his own lust. His self-will in regard to women had led him into a trap of all traps. He had now come to Delilah, a woman who was totally controlled by Satan.

Samson's restoration and glorious victory against the Philistines at the time of his own death did much to atone for his years of bondage. Yet, despite the fact that the name of Samson even today conjures up pictures of heroism, bravery and remarkable strength, we still think of him as a morally weak man, who was unable to control his own passions. What an end to such a gifted man, who had such God-ordained potential. What a tragedy to realize that he forfeited this potential greatness in God for the love of a covetous, wicked woman. Another great tragedy is, of course, that this beautiful woman allowed her lust for money and power to turn her toward such wickedness.

God made man the stronger sex. Yet even the strongest man can be influenced by the woman he loves. Every woman knows just how much power she has over her man. The great temptation lies within women to use that influence wrongly. This we must never do, however, even in small measure! Some women delight to see just how much they can manipulate their husbands. They rule over them in subtle ways, through their emotions, or even their fears. However, this is a danger to be carefully guarded against. We must seek to influence our husbands only in positive ways.

A home is secure and protected when it is firmly under the control of the husband. Women are too prone to emotional changes and reactions to bear the full burden of decision-making. Certainly, decisions regarding the home should be a joint venture, with the wife's desires and thoughts well known to her husband. It is certainly not a dictatorship. However, final decisions must rest with the husband. Otherwise, chaos and power-playing invades the home, and God's peace and joy and blessing will depart.

When we think of Delilah, we think of Judges 16:16: *"It came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; that he told her all his heart."* She was a determined and self-willed woman, and she nagged Samson until she got her way. Delilah wore him down until she had what she wanted. Samson was obviously not in control. Therefore, there was chaos which led to Samson's captivity and shortened life.

So let this sad story be forever a warning to women to guard their hearts from a controlling spirit. Delilah was a beautiful woman outwardly but because of her wicked, dominant spirit, she is not known as a woman of inward beauty or spiritual worth. Outward beauty is a gift from God, but as such, it has no bearing upon our value in His kingdom. Inward beauty is something that must be developed. Inward beauty is the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit, and all the other beautiful fruits of the Spirit. When one is possessed with an inward beauty of soul, it brings peace and joy to the heart like nothing else can. All evidence of a need to control, compete, and win is gone—there is only sweetness and a smile of contentment. May we seek those eternal qualities, and bring joy to the Lord and to our husband.

RUTH

Meaning of Name: Friendship, Beauty (something beautiful to see)

Scriptures: The Book of Ruth, Mt.1:5

Characteristics: Consecrated, Loving, Humble

Ruth means “beauty, or something worth seeing.” Others suggest her name means *friendship*. Ruth certainly was both of these. We are first introduced to her in chapter one of the book written in honor of her name. As the story opens, we find that she is a young widow. Actually, in the book of Ruth, we have a picture of three women. First of all, there was Naomi. She was a faithful Israelite woman who traveled with her husband and two sons to the land of Moab during a famine in their hometown of Bethlehem. They lived in Moab for several years. Her husband died; her two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Then her sons died and she was left a widow and childless in a strange land.

Naomi was heartbroken. Her thoughts and longings returned to the land of her nativity. She decided to go home, and her two daughters-in-law also made the decision to accompany her. She must have been a very kind, loving woman because they were so willing to follow her, but Naomi protested. There was no reason for them to go and every reason for them to stay in Moab. They would be safe and secure in their own land with their own people. If something happened to her, there would be nothing for them in her land. Thus she reasoned with them and urged them to return home to Moab.

The name of the first daughter-in-law was Orpah. Though she was a Moabite, she had seen enough of the reality of Naomi’s God to be attracted to Him. She was willing to go with Naomi and adopt her God and her customs. Naomi explained to her how impractical it would be to return with her. Orpah’s pliable nature (like the character, Pliable, in the story of Pilgrim's Progress) was easily deterred by the dangers of the way. She soon agreed to return to Moab, although she was sad to leave Naomi. Orpah is like many who have tasted of the good things of God, but who do not have the stamina to endure the hardships. Orpah was emotional, she cried and kissed her mother in law good-bye, but in doing so, she did not pass the test to go on with God. As we consider the life of Orpah, may we seek God for His grace. God is not impressed with tears, emotions, and promises, but with *action*.

Now we are introduced to Ruth, and we see her beautiful nature coming through. She heard Naomi’s words, but she also caught a glimpse of her heart. Ruth realized that if she returned to Moab, Naomi would be all alone without anyone to help her in old age. Ruth had heard numerous stories of Israel’s God, and there was a strong attraction to Naomi and the God who made her so wonderful. She knew that whatever the cost, she had to continue with Naomi and share her fate. This is true consecration.

“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). What incredible loyalty and love is seen in these verses. We cannot be too rough on Orpah for turning back. She did the expected thing. However, what Ruth did goes beyond that which we would expect. We need to understand the sacrifice here. Ruth was going to a land where she was not only a stranger and a foreigner, but where she had little hope of any life apart from taking care of her mother-in-law. She could not dream that her destiny would include an Israelite husband, for she was a despised Moabitess. Since she was a childless widow and destined to remain so, there would be no children to console her in her old age. She would be far away from all that was familiar and precious to her. All she had to look forward to now was the companionship of a woman who, by her own admission, called herself “bitter” (*Ruth 1:19*).

Yet when we make this kind of commitment, it is very inclusive. When someone goes on the mission field, this is the kind of commitment he or she must make in their heart. The people God is sending us to must be our people. If we cannot do this, we will be living in one place, but our hearts will be somewhere else. This was what Naomi was trying to tell her daughters-in-law. No one can be happy living in two different places—when their mind and heart are in one place, but their physical body is in another place. Naomi did her best to make them consider all the obstacles that would surely come their way if they followed her all the way home.

Yet we must look at the beautiful reward that awaited Ruth after she made this decision. Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David, who was of the lineage of Christ. All of this came *after* her consecration, *after* her willingness to turn toward the God of Israel, *after* she was willing to give up being married again and just care for her mother-in-law. When Ruth arrived in Israel, she did not just sit back and expect everyone to serve her or wait upon her. She was willing to take the lowly position of gleaning on the edge of the fields just like the strangers did. Because of her faithfulness, God directed her to the field of Boaz who greatly admired her willingness to help Naomi.

When Ruth discovered that Boaz was Naomi's near kinsmen and there was a possibility of a marriage to Boaz, again she faithfully listened to her mother-in-law's instructions how to pursue his favor. This she does even at the risk of her own reputation (3:7-14). As a result, Boaz took upon him the Levitical right to marry Ruth. Out of this union she bore Obed the father of Jesse, who begot King David. David's greatest son, of course, was the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these honors came as a result of Ruth's loyalty and unselfish love. Ruth could not have possibly known the endless blessings that awaited her during those lonely times when she was being tested.

During periods of great darkness or discouragement, we find it difficult to think that God is really at work in our lives to do us good. We may even be tempted to think that divine providence has passed us by. During these dark moments, perhaps we have found ourselves responding as Naomi who testified that the Almighty had dealt very bitterly with her, and we misjudge God and His purposes. God's silence tempts us to think He is no longer actively involved in our lives. Naomi's doubts and losses caused her heart to struggle with bitterness. When we look at the happy ending of this story, however, we see that all along God had purposed only to do her good. Therefore, we must not allow our hearts to sink into despair when we find ourselves in circumstances we do not understand.

God turned what seemed like happenstance into a great miracle for Naomi and Ruth. As Ruth gleaned in the field, she came to know Boaz. In time she became his wife. Life can often seem haphazard and accidental. Yet if we are committed to the Lord, He will work through what we would think to be mischances, mistakes, and errors of human judgment, and we will find that actually they are divine appointments that propel us into His purposes. We should come to realize that God has a purpose for everything and that ultimately He can make it work for our good. He will meet us in all we do, whether it seems ordinary and mundane, or miraculous. Life is a choice. Like Ruth and Orpah, we are all confronted daily with opportunities that make us *choose* God's way, or our way.

Orpah and Ruth were Moabites. In the study of Genesis, we learn that Lot's two daughters did a shameful thing to their father. Because of their own lack of moral fiber and fear that they would have no family, they tricked their father into a drunken stupor and each one had a son by incest. Thus, Ammon and *Moab* were sons of Lot by incest, who later became nations. Ruth and Orpah were Moabites. Ruth was able to overcome her background and heritage because she had a heart toward God. She was able to come out from her undesirable situations, but Orpah turned around and went back into it.

There are many *Orpahs* in the world. “Orpahs” are those who say, “It’s no use. I’ll just give up. I won’t even try because I cannot get past my background. It is in my mother, my grandmother, and I just cannot conquer this thing.” For Ruth, what could have been an obstacle to her became a stepping stone to lead her into the purposes of God for her life. This is a good lesson for everyone of us. When we are dealing with people, we must not allow them to hide behind their unhappy history, or their father or their mother. We must prove to them that God’s grace is sufficient, even for *their* situation. God’s enabling power is great enough to raise anyone up and give him a new start. In this respect, Ruth overcame, Orpah did not, but still it was a matter of choice.

The testimony of Ruth’s character is clearly defined in the story. She was hard-working, unselfish, committed, submissive, gentle, virtuous, but also *determined and steadfast*. What wonderful qualities for a woman to possess! Ruth did whatever she was asked cheerfully and willingly. It was hard, dusty work to glean in the fields after the reapers, but she did it for herself and Naomi. She obeyed Naomi completely, even when it involved risking her own reputation. She completely trusted in the older woman’s wisdom. Such humility and faith demonstrated here is actually quite rare. Yet this is what qualified her to be part of the lineage of Jesus Christ—the One who humbled Himself to become Servant of all. May we also possess this kind of humility of heart, so that we will qualify to be in the Bride of Christ.

HANNAH

Meaning of Name: Gracious

Scriptures: I Samuel 1:2—2:21

Characteristics: Perseverance, Committed, Prayer Warrior

Polygamy was never blessed by God, even though He allowed it in the Old Testament. Under the New Covenant, both polygamy and divorce are outlawed. Hannah was one of the two wives of Elkanah. She was the most favored and beloved of the two women. Elkanah was an assuring and adoring husband to Hannah. Nevertheless, she was unable to forget her barrenness. Elkanah's love was steadfast and sure, and his kindness and love for her in the form of peace offerings is also apparent from Scripture. Yet with all this love and attention, Hannah was still unable to forget her childlessness. Her troubled spirit took away her appetite. She was *absorbed* with her barrenness every moment and it brought her much sorrow and grief. It also robbed her of the joy of the Lord, and made her unable to properly love her husband. Eventually, God answered her prayers and a new life was formed in her barren womb.

Two women and one man—from the beginning this speaks of trouble! Adding to the problem was the fact that one wife (Peninnah) had children and Hannah did not. Jealous of the favor shown to Hannah, Peninnah constantly embarrassed and provoked Hannah for her childlessness. Hannah's character, however, caused her to take Peninnah's insults silently. She took this trouble wholly to herself. Most of us would have found some justification in *returning* in some measure the unkind and even cruel remarks of Peninnah. Yet Hannah said nothing even to her devoted husband, who in reality created this undesirable triangle by his polygamy.

It was this purity of attitude that moved the heart of God to open her closed womb. Years of travail had wrought a special intimacy with the King of kings and Lord of lords. Hannah's prophetic song of praise in First Samuel chapter two is the very expression of this intimacy (1 Sam. 2:1-10). After many tears before the Lord, Hannah had been granted the desire of her heart—a son. She had given her beloved son back to the Lord, and she was at peace with this decision as she sings: *“My heart rejoiceth in the Lord. Mine horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies: Because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: For there is none beside thee: Neither is there any rock like our God”* (1 Sam. 2:1-2).

At a time when most women would be full of sorrow at the thought of giving up their only child, we see that Hannah is filled with strength and victory. Something new and different has happened to this sullen, unhappy, barren woman portrayed in chapter one. In a true sense, she had been born anew. Her strength was in the Lord, and her lips could no longer be silent. An overflowing well caused her to praise the Lord of glory because of His faithfulness. A deep trust in the wisdom of her Creator made her to forget her sorrow, and she could only rejoice in her salvation.

Like Hannah, we need to experience a greater reality of the salvation of God that lies within our hearts. Hannah's barrenness made her sorrowful, but when God spoke to her, faith and rejoicing overcame all sorrow and sighing. During these times of barrenness, it is easy to lose our focus and become unthankful for the benefits we enjoy as Christians. The Lord desires to meet all our needs, but we must always trust and thank Him beforehand for His provision. Thankfulness is a necessary sacrifice in our walk with God. We can never hope to be “more than conquerors” if we do not possess a heart of gratitude. Thankfulness is the key to every victory that we have in God.

Hannah was of noble character, but unthankfulness was certainly a weakness. In the pain and sorrow of barrenness she had lost her focus and did not remember that the mercies of the Lord are new every morning and that “He daily loadeth us with benefits” (Psa.103:2). She had also lost her joy which was her strength (Neh. 8:10). When our strength is gone, the adversary threatens to undo us.

By giving in to her grief, Hannah found herself unable to pray and eat. She was, therefore, unable to fulfill her duty to God and to her husband. In her time of testing, she was gently rebuked by Elkanah to take notice of his love and affection. She responded as well as she could, coming to the table to eat (1 Sam.1:8-9). This is all God requires when we are in a trial. We must respond as much as we can with faith and strength, and try with all our hearts to do the right thing. For Hannah, this simple act of faith returned her to prayer, and she poured out her complaint to God once more. This time, however, her travail was even more fervent (v10-11). The delayed answer provoked a greater consecration to God, and she vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

During this intense time of prayer, even pastor Eli misunderstood her, and then misjudged her. He thought she was intoxicated and thus admonished her. Instead of taking offense, she calmly explained her situation to him. Hannah did not close her heart. Only proud hearts become hardened with offenses, not those that are humble and desperate for an answer from God. Eli then spoke on behalf of God and said: “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (1 Sam.1:12-19). Hannah was able to get beyond the pastor's humanness to hear a word from God through him. She discerned the voice of the Lord speaking through him, immediately after he misjudged her. Because she kept her emotions under control, she was able to hear something from God through a backslidden minister. Thus, faith entered her heart, and she conceived. What a marvellous example Hannah exemplifies to men and women everywhere and in all ages!

In Hannah's prophetic song of praise in 2:1-10, we see how greatly she has triumphed in God. No direct mention is made here of her son, Samuel. Through her trial, Hannah had learned the valuable lesson of praising the Giver and not the gift. Amazingly, answered prayer has not distracted her from the things of God as did her sorrow. In actuality, it all seems to have increased her admiration of God. Hannah is now fully vindicated from her barrenness, but she has begun to realize an important truth here. There may in fact be other “Samuels” in her life, but there is none like her God. Her heart now rejoices, not in the reality of her son, but in her God. She bows her heart before Him to praise Him for the revelation of her salvation, not for the particular blessing she has received from Him. Where once she was concerned with her own wants and desires, she is now deeply affected by God's goodness.

Finally, the spirit of prophecy replaces a spirit of prayer. Hannah is caught up in the prediction and preservation of the Israel of God, and even the further destruction of God's enemies. Having faithfully rejoiced and offered true thanksgiving for what God has done, she concludes with hopes of what He will do through Jesus Christ. Hannah is looking forward to the Kingdom of Christ, and we see in this fervent prayer an important reference to the coming Messiah. (v9-10).

What is the lesson here for us? Out of distress, heartache, confusion, embarrassment, even reproach, we cry out to God to give us something. Then, because He is a good God, He gives us that which we are crying out for. Why? So that we may give back to Him that which is already His! Actually, we must even go a step further like Hannah—our heart must rejoice as we give it back to Him. This is such an essential principal in the Kingdom of God.

Truly, our hearts must grasp the significance of this truth if ever we are to have lasting victory in Him. God understands our struggle. He understood Hannah's. But her victory came when she was able to reach heaven with her prayers of thanksgiving.

When we think of Hannah, we are reminded of intercession. Hannah was a woman of prayer. She was a sterling example of one who poured out her soul to God, who wept and travailed in such agony of spirit that she was accused of drunkenness. Her desire was such that she could not even voice it, her pain was too great for that. But God gave her a son, Samuel, who was a prophet of God. It is important to realize that Hannah travailed in prayer for her son before she physically travailed in giving birth to him.

Spiritually, this is often the case with us. Before we see something come to pass in our lives, we must often travail and intercede with all our might until there is no strength left in us. In giving birth to a baby, there is pain and suffering; there is agony and enduring. We become weak and our whole desire is fixed on one thing and one thing only—the appearance of the baby. In the spiritual, we must come to a place like that, where we will not rest nor be at ease until the purposes of God come to pass. This is one of the greatest lessons we can learn from Hannah.

We can also learn the importance of being a godly parent. Hannah prayed for her son *before* he was born, and she did not cease to pray for him afterwards. She nourished him tenderly at home, but she did not hold him to herself. Hannah released him to God's purposes. She had consecrated him to God, which is the first duty of any Christian parent. And she did not go back on that commitment, even though it cost her dearly. Hannah had to leave her son when he was only four years old. She had to leave him in the care of an old man who had failed as a father with his own sons.

This was also the same man who misunderstood her travail and thought she was drunk. After waiting years for a son, she could now only see him once a year. Yet she carried out her promise to give her son back to God. Hannah is such a wonderful example to us because she was willing to pay the price of total commitment to God, no matter what the cost was to herself. Can we do less in our day?

MICHAL

Meaning of Name: Brook

Scriptures: I Sam. 14:49; 18:20-28; 19:11-17; II Sam. 3:13-16; 6:16-23; I Chron. 15:29

Characteristics: Scheming, Resentful

Michal was the daughter of King Saul, and she was also the first wife of David. We are introduced to her in First Samuel 18:20. At this time, her father Saul was becoming very afraid of David. The Scripture tells us in verse twelve, “*And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul.*” Though unspoken, Saul’s jealousy was discernible to David. Saul’s fits of anger were becoming a common occurrence and David had just recently avoided a javelin that Saul had hurled at him (I Sam 18:11). Yet David showed respect to King Saul in all of this. David behaved himself carefully and wisely in all his ways because he knew the king was determined to murder him.

In a plot to have David killed by the Philistines, Saul made him captain over a great army, expecting him to be overcome by the enemy. So confident is he of David’s demise, that he offers his eldest daughter to David to wife as a reward for his valor. We are then told in Scripture that King Saul gives his daughter to another, and not to David. This was meant to be a great public insult to him and to his honor; yet David still conducted himself prudently. So wisely, in fact, that when Saul offers his younger daughter Michal for the price of 100 Philistine foreskins, David graciously accepts.

Saul had already tried to kill David with a javelin, and David did not fight back. Then he was confident that the might and power of the Philistines would bring David down—and yet that plan failed, only making David more loved of the people. Secretly hoping that David would say or do something to show his disrespect or anger toward him. Saul dishonored him before others by not keeping his promised betrothal to his eldest daughter. Saul’s next plan of attack involved his younger daughter, Michal. He offered his daughter, but there was still a catch. Saul knew the Philistines were a brutal bunch. He also knew they hated the Israelite ritual of circumcision, and his dowry of 100 Philistine foreskins would anger them greatly against David. “Perhaps,” thought Saul, “this will even lead to his death!” However, nothing seemed to be working in Saul’s favor.

At this point in the story, the Scripture has not told us much about Michal’s character qualities, so we can only read between the lines here. Obviously, Saul’s oldest daughter must have been a more desirable woman, for she was Saul’s first choice for David. But as Saul considers his daughter Michal, we hear his thoughts, “*And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him.*” Why would any father say this about his daughter? Did he know something about Michal’s character that we don’t know? Was she contentious? Was she hard to live with? Was she disrespectful and vexing to men? Perhaps her character was such that he felt confident that she would help him destroy David. Unfortunately, we are not certain of Saul’s reasons for feeling that Michal would be a “snare” to David, except that his request for one hundred foreskins would jeopardize David’s life in battle.

Later in Scripture we see things in Michal that made her a very undesirable mate for a great man of God like David. But for now, the Scripture has only told us that she loves David. In fact, we see that she showed that love when she risked the wrath of King Saul by helping David escape from yet another attempt to kill him (19:11-17). In this, she was courageous and loving. She was David’s protector and helper. Yet there are other character traits in Michal that were not so good.

After helping David escape from her father, her cunning and deceitful nature comes out. In response to her father's chiding words, "Why hast thou deceived me so?", Michal tells a lie that casts a very poor light upon David's intentions. Her reply to her father is this: "He said, Let me go, why should I kill thee?" One minute she is helping David. The next minute she is defaming his character by saying he threatened to kill her. What an unjust and unworthy reflection upon the noble character of young David. By these evidences, it would appear that Michal was a very self-serving, proud kind of lady.

Later, she was given as a wife to someone else (I Sam. 25:44). We are not made aware of Michal's attitudes about this arranged marriage. What we do know is that she lived with her new husband all the time that David was in the wilderness being hunted down by her father. She apparently did so happily, for she was forcefully removed from her weeping husband by Abner, who brought her once again to David after he became king of Judah. Whatever positive qualities Michal might have had before her marriage to David, the passing years had definitely not brought grace nor improvement in her attitudes. Evidence of this fact was displayed when David danced with great joy before the ark of the Lord. Michal despised and mocked him for doing so. Michal's heart had grown venomous and proud, for she had remained too long under the influence of her father, King Saul.

Marriages must grow! In the case of Isaac and Rebekah, it did not! In the case of David and Michal, there was no growth either. In fact, it deteriorated. Marriage can only grow if the couple is growing spiritually. Growing spiritually means we are increasing in the godly characteristics of the God of love. If love and the other fruits of the Spirit are growing, we should see a change in our attitudes, in our flowing peacefully together, and in the way we approach and respond to one another. When God brings two hearts together, He expects them to become one. Although this process is often a long one, God's grace is sufficient for any problem and situation we might face in our marriages. The *circumstances of life* will either cause a couple to grow in grace and appreciation of one another, or they will act as a wedge and cause a rift between the two.

Michal had grown proud and hard, thinking herself to be better than her mate. After all, she was a king's daughter and had been associated with royalty before David. This attitude separated her (in spirit) from her husband. David did not take the throne away from Saul without sharing that honor with Michal, Saul's daughter, his first wife. She rightfully deserved to be queen along side of him. David had become the King of Israel, and Michal had a place of honor, but she could find no joy in it. Why? Because her heart was infected with bitterness. One can almost hear the contempt in her taunting voice as the scriptures record the few words she did utter. "How *glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovereth himself!*" (II Sam.6:20). This unjust reproach of David's devotion before the Lord provoked God's displeasure who put her under the just reproach of barrenness for the rest of her life. We are given no details or reasons for her growing bitterness toward David, but from the words of 6:20-22 it appears that she had taken offense over the matter of her father's dethronement and was siding with the house of Saul. What we do know for sure is that David became a wiser and better man while Michal became more and more a foolish and bitter woman.

In closing we should remember that our attitudes toward the circumstances God allows in our lives will determine whether we become better or bitter people. As we consider the life of David's first wife, Michal, let us remember this verse: "*Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*" (I Sam. 2:30). Michal was lightly esteemed by God because she despised the Lord and talked so disrespectfully to her honorable husband. Surely, in the plan of God, if Michal had responded rightly and not haughtily, she could have received great honors from God. Instead, her name is forever associated with reproach and dishonor, and fruitlessness. May it not be so with us!

ABIGAIL

Meaning of name: Cause or Father of JOY

Scriptures: I Sam. 25:3-42; 27:3; II Sam. 2:1-3

Characteristics: Gracious, Understanding, Wise, Adaptable, Humble

The Scriptures do not give us much background or genealogy for Abigail. Yet her disposition expresses well the meaning of her name. She must have had early training in the ways of God because we can see how it governed her life in all she said and did. Abigail is the second woman whom David married. They met in an unusual situation. While in the wilderness, David and his men guarded the sheep of an Israelite name Nabal. They were protecting them from marauding animals and men. When Nabal slaughtered his sheep and held a great feast, which was customary, David sent his hungry men to ask for a portion of the meat and other dishes as a gift for his goodness in protecting Nabal's possessions. Instead of being grateful, Nabal was rude and surly, sending David's men away with empty hands and ears ringing with insults. David became angry and decided to teach Nabal a lesson by destroying all that he had.

This is when Abigail comes on the scene. Although Nabal was a foolish man (his name means *fool*) he had been smart enough to marry a wise woman. The Bible says Nabal was "*churlish and evil in his doings*" (25:3). Churlish means a bear of a man—and Nabal was certainly that! He was a very brutal, harsh, selfish man. The Scriptures tell us that he was a heavy drinker. Actually, he was a drunkard. We know he was also an unbeliever, for it is repeated a number of times that he is a son of Belial, or a son of Satan. Nabal was a very abusive man, one who could not be talked to or reasoned with. Yet Abigail did her best to honor him and serve him wisely, being loyal and faithful to him in all situations.

Our story of Nabal opens in First Samuel chapter 25. It would seem that Nabal is in sympathy with King Saul, as his treatment of David is very insulting and grievous. He knows that David and his men have been protecting him, still Nabal speaks foolishly about David, refusing to give him and his men food for their labors. He should have been generous to David for this protection. Actually, Oriental custom required Nabal to be polite to him, even if he were a deadly enemy. Yet we hear Nabal say, "*Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse ... Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?*" What Nabal is saying in effect is this: "Who is this David—just some hireling of King Saul—just another rebellious servant who has broken away from his master. Should I give my substance to these kind of men?"

Everyone knew that this was not the case. Israel knew that David was now running for his life away from the wrath of King Saul, even after David had won many battles for him. He had killed Goliath, and gained several crucial victories for Israel. Everyone in Israel knew who David was. But this was Nabal's way of ignoring and insulting him in front of his men. This was really a very wicked thing to do. Yet this incident allows us to see the character of Abigail shining forth. Abigail must have had great unhappiness. Being forced to live with a fool, she is a woman that had to learn to take a bad situation and repeatedly turn it in to something good. Only God knows the extent of the sufferings she experienced at his hands. We are not told. However, we do know that she must have triumphed in her situation because God only had good to say about this wonderful woman of God.

Let us consider for a moment her situation. Abigail is locked into a marriage with a very wicked man, who is blatant in his evil toward her and others. Yet we see a woman who does everything in her power to *limit* the damage her husband does.

Nabal's actions toward David really put him and his entire household in danger of death at the hands of David and his men. Therefore, Abigail knew she must act quickly. She must rescue her husband before David takes vengeance upon him. Her position of humility reminds us of Achsah. Abigail comes down from her donkey, falls at David's feet, and says: *"Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal ... I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days."* (1 Sam. 25:23-28)

Of all Abigail's bad situations, this certainly must have been one of the worst. Yet how wisely she handled the situation. Let's look again at what she was facing. To say that David was angry would be an understatement. He was furious. Actually, he was ready to kill Nabal and his entire household. Early in chapter 25:3, we are told that Abigail *"was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance."* Now we are beginning to understand why. Let's see what she does to turn this terrible situation around.

While it is true that she has risked the wrath of an evil husband by going out to David without his knowledge or permission, we wonder at this point if we could have done less given similar circumstances? With a dire situation, Abigail was forced to make a quick, decisive, independent decision apart from Nabal. Because we know that submission to our husbands is a basic principle of God, should we blame her for not getting permission from a foolish, drunken, wicked man?

Perhaps we should consider her situation more closely. If her plan works and David does spare Nabal's life and those of his household, what harm can she expect from him when he finds out that she has gone to David? How will this affect the servants and all the people in her care? Fears like that would have been enough to stop the most assertive of women, yet we still see Abigail in humility gathering food to take to David as a peace offering. What absence of fear and hysteria she exhibits here. In the midst of tremendous pressure, she holds steady. As a result, she is ultimately responsible for diverting a terrible disaster. In this, we see that she is like Queen Esther.

Esther knew it was against the law to go into the king's presence without his express permission. Yet the lives of her people were at stake, and she had to act quickly with resolve. Her immortal words, "If I perish, I perish," show us her heart as she presses forward beyond her own fears, desires, and comforts. Like Abigail, Esther knew her situation called for drastic measures.

When the lives of many are threatened it would seem from these two separate accounts that there are exceptions to the laws of submission to authority. However, what we do must be done in a spirit of humility. When we consider the fact that Queen Vashti was banished and removed as queen because she did not obey the king's command nor follow the law, we may be tempted to think God had a double standard. After all, Queen Vashti was put in a very bad position by the king when he commanded her in all her beauty to be in the presence of a room full of drunken men. It was not a customary thing for a king to do, and if he had been sober, he most likely would have very much regretted treating her that way. However, her proud, arrogant attitude is what displeased the king, his advisors, and God as well. This prideful attitude caused her to lose the throne.

Another well known Bible woman had a similar problem. Sarah was told by her husband, Abraham to tell the king she was his sister because Abraham feared for his life. She was his half-sister but also his wife. This must have been a very difficult situation for Sarah. Yet she honored Abraham and obeyed. As a result, God defended her. Vashti, on the other hand, took matters into her own hands, and God could no longer fight for her or her situation. Hence, she lost. When we consider the responses of these different women, we see an essential truth coming forth for all women. There is a *solemn call* that is placed upon every woman of God to live a life of humility and meekness, always conscious of her attitudes of heart and mind. How true it is that “so many lives depend on what I do!”

Abigail attests to the true humility that pleases God. Even though she knew that Nabal was the only one to blame, she was willing to humble herself before David and take the blame for her husband’s actions. This is not the action or attitude of someone who is being willfully disobedient. She knew David had every right to avenge himself of Nabal’s sin. In wisdom, however, she appealed to him not to shed innocent blood. She reasoned with David, reminding him that when he would become King, he would later regret his actions. David, a righteous man, not only responded to her humility of heart, but his anger was turned because of her wise counsel. Immediately, he knew that Abigail was right. He knew that God had sent her, for he responds, “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel which sent thee this day to meet me. Blessed be thine advice and blessed be thou which is kept me this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with mine own hand*” (1 Sam. 25:32).

Abigail then returns home. Seeing that Nabal was drunk, she waited until morning to tell him what had happened. We can just imagine how this foolish “son of Belial” could carry on when he was drunk. How many times had Abigail, or perhaps the rest of the household, experienced abuse at his hands during such times? However, wisdom was ruling this woman of God and she knew to wait for the proper timing. She was a woman accustomed to choosing her moments wisely. No doubt her decision to wait until morning came because of many previous moments of despair and destruction that had come as a direct result of Nabal’s wicked nature. Yet we must realize that because of who Nabal was, Abigail took great risk upon herself to tell him about David at any time. Though we are not given in Scripture the reason for Nabal’s reaction, we are told that he suffered a physical stroke or heart attack from the shock of her disclosure. He died ten days later. After Nabal’s death, David came to her and took her to be his wife.

Perhaps some would reason, “Abigail knew exactly what her husband would want her to do, and yet she acted contrary to his wishes. Therefore, she was wrong.” To answer this, we need to refer again to First Samuel 25:32-34. David confirmed that Abigail's actions were of God to keep him from shedding blood and regretting it later. He knew God had sent her, and that he was directing her. To David, she was a woman who was hearing from God. And because of it, David was listening. Scripture also makes it clear that her motive for acting independently was for the purpose of sparing the life of her husband. Surely, we cannot fault her for this, for she was taking steps to preserve his life.

Abigail stands before us as a model of a wise woman in a difficult situation. What can we learn from her? How can we help women who may be trapped in similar circumstances? Not every situation that women are up against is as urgent as Abigail’s. Yet many women today face pressures from an abusive situation. A simple answer is not easy. However, there are some important keys in this story of Abigail that can help us.

First, we know that Abigail was wise. Wisdom is divine; therefore, we must give ourselves completely to that One who is wisdom if we expect to be a *winner* in a seemingly “no win” situation.

It was wisdom that ruled the life of Abigail, and it was that wisdom that caused her to follow the leading of God which eventually brought her to the throne as the wife of King David.

Secondly, we must possess a humble, giving attitude that strives to preserve our marriages even when they may seem doomed to failure. Abigail was determined to make the best out of a very bad situation—and we must strive to do the same. It is this attitude of heart that pleases God and gives us a beauty of character that makes us attractive to others. This was the shining attribute of Abigail, and God commends her for it as He speaks of her “beautiful countenance.” Abigail was not only beautiful outwardly, but she possessed an inward beauty that was apparent to everyone around her.

Despite her bad marriage, amazingly it had not made her unattractive and sullen. It had not broken her spirit or destroyed her good nature. She was not depressed, despondent, and out of touch with the realities of life that daily confronted her. Even in her disappointment, she went about doing good. She cared for her servants, helped her husband in his ignorance, and appealed properly to David so as to spare him further trouble. In a dangerous situation she was able to give herself to others, acting quickly, wisely, and prudently to protect them. Unfortunately, many who find themselves in less than ideal marriages do not possess this same precious attitude of heart. Instead, their despair gives way to bitterness, bitterness to hatred, hatred to hopelessness. Ultimately this plunges them into a deep pit of depression and pain where they are no good to themselves or anyone else.

Thirdly, there may be a time when ladies will have to take decisive steps, and without permission, if there is ever a life or death situation confronting them. In her moment of terror, Abigail did not stop to argue with a fool. She had to act quickly on his behalf. Courage has been defined as someone with fear in their hearts who moves forward anyway. Well, this certainly describes the courageousness of Abigail. But there is an important lesson in this story that forms the real issue here. Despite Nabal’s wickedness, we see that Abigail’s godliness caused her to want to save her husband’s life. So much so that she risked her own life in the process, and was willing to take upon her the blame for her husband’s wrong doing. What a testimony of the grace of God working in a person’s life! She would not allow her heart to delight in his demise, nor was she ready to accept his destruction from the hands of David. Clearly, she was not the kind of person who would or could return evil for evil, hatred for hatred, or vengeance for vengeance. Should this not be the goal of every woman of God who finds herself in a similar predicament!

After the death of Nabal, God brought Abigail into a place of honor as the wife of King David. The fact that she took five (the number of grace) maidens with her when she went to wed David speaks of the grace of God that was evident within her. She lived in the wilderness with David, moved to the city of Ziklag with him, and returned with him when he became king. It could not have been an easy life. David was an outcast and a wanderer. Instead of the luxurious home she may have had with Nabal, she was forced to follow David wherever his captivity took him; yet she did so most willingly. In this, she is a lasting testimony of one who is the perfect “helpmeet.” Helpmeet is defined as one who adapts to the one she is to help. Surely, we can say that Abigail was an adaptable, flexible woman, one who was able to flow with the challenges and circumstances that life brought her way. As women, we need to covet this precious gift of grace. How we need to cry out to God to give us the spirit of Abigail, that we might also take a bad situation and make it a better one by God’s grace.

So also should we follow our heavenly Bridegroom cheerfully and willingly through the wilderness. He will lead us into strange lands, among our enemies, through captivity, and finally into a place of ruling and reigning with Him for all eternity.

BATHSHEBA

Meaning of Name: Daughter of the Oath

Scriptures: II Sam.11:3-27; 12:24,25; I Kgs. 1:11-31; 2:13-23

Characteristics: Penitent, Diligent

Bathsheba is one of the most well-known women of the Bible. Movies have been made concerning her adultery with King David. The resulting consequences of that terrible sin caused them both much sadness. However, there are still truths that can be learned from her life. She was a beautiful woman, married to a brave, self-effacing man named Uriah. When David spotted her on her balcony bathing herself, there must have been many conflicting thoughts and feelings. She was the beloved wife of a very good man, as seen in the parable Nathan told (II Sam.12:1-7). From the brief sketch we have of him in Scripture, Uriah shows great sensitivity and concern for others. He is also listed among David's mightiest men (2 Sam. 23:8-39; v39). Bathsheba was a beloved wife in what seemed from all outward appearance, a good marriage. Why, then, did she fail?

For the answer here, we must turn our thoughts back to Mother Eve. Women like romance, attention, and excitement, and they also have their vanities. Besides all that, David was the King. He was a great man, highly favored and revered. How could she resist going to him? Being called to come to him was very flattering, and must have aroused her sense of importance. We can just imagine her thoughts, "The King of one of the strongest nations in the world, has sent for me!" Perhaps she talked herself into the belief that she could not refuse him. After all, he was the King. At any rate, she obeyed the summons, spent the night with David, then returned home only to discover several months later that she was carrying David's child.

There was no probability that it could be Uriah's for he had been on the battlefield for months. Under the law she could be stoned. How she must have despaired and regretted that one impulsive night. She realized that only David could help her, so she sent word to him. He wrestled with the problem, then sent for Uriah. David told him to go home to his wife after asking news of the battle. But Uriah was a sensitive man; he could not rest in his home while his men endured privation and danger on the battle field. Thus, David's cover-up plan failed. Then David decided to have Uriah purposely killed in battle. The result of this was only more disaster. Nathan the prophet was forced to openly rebuke King David for his sin, and the son born to David and Bathsheba died.

Now we come to an interesting portion of Scripture. David and Bathsheba had another son. In Second Samuel 12:24,25, it is said of this second son, Solomon, that the Lord loved him. At birth he was named "Jedidiah," meaning "beloved of the Lord." Here we see the great mercy of God. Two of His beloved children had sinned. He had visited them in judgment, and there was much more judgment to follow. Yet He saw their love for Him, and the deep sorrow and repentance for their sins, and probably the despair in their hearts. Much is spoken of concerning the repentance of David, and rightly so, but now let us look into the heart of this good woman.

She, too, had deeply repented. How she must have rejoiced when God named her son "beloved." What a comforting word of forgiveness and acceptance to her own spirit! The book of Proverbs abounds with quotations from Bathsheba and David regarding the walk of righteousness, seeking wisdom and understanding, and not yielding to moral temptations. Bathsheba was diligent to instill within Solomon right precepts. She tenderly watched over him and instructed him. He had been encouraged all his life by both his mother and father to seek wisdom.

Therefore, when his big test came later in life and God asked him what he wanted, Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding to guide Israel. He had been taught the importance of wisdom and understanding from the time he was born, thus, he requested, “Give me an understanding heart.” In so doing, he was blessed with wisdom above all others. When he wrote Proverbs, he filled it with quotations from his parents. Several passages mention the importance of *not forgetting the law of thy mother*. The last chapter of Proverbs is thought to be a prophecy taught to Solomon by his mother.

In her earlier years, Bathsheba failed. She should have never been in open view of David when she was bathing upon her roof. She was party to adultery and deceit which later led to murder. But she truly repented. The greater part of her life was spent in walking with God and instructing her son in God’s ways. She was preparing her son to be a great, wise king. Bathsheba is a sterling example of a godly mother who diligently taught her son, and she shines as a trophy of the redemptive grace of God.

In many societies, when parents are asked what they want most for their children, the answer is *success*. Still others, less driven by achievement and a struggle for dominance, tell us that they would hope above all that their children could attain unto *happiness*. Yet, in this story we see a mother who was anxious to teach her son *righteousness*. Bathsheba's goal for her son was neither success or happiness, although we are certain that she hoped these things for him as well. As we read many of the proverbs, we see her invaluable influence upon Solomon's thoughts and meditations. Thus, it is clear that she was more interested in finding within him *goodness*.

And mothers—this should be our answer as well! The cry of our hearts for our children should always be, “Oh, God, let goodness and mercy follow my child all the days of his life. And may he never know the sorrow of going his own way! I want him to be successful. I want him to be happy. But most of all, I want him to be good. I want him to be pleasing to you. ”

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

Meaning of Name: Not given

Scriptures: I Kgs.17:8-24

Characteristics: Faith, Unselfish

Our story of the unnamed widow woman opens in First Kings chapter 17. Elijah, the prophet of God, has been directed to travel to Zarephath, a city of Sidon, outside the borders of the land of Israel. It is interesting to note here that at a time in history when the Israelites were God's Covenant people, He chose to send Elijah directly to the home of a Gentile widow. In Luke 4:24-27, we are given insight into this situation by the Lord Jesus Himself. *"Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow."* Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations around them, and in this passage we see clearly God's intention to judge them for their disobedience. The three and a half year famine was a terrible judgment. There were many widows who would have very quickly welcomed Elijah at their door; yet God chose to send him to the home of an unnamed widow woman of Sidon (modern day Lebanon).

It is not unlike our Lord to use an example like this to reveal to us His ways. Elijah himself was experiencing hardship through this devastating famine, just like other fellow-Israelites. Since it was Elijah who had prophesied this great disaster in the midst of the people, he was hated and most likely driven out by his countrymen. Directed by God, Elijah moved in obedience, only to discover that God had commanded a poor, destitute widow woman to sustain him. God could have sent his prophet anywhere. Our first thought would be that God would surely send him to some worthy person among his own people. Instead, God sent him to a Gentile. So often this seems to be God's way of bringing provision and even honor to the less fortunate of this world. It demonstrates also that He is not a respecter of persons because of nationality or race.

When Elijah sees the widow at the gates of the city, she is gathering sticks to prepare her last meal for herself and her son. Still under the direction and guidance of the Lord, Elijah calls to her, saying, *"Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink"* (1 Kg.17:10). We see her gracious character immediately by her quick response to this stranger who stands before her. In need of a drink after his long journey, the widow does not hesitate to help him, demanding no payment for her services. As she goes to fetch it Elijah called again to her, saying, *"Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand"* (v11), to which she replies, *"As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die"* (v12).

As far as we can tell from Scripture, this is a woman who is not familiar with Elijah. Yet we see that she recognizes him as a man of God as she uses the phrase, "As the Lord thy God liveth." Obviously, there was a sense of the fear of God within her, and perhaps some limited knowledge of the God of Israel. However, her faith is the characteristic most cherished by the Lord. In the midst of a very meager existence, her great faith is most probably the reason that Elijah was sent to her. (God goes beyond race, creed or color to look into the hearts of those He would choose to call His children.) As our story unfolds, we see that God had a wonderful plan for this Gentile woman, a plan that would bring her into a whole new realm of Kingdom living as she responded in faith to the God of Israel.

Now we see the conflict in this drama really heating up. The widow woman has just announced that she has only one meal left for her son and herself, and after eating that she expects to die. Elijah's response to her is simple, but direct. "*Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*"

Elijah has just said, "Before you have your last meal, serve me first!" But if Elijah's command had just stopped right there without further explanation, it would have been most difficult to understand how God could require from this poor Gentile widow such life-threatening obedience. How could God require a non-believing Gentile to move in the realm of such sacrificial faith as this? The answer comes as we read on further in Scripture and hear Elijah's words: "*For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.*" For real understanding of what is happening here, let us examine the dynamics of a very important Godly principle. In Romans 10:17 we are told, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the [Rhema, or quickened Word] of God." How does faith enter the heart of a person? It comes by hearing the quickened, life-giving Word of God. As we hear, God's faith is created within. It is the faith of the Son of God that enables us to believe Him for a particular promise or provision. Then, as we are moved by the faith that is supplied by that Word, we eventually receive what He has promised.

It is important to realize something else here concerning the character of God. He is a master builder and He builds our faith, layer by layer. His Word tells us in Isaiah 28:10, "*Precept must be upon precept, line upon line.*" He takes our faith from one level to a higher one (cf. Rom.1:17). The widow woman depicts a good example of this. God gave her a clear Word from a godly man in whom she could easily believe. Then to enlarge her faith she was asked to give away her last meal to the prophet. In actuality, God had given her the treasure of "desperate circumstances." This is a treasure indeed because it is in times like this that God meets us and brings us into higher levels of faith.

In Daniel chapter two Nebuchadnezzar had a divine dream, then he forgot it. The king commanded the magicians and wise men not only to interpret his dream, but to remember the dream he had forgotten. If they could not, they would all be slaughtered. This included Daniel and his three friends. The entire setting was divinely ordained. God had given them the "gift of desperation." Either they had an answer from God *now*, or they would die. Consequently, they stayed up all night crying out to God, and He heard them from His holy hill and gave them the answer. The same was true for the widow woman. It was her last meal. God said, "Give away your last meal." The widow woman was backed up against a wall. Yet this desperate moment allowed God to bring her into a realm of faith that she had not known before. In giving all she had, God promised to sustain her for the remainder of the famine. But we soon find out that God wanted to enlarge her faith even more.

In chapter 17:17 we read of the untimely, sudden death of the widow's beloved son. This time her situation went beyond dire. Again, she called upon the prophet of God to rescue her. Her faith had grown by the miracle of provision and association with Elijah. But now, as the voice of the prophet cried out for a creative miracle, her faith was about to be perfected. "*And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber of the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth*" (v22,23) Something extraordinary had just happened. The One who is called, "The Resurrection and the Life" had visited her home, causing death to be swallowed up in victory. Breath had returned to a son's lifeless body, and she could never be the same. This poor Gentile widow had witnessed what no Israelite had ever seen before. Hebrews 11:35 tells us that it was *by faith* that "women received their dead raised to life again."

THE WOMAN OF SHUNEM

Meaning of Name: Not given

Scriptures: II Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6

Characteristics: Thoughtful, Hospitable

In Second Kings 4:8-13, we read of a remarkable woman who lived in Shunem, an area in the portion of land that belonged to the tribe of Issachar. We are not given her name. Yet her life was a blessing to God and to His people.

Elisha was a great prophet of God whose ministry was to the nation of Israel. He traveled many miles, often sleeping and eating only when people offered him hospitality. The woman of Shunem saw him walking by her home one day and she invited him in for a meal. From that moment, whenever he was in the area, Elisha stopped to eat with her. The burden to help Elisha prompted her to ask her husband to build on a special upper chamber in the house for him. Scripture says she perceived him as a man of God.

What a thoughtful, considerate woman she must have been. Not only did she want to feed Elisha, she wanted to provide lodging for him as well. Her generous, hospitable nature must have been a tremendous blessing to Elisha. In return for the care he had received from her, Elisha wanted to do something special for her. When he discovered that her husband was old, and they had been unable to have children, Elisha called her to him and announced that she would have a son. In reward for building the prophet a chamber, God builds within her womb, a son. This story reminds us vividly that in our giving, we can never out give God. It is good to keep our hands open and ready to bless God's people, especially His servants.

When the child was grown, he became sick and died. In her distress, the mother did the only thing she knew to do. She left her dead son in the prophet's chamber, and went immediately to find him. Her son was given at Elisha's request. Now everything within her believed that God would give back her son at Elijah's request. Such was her faith. Finding Elisha, she brought him home with her, and her son was wonderfully restored to her. Again, this is recorded in Hebrews 11:35, the chapter of those known for their faith.

The woman of Shunem went the second mile. Because of it, she was blessed of God. She could have been content with just feeding the prophet when he passed by, but there was a compassion and desire to bless the Lord and His servants. Her desire was to refresh the body, soul and spirit of Elisha.

Sometimes we are content with just doing the minimum that is asked of us by the Lord, or by those whom God has placed over us. God's heart is one of generosity. He desires those who are also benevolent in nature. When a man or woman is tight-handed, they limit themselves from receiving God's blessings. It is so unlike our Lord to be a reluctant giver. We must be so careful not to be those who measure everything we do, always fearing that we are giving too much of ourselves or losing something in the process. Peter urges us to use hospitality, not grudgingly (1 Pet. 4:9). Like the woman of Shunem, let us be those who seek to bless rather than those who seek to be blessed.

Luke's Gospel especially records the women who ministered to the needs of Jesus and His disciples. They held a very special place in His heart, and God gave them honorable names in His eternal Word (see Lk. 8:1-3).

THE LITTLE MAID

Meaning of Name: Not given

Scriptures: II Kgs. 5:1-27

Characteristics: Faith, Faithfulness

Our account of the little maid begins in Second Kings chapter 5. We have all heard about the healing of Naaman the Syrian, a leper. Yet Naaman's story of healing would not have been possible without his wife's little maid. She was an Israelite, taken captive by the Syrians. At the time, Israel was not openly at war with Syria, however, Syria made raids along the border and carried off goods as well as captives. They would then make slaves of them. This little maid was one of these captives. Here we see a young girl, her age unknown to us, taken captive at the hands of rough men, who sold her into slavery. She was a devout Israelite, serving and believing fervently in the God of Israel. She also believed that God could heal Naaman. She told this to her mistress, and it reached the ears of the king of Syria, who sent Naaman to Elisha (2 Kgs. 5:2-6).

Much has already been said about how our choices affect us and all those around us. Certainly, the little maid was one who, despite all her hardships, had made a choice to serve the Lord with all her heart. This is so apparent as we see her witnessing of God's faithfulness to her Syrian mistress, this one who considered her a slave and who did not follow the God of Israel.

It is also apparent that her love for God so permeated her being that it seemed to take away any hardness or hatred for those who held her in captivity. The Lord so filled her life that she seemed forever buoyed up by a supernatural peace and contentment. There is no suggestion of homesickness or dissatisfaction of any kind. Her life just seems to be clean and pure. Love for God so ruled her life she was able to keep a heart full of joy, still loving all those with whom she came in contact.

She could have easily become bitter at God and even closed her heart toward Him during her time of testing. She could have reasoned so many times within herself that God had failed her and not protected her from slavery at the hands of the Syrians. After all, because of His judgments, she had been separated from her parents and her home. Was their fate yet unknown to her? Or perhaps when she was captured, her family was killed. We do not know. Yet she did not become ruined with resentment and filled with self-pity as so many others. This little girl had true faith in God. She believed even when she did not understand. Even in her undesirable surroundings, she maintained her faith in God.

When we find ourselves in the darkness of prison-like experiences that come from the hand of the Lord to try us, what is our response? Will we let our circumstances rule us, or will we, like this young maid, cry out to God to help us rule and reign in the midst of those circumstances? Psalm 110:2 commands us to rule "in the midst of our enemies." Little did she know that as a result of her life and testimony things were soon going to change dramatically. Very soon, Naaman and his wife, his other servants, and even Elisha were going to feel the impact of this little girl's faith.

Naaman was a great soldier and an honorable man. Yet he was afflicted with the curse of leprosy which was incurable and also a type of sin. Naaman was as great as the world could make him. Yet, as one writer puts it, "the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him." The little maid had great confidence in the power of God and said to Naaman's wife from a heart of faith. "If Naaman could only come in contact with Elisha, my master could be healed."

There must have been respect for this young girl's words. It also required *humility* for the king of Syria and Naaman to hearken to a young maid and act so quickly upon her words. Thus, Syria's king wrote a letter immediately to the king of Israel, informing him of Naaman's visit. Naaman finally arrived at Elisha's house, eager to greet this prophet who had the power of God in his hands to heal the sick. You can imagine his complete surprise and dismay when Elisha did not even receive him, but instead sent a message to him by way of a servant. This was the beginning of a test from God.

Elisha instructed him to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times to be made clean. However, this was not what Naaman expected, and he was very disgusted and angry at Elisha's methods. How common it is for man and God to differ in their viewpoints of just how things ought to be done. How often pride causes us to forego our own redemption, and makes us our own worst enemy. If Naaman expected a cure, he would have to submit his will to the Divine will. There was no other way. In essence, that is the moral of this story. It could have ended there, if it were not for the gentle urging of Naaman's faithful servants who pleaded with him to comply to Elisha's request. Now as he faced the most important decision of his entire life, perhaps he was once again reminded of the little maid's testimony. More than likely, he remembered how she had so confidently told his wife of the miraculous power that was working in and through Elisha. These thoughts calmed his angry spirit, and once calmed, Naaman submitted to Elisha's request.

After washing himself seven times in the River Jordan, Naaman was completely cleansed from his leprosy, and his flesh was like the flesh of a little child. Now we see the greatest miracle of all as Naaman returns to thank Elisha, saying, "*Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.*" Naaman was not only made physically whole, but he was made spiritually whole as well. All because a little unnamed maid in the Word of God willingly accepted her circumstances!

Think of the number of people who she influenced because she triumphed in her situation. How many people witnessed this glorious miracle and believed upon the mighty God of Israel because of it? When Naaman returned home to Syria cleansed and made whole, how many people were touched by his testimony of healing, and even more by his confession of faith in the God of Israel? How many in his household were persuaded to believe and follow God after his conversion? With his sphere of influence, we can surmise that the numbers were great.

Like the little maid, we must allow ourselves to be a channel through whom the glory of God can be manifested. She was the missing link between Naaman and his healing, between Naaman and Elisha. Graciously, the Lord allowed a little servant girl to be fitted into that vital link in the chain of events that caused Naaman's healing which brought much glory to God. All too often, we complain about our circumstances instead of accepting them. However, if we do not accept them, we cannot bring glory to God. This little girl was only a maid, a servant, but somehow she was able to grab hold of the reality that she was not man's servant but she belonged to God. Her acceptance of this truth allowed God to use her to witness to a whole nation. Her life as well as her words became a witness of His greatness and His goodness. Naaman's healing was a tremendous testimony to Syria and its king.

Many of us may be doing what we consider unimportant. We may be doing the work of a servant like the little maid, longing instead to do something great in life to make our mark. Let this story be a lesson to us that if we are faithful in the place where God puts us, if we can be truly content just to be His servant, then it will be amazing what God can do to make our lives count in His Kingdom. God has a purpose for each and every one of those who are called by His name. So let us, like the little maid, be faithful to accept His plan and purpose in our lives as we seek to honor Him by our service.

JEZEBEL

Meaning of name: Unhusbanded

Scriptures: I Kgs.16:31; 18:4-13; 19:1,2; 21:5-25; II Kgs. 9:7-37; Rev. 2:20

Characteristics: Cruel, Domineering

No study of the women of the Bible would be complete without looking at some of the infamous ladies mentioned in the Word of God. Jezebel was one of the worst. In fact, to refer to a woman as “Jezebel” even today is considered one of the greatest insults possible. What did this woman do to deserve such infamy?

She was a descendant of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon. He had been a pagan priest who had violently taken the throne away from his brother and became king. Her heritage was one of idolatry and cruelty. She promoted the worship of Baal in Israel and sought to kill all the Lord's prophets. She was the one who schemed to have Naboth killed so that Ahab could confiscate his vineyard. Finally, when she heard that Jehu had slain her son Joram and was coming to kill her also, she carefully made up her face, then defied him as he rode into the courtyard. He then ordered her to be thrown out of the window and her corpse was trodden upon and eaten by dogs. They could not even give her a burial for only her skull, feet and hands remained. In a sense, she typifies that evil woman “Mystery Babylon” who is violently thrown down and found no more at all (Rev.18:21).

Let us now sketch her character as shown throughout the books of First and Second Kings. Jezebel was a very dominating, strong woman who was married to Ahab. She influenced Ahab to turn to idolatry. The Bible clearly attributes the evil of her husband *to her influence upon him*. What a terrible indictment against a woman. Again and again in this study we have emphasized the necessity of making sure our motives are pure and our choices are right. Surely, a woman can and will influence her husband to go in the right direction or the wrong one (See 1 Kings 21:25).

Jezebel was hard-hearted and very selfish. She had been a princess, accustomed to getting her own way, and this she continued until her death. She was responsible for the innocent bloodshed of many prophets (1 Kg.18:13), and had a passionate hatred for God and His messengers. Even after God showed His power by defeating the prophets of Baal on Carmel, her only response was that of anger and a greater determination to kill Elijah (19:1-2). This woman was a vessel totally yielded to Satan.

Jezebel was deceptive and a murderer, wholly committed to her own evil objectives. When Ahab pouted because he could not have a vineyard he wanted, she had no scruples. She hired men to bear false witness against Naboth and had him killed. Then she presented the vineyard to Ahab with no qualms whatsoever (21:1-16). Ahab did nothing to stop her, and God held him responsible. When the Lord pronounced judgment upon Ahab, he humbled himself before God, showing a measure of repentance. Jezebel did not (21:27-29). She was a proud, arrogant, strong-willed woman that led her husband, her children and all of Israel into idolatry. She even influenced the nation of Judah for evil because the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, married her evil daughter, Athaliah (2 Chron. 21:4-6).

Within the nature of every woman is the conflict of desires—that desire is to rule, but also to be ruled over. It is a woman's share of the fall. God told Eve, “*Your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over thee.*” How tragic is the life of any woman who has usurped authority, whether it is in the home or in a nation (1 Tim. 2:12). The world still speaks disparagingly of the woman who “wears the pants” in the family. Jezebel ruled harshly, and the two nations affected fell deeply into sin.

Christian women need to learn to submit their strengths and weaknesses to the Lord. They must allow His will to become their will instead of trying to bend God's will to fit their own. Many churches and ministries have been ruined by dominant women who manipulate their pastor husbands through prophecy, prayer, or through their emotions. Ladies, do you demand, cry, pout, urge, nag, deprive your husband of marriage relationships, or make life absolutely miserable until your man crumbles beneath your pressure and gives in to do your will? Many men have fallen into adultery, and ministries have been destroyed because of the ungodly behavior of their wives. Manipulation may fool some people, but it never fools God, nor does it fool the children of such marriages. Their response, unfortunately, is usually to rebel against God, and they often take that same manipulation into their own marriages. Others adopt an evil alternative lifestyle as part of their rebellion against what they have experienced in the home.

Jezebel's name means "unhusbanded." It refers to a woman who will not obey her husband or allow him to take his place as her leader. Often this is not because the husband is a tyrant either! There are women who resist and oppose even good and honorable husbands. This is dreadful evidence that the fallen nature of pride, ego, and self-will have never been taken to the cross. A lack of submission will destroy the home and the Church itself. It is a denial of the whole message of Christianity where Christ is to be the head of His Bride, the Church.

If you know you are a strong-willed woman, you need to cry out to God to change your heart and mold you into a woman of a meek and quiet spirit. This is the only kind of bride Christ will be wedded to. If we ladies cannot demonstrate this in earthly marriage, it certainly will never work in our relationship with Christ. Marriage is *a natural object lesson* that depicts our spiritual condition. We can find out how submitted we are to Christ by our relationship and attitudes toward our spouse.

Weak men, content to leave the decisions in their households to their wives to avoid conflict, also need to change, but there is another factor we need to consider here. It is a fact of life that when women assert themselves into those roles that belong to a man, usually the man will give up after a time and just let her take over. Our husbands, and those who are over us in the Lord, must not see anything of *a Jezebel spirit* in our natures. If they do, we must do everything in our power to change by God's grace. So let us guard our hearts and ask God to give us a love for purity, submission, and divine order. Our marriages can never glorify God until we are in order with our husbands.

Often women will come to the pastor and say: "My husband does not love me!" The pastor will then ask: "Are you listening to your husband and obeying him?" The wife will say, "No." The truth is, a man is not able to love his wife if she is always ignoring him and never obeying what he is saying. Every wife should understand that her husband is unable to love her properly if she never obeys or respects his requests. To understand this from another angle we could ask ourselves this question: "Is God's heart going to be open to me if I never listen to Him, or I only listen to Him when I feel like it?" The answer, obviously, is *no*. And a husband's heart is not going to be open to the wife who constantly resists his spirit. Remember, we are called to be wedded to Christ. Are we being obedient to the Heavenly Bridegroom? Are we being obedient to our earthly bridegroom?

ATHALIAH

Meaning of Name: “Whom Jehovah Has Afflicted”

Scriptures: II Kings 8:26; 11:1-20; II Chron. 22:2-12; 23:12-21; 24:7

Characteristics: Heartless, Ambitious

Athaliah was an appalling character. In some ways she seemed more wicked than her mother Jezebel. She married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. This marriage to Athaliah absolutely ruined him (cf. 2 Chron. 21:4-6). When their son Ahaziah became king, she was his counselor and compelled him to walk in the wickedness of Ahab (2 Chron. 22:1-4). When Ahaziah died at an early age, she slew all of the children who were akin to the royal family, and afterwards seized the throne (2 Chron. 22:10-12). When we realize that most of these children were her own grandchildren, we see how diabolically ruthless she was. To do something this fiendish, it is clear that Athaliah had been smitten by God and given over to a reprobate mind and lacked *natural affection* (2 Tim. 3:3). This is the hallmark of one who “*sells himself*” to Satan, to work evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kg. 21:25).

Athaliah ruled by blind ambition and was driven by a lust for power. She continued unchallenged as queen for six years, but was slain at the coronation of her grandson, Joash. By the quick actions of his aunt, Joash had been spared from the sword when Athaliah murdered all her other grandchildren. At age seven he took away the throne from her which was rightfully his. In the truest sense of the word, she was her mother's daughter. Ezekiel 16:44 says, “*As is the mother, so is her daughter; Thou art thy mother's daughter.*” Athaliah indeed was more wicked than her mother, for in slaying her own grandchildren, she went beyond all natural, human emotions and logic to commit such atrocities.

Perhaps many of us could never relate to or identify with a person like this. Yet how many children have ended up as innocent victims of a selfish, self-centered mother who is driven with ambition to reach the pinnacle of success. In today's society, women are encouraged to “find themselves,” to please themselves, to put themselves first, to pursue self-expression, and to free themselves from all restraints. Western society has taught women to settle for nothing less than complete liberation. Consequently, an increasing number of women have abandoned their homes, husbands and children in pursuit of success and personal satisfaction. The result has been unspeakable. There is widespread divorce, child abuse, abortion, unstable homes, teenage delinquency, murders, rapes, even young children killing each other. Society is driven by blind ambition. Men and women alike spend day and night on the job, rarely seeing their families. All this is in pursuit of success, pleasure, and material gain. Under these very undesirable circumstances, children have grown up without proper love and care, both emotionally and spiritually.

Unfortunately, the spirit of Athaliah is not restricted to one generation or one society. We are living at a time when Satan is waging a vicious war against God and Christian morals in an attempt to control the world. Satan's spirit works through women like Jezebel and Athaliah. We can see this spirit even at work in the Church today. However, Athaliah's end was death. She was slain by the sword, even as she had slain her own flesh and blood. She was judged as an idolator, a usurper, and an enemy to the people and to God. All those who are like Athaliah shall perish eternally.

Let us follow the admonition of Romans 12:2, “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*” We must not be intimidated or pressured by the forces of this world so that we would abandon our children, our values, our homes, and our marriages in exchange for life's ambitions.

HULDAH

Meaning of Name: Weasel

Scriptures: II Kings 22:10-20; II Chron. 34:18-28

Characteristics: Available, Faithful

In Second Kings 22:10-20 we meet a remarkable woman named Huldah. She lived in Jerusalem at a time when there was a revival under way in Judah, but also soon coming judgment. The great kings of the United Kingdom of Israel had long passed from the scene, and the nation had since been divided into two rival groups—north and south. The northern tribes had been carried away in the Assyrian invasion, but now the southern kingdom of Judah had also degenerated into idolatrous worship.

During this time of moral declension, Josiah was born. His birth had been predicted three hundred years earlier (cf. 1 Kg.13:1-3; 2 Kg. 22:1-2). His grandfather Manasseh had been one of the most evil kings of Judah, and his father Amon was following in his father's footsteps. When Josiah was eight years old, his father was murdered. Suddenly, at the age of eight, Josiah was crowned king. King Josiah was different from his grandfather and father. Unlike them, he had learned to walk in the law of the Lord. He followed the example of his ancestor, King David. In the twelfth year of his reign (2 Chron. 34:3), he began to purge Judah from idolatry, and revival was starting to spread across the land. Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophets during his reign (cf. Jer.1:1-2; Zeph.1:1).

When Josiah had reigned eighteen years, he ordered renovations to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. In the middle of all this activity, an ancient scroll was discovered, which was immediately brought to Josiah. King Josiah's response was intense, as we hear him saying in II Kings 22:13, "*Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.*"

Josiah ordered all the kingdom to find out what this book meant. This is the moment when Huldah enters our story. Actually, little is said here of Huldah, but this is true of many great men and women in the Bible. God records only the most important moments of their life as it relates to His total purpose and plan for His Kingdom. God's emphasis is on His Person and plan, not in glamorizing personalities of men. What we do know about her is that she was a reliable prophetess. The fact that she was sought out by King Josiah's officers tells us that she was well known for her discernment.

Huldah's words were decisive and straight to the point—the people of Israel were to be judged because of their idolatry and wickedness. She stood firm with no apologies and no watered down message from the Lord. In this, she proved herself a woman of distinction who used her God-given spiritual gift *for the benefit of an entire nation*. Also, her message from God to the king was very touching. God declared that He saw Josiah's tender heart, and this postponed judgment. The Lord promised that his eyes would not see the coming judgment. So often the Lord takes the righteous home so that they do not see the coming sorrow and judgments that fall upon unrighteous believers.

The lesson we learn from Huldah is *availability*. Perhaps we may feel like we are very unimportant to the Kingdom of God. Maybe we serve in various departments and spheres of the church, unknown, unseen, and usually unacknowledged. At times we wonder if our lives count at all. Yet if we are faithful, even as Huldah, we will discover that our words, our deeds, or perhaps some small act of kindness can be used of the Lord in a very extraordinary way.

ESTHER

Meaning of Name: A star

Scriptures: The Book of Esther

Characteristics: Contentment, Humility

The story of Esther, the beautiful queen who saved her people, has excited the imaginations and hearts of both Christians and non-Christians alike. It is a story with a fairy-tale quality, depicting her rise from rags to riches. Esther began life with the name of Hadassah, meaning “a myrtle tree.” She took the name of Esther, meaning a “star” when she joined the other beautiful maidens in the court of Ahasuerus to compete for the title of queen. Many sermons have been written, and there are many precious truths we can glean from the book of Esther itself, but our main focus will be on the character and the personality of the girl herself.

This orphaned Jewish girl, adopted and reared by her uncle Mordecai, was lovely in every way. In fact, she was so lovely that she was chosen from among many other maidens to become queen. During the customary year long period of preparation, (six months of sweet smelling odors and six months of bitter herbs) Esther made a wonderful impression upon Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the women. When it was Esther’s turn to be seen by the king, Hegai asked her what she wanted to appear in before the king, and she simply replied, “*Whatever you choose to give me*” (2:15).

This was really an extraordinary revelation of her character. It showed humility and contentment. Esther was without guile, pride, or vanity. There must have been many valuable jewels she could have demanded, and many expensive robes, but she was humble enough to trust the judgment of another, and content enough not to covet the riches of the kingdom. Her mind was obviously untainted by worldly considerations. How different from the cry of many women today. Women are urged to be assertive and to press for their rights. They are encouraged not to settle for just what they are given, but to seek more. How we need to learn this lesson from Esther, that “godliness with contentment” is worth more than all the wealth and pleasure of this world.

Pride is the real root of all sin. It is the opposite of humility, which is the foundation for all other virtues. The humility that we see in Esther lends strength to this divine truth. It was her humility that brought her to the throne. Conversely, it was pride that caused Vashti to lose the throne. Humility is the virtue that opposes our daily life-styles. Pride blinds us to our own faults, while it exaggerates the faults of others. Pride destroys families, even kingdoms—just as it did in this story of King Ahasuerus and Vashti. Blinded by pride, Queen Vashti thought that she was above the law. But she was quite mistaken!

When Esther was chosen queen, her beauty was praised throughout the land. Feasts were held in her honor, and gifts were lavishly bestowed upon her. Yet all of this did not mar the essential humility and simplicity of Esther’s character. This truth becomes especially important as we read further in this story to see how Esther risked her life for her people.

We must now consider the obvious. What would we do if we were in her position? Esther, a poor Jewish orphan, finds herself in the palace of a heathen king, only one of many in his harem. Like any young girl, her need for romantic love was probably very much alive within her; yet her life was not her own and her choices were limited. Knowing what had just happened to Queen Vashti, who had been banished forever from the presence of the king for disobedience, must have affected her attitude about being in this position. However, Esther was a woman filled with wisdom.

She was a sensitive, intelligent woman who demonstrated remarkable self control in a time of imminent danger for herself and her people. This fact is evident when we consider how she carefully and prayerfully approached and petitioned the king after hearing that all the Jews were to be killed because of a royal decree from the king. In those days it was against the law to come before the king without his permission. Esther 4:11 tells us: *“All the kings's servants and the people of the kings's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.”*

Esther was well aware that her actions could put her own life in jeopardy; yet she valiantly persevered in her efforts to win freedom for her people, the Jews. It is clear that she was afraid, but she was determined to save her people from sure disaster. Her response to Mordecai her uncle lets us see into her willing heart. *“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”* Esther gave herself unreservedly to this cause. So much so that she dared to resist the law of man to follow the law of God that was deeply resident within her pure heart. She did not count her own life dear to herself, choosing rather to serve her people and her God. Her words, *“If I perish, I perish,”* should be engraved upon the hearts of God’s people everywhere, for these words remind us of our own need to abandon ourselves to Him.

In contrast, let us look at Queen Vashti for a moment. Vashti also found herself in a situation with the king where a course of action she decided was against the law. The king commanded her to appear before him and the other dignitaries when their hearts were *“merry with wine.”* To Vashti, it was humiliating to be displayed in this fashion. Yet she was beckoned by the king to come. For reasons she may have felt were perfectly justified, Vashti refused his command. She made a conscious choice *to defy him*. And even though she knew that this defiance would also affect many other women in the king's domain, she still refused to come into his presence. Consequently, she was judged harshly by the king, his counselors, and the Lord Himself. *“Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes ... thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath”* (Esther 1:17,18).

What a marked difference in attitude we see in these two women. Unlike Esther, we do not see Vashti crying out to God for answers to her dilemma. There is no fasting and prayer to preserve her right for proper respect. There is no appeal to others to help her in an uncomfortable predicament. What we see is pride and arrogance rearing its ugly head. We see a strong-willed, defiant woman asserting her rights and privileges as the wife of a king. Absorbed as she was in her own importance, we see a woman who was under the direct headship of her husband, choosing to become her own boss. We also see the utter folly of such direct defiance, for she lost everything.

Esther is truly one of the women that we should seek to emulate. Her quick action to save the king’s life from the plot of the two chamberlains (2:21-23), along with the wisdom she displayed in all her dealings with wicked Haman, give us much insight into the beauty of her character. Even after the purging of God’s enemies from the kingdom had been completed, we see that Esther seeks no fame or power for herself. She gave her Uncle Mordecai the credit he deserved, and then saw him placed as second ruler in the kingdom to assist in the governing of Persia. Esther came to the throne because of a gracious tongue, a contented heart, and a spirit of humility. God brought her to the throne for a reason. She was able to dissuade a husband from making a serious error of judgment by her wisdom, self control, and faith. Esther and Abigail stand out among others for their ability to reason with men.

VASHTI

Meaning of Name: Beautiful

Scriptures: Esther 1:9-22, 2:1,4,17

Characteristics: Proud, Rebellious

Vashti was the wife of King Ahasuerus who was later deposed and replaced by Queen Esther. Vashti had publicly disobeyed her husband and embarrassed him when she refused his request to appear before the king and his guests during the time of a great feast. Perhaps some could argue in favor of her actions, as it was not customary in those days for a queen or any woman to display her personal beauty and charm in the presence of men whose hearts were “merry with wine.” However, when we consider the subsequent events in the book of Esther and also of the history of Persia, we realize that it was God who orchestrated the whole matter. God allowed it all so that Esther could become queen at just the right time in history.

One might argue that Queen Vashti was right, and that she received an unjust punishment. However, the key issue to be considered here is *honor and submission*, not fair or unfair. Only one thing mattered in this situation—would she honor her husband, the king? This is a question for all wives to consider. Fair or unfair, when we are faced with our own painful situations, will we make the right choice and honor our husband? Because he is the priest and king of our home, will we honor his position? This is such an important truth for women to grasp. During those times when you find it very difficult to trust, obey and honor your husband, you must still cooperate with him as unto the Lord. By doing this, you honor God. Queen Vashti’s wrong response to authority teaches us the importance of submission and acquiescence. This story also reminds us that our words, deeds and actions influence and affect many lives around us. As a queen, Vashti was in a place of great influence. Her inappropriate example affected the attitudes, opinions and actions of many women across the land. Perhaps our sphere of influence is not that far reaching, but for those whom we do touch, it is equally as critical that we behave ourselves wisely before them.

One of the most important duties of a wife is to bring honor to her husband, and to seek to hide his imperfections from the world. Therefore, when Vashti refused to obey Ahasuerus, she was holding him up to public ridicule and criticism. It was probably very debasing for Vashti to go into a banquet hall filled with men who'd had too much to drink. When the king was sober, he may have even regretted making such a request mandatory for her. However, her defiance was far worse than what she had just turned away from. The King’s presence would have preserved her from any evil consequence. Therefore, in choosing not to obey her husband, she showed open contempt for his judgment and authority. Her openly defiant attitude toward her husband showed pride and haughtiness. This was an act of rebellion. Thus, she lost the blessing of God, was deposed as queen, and Esther took her place.

Vashti means beautiful, and surely she was most desirable to look upon. However, because of her beauty she was lifted up in pride. This pride led to her rebellion and insolence against the king. In this, she is a type of Lucifer, who also rebelled and was demoted because of pride and arrogance.

We must understand the principle here. Submission, even in unfair situations, brings God’s favor. Rebellion never does. Therefore, we should root out of our hearts any seeds of rebellion or pride against authority and those we love. When Sarah submitted to Abraham’s order to call him her brother, God protected her from any improper advances from Abimelech. As we submit to those in authority with a right heart attitude, God will step in and plead our cause and protect us from evil.

ZERESH

Meaning of Name: Gold

Scriptures: Esther 5:10-14, 6:13

Characteristics: Intelligent, Ambitious

We see Zeresh mentioned also in the book of Esther. She was the wife of Haman, the Agagite, who tried to have Mordecai and all the Jews killed. Haman was a proud and arrogant man like Adolph Hitler. He was willing to exterminate a whole race because one man did not bow to him. Pride is at the bottom of great wickedness. Haman was full of indignation at Mordecai's refusal to bow before him. It made his spirit restless and vexed his soul. Although he outwardly "refrained himself", Haman was not able to overcome his agitation of Mordecai's contempt. This little affront which he received from Mordecai absorbed his soul; it was his continual meditation. He took no notice of all the riches and honor that he already had. His position in the kingdom, his wealthy estate, his family and friends were all secondary to the hatred he felt toward Mordecai. From that moment on, Haman could not live a normal, happy life. His pride demanded retribution. In his anger, he complained bitterly to his wife and counselors that he had been totally disgraced by Mordecai's actions.

A wife has such an affect upon the thoughts and actions of her husband. A wife can turn her husband toward good, or she can turn him toward evil. A wife can use wisdom to build her house, or with wrong words and actions she can tear it down with her own hands. Unfortunately, this is precisely what Zeresh, the wife of Haman, did. In this respect, she does not live up to the meaning of her name. To be pure gold, one must pass through the fires of God, where all impurity of motives, greed and ambition are purged. Zeresh was very obviously an unredeemed, unrefined vessel. Certainly she had never passed through the furnace of affliction that separates the ungodly impurities of one's life, and because of it she was not a blessing to her husband, but rather a curse.

During a time of great rage, Haman wondered aloud what to do to Mordecai. He therefore asked his wife, along with other trusted counselors to help him in the decision making process. Instead of sensing the danger of his uncontrollable anger and attempting to help him think objectively, Zeresh is the one who advises him to have the gallows built for Mordecai. She is the one who is feeding his anger, hatred and prejudice instead of trying to appeal to him to choose another course of action and response. There was no fear of God resident within her heart. She was of the same caliber as her husband. Zeresh was an intelligent woman, but her heart was filled with the same pride and ambition that infected her husband. Because of this advice, Zeresh had to witness not only the death of Haman upon the gallows, but that of her ten sons as well.

This account shows us well the price tag of ambition and pride. A wife is often her husband's favorite counselor. He has her ear. Certainly she is the most accessible. If a marriage is in right order, a husband will open his heart to his wife, expecting comfort and sometimes counsel. A wife should be her husband's best friend. She knows him better than anyone else. For this reason, it is important that wives ask God for wisdom and righteousness in their lives so that they may say and do those things that help instead of hinder. We cannot give godly counsel if our hearts are filled with the world's ways or hidden sins like Haman's wife, Zeresh. We must seek true humility of heart and the wisdom that comes from above, which is pure, peaceable and gentle. We must seek a heart of wisdom to guide our thoughts and deeds or we could *destroy* all that we are endeavoring to build for the glory of God.

Summary of the Old Testament Women

Every woman in the Bible is known usually for one particular trait. That is true of us too. Below is a brief summary of the outstanding feature (or features) of each woman. Even more important, however, is what *we* are known for, not only in this life, but in the records of heaven.

Eve - She is the first woman, wife, and mother. Eve is the only woman who was never a little girl or experienced a childhood. She had no iniquity in her blood from past generations. She is known for being beguiled by the serpent, who played upon her emotions and curiosity for the forbidden.

Sarah - Sarah was a woman of faith, even as Abraham was known for faith. Her name and nature was changed from Sarai (dominant) to Sarah (princess, submissive one). She had learned to honor and obey her husband, calling him *lord*, and enjoyed the fruits of a submissive nature later in life. By faith she received strength to conceive a son when she was well beyond the years of bearing. Her laughter was changed from one of unbelief to the laughter of fulfillment.

Hagar - She was a bondswoman. Hagar and her fruit (Ishmael) represent the bondage of the old covenant of works. Her fruit was a product of the natural mind and human ingenuity. What she brought forth mocked Isaac, the son of promise. Both she and her fruit were rejected and replaced.

Lot's Wife - She was obsessed with the world and longingly looked back at what God had condemned and was turned into a pillar of salt. Salt speaks of death. Her daughters were women of the world too, and brought disgrace to the Lord. Christ told us to "Remember Lot's wife."

Rebekah - This beautiful young woman had a good beginning in life, and in her marriage. Their marriage did not grow, however. In fact, it deteriorated. She took matters into her own hands and practiced deceit. Isaac, too, had neglected several areas in his own life. She is best known for imparting her guile to her favorite son Jacob, who supplanted his brother. The result of this was a divided home and a miserable life for everyone.

Rachel - Rachel was beautiful, but barren. She envied her sister and demanded of Jacob to meet her needs, which only God could do. How opposite of Hannah who went to God to meet her needs instead of demanding her husband to do so. She is best remembered for being the mother of Joseph.

Leah - She was never loved by her husband because of the manner in which she got him. Leah went along with the deception of pretending to be Rachel on the wedding night. In spite of this, God made her fruitful even when she was unloved because of a heart that was inclined toward Him. At the end, she was buried next to her husband, and from her six sons descended most of the great men of God.

Dinah - She is the rebellious daughter of Jacob and Leah. Dinah's mother and father did not have a loving relationship and certainly this added to the rebellion. She went out to see the daughters of the land, and having worldly girlfriends, she met the wrong fellow and fell into moral sin. This resulted in her brothers murdering the fellow and the whole village. Then Jacob's family had to relocate.

Jochebed - The mother of Moses is known for *her faith*. She hid her son in the bulrushes of the Nile, and was not afraid to circumvent the commandment of Pharaoh. Later her son was restored to her, and she was paid by Pharaoh's daughter to raise her own son. Satan knew this child was ordained to destroy his domain in Egypt, yet he was obliged to nourish him by Pharaoh's daughter. God is the one who controls everything, not Satan. Satan is subject to all of God's bidding.

Miriam - She is remembered, not so much for watching her infant brother in the bulrushes of the Nile, or her prophetic ministry, and not even for leading the women of Israel in the song and dance at the Red Sea. She is most remembered for her jealousy of Moses and speaking against the man she was called to support and undergird. What is admirable cannot cover up what is *not* admirable.

Zipporah - The wife of Moses is known for her words and actions at the inn when the Lord sought to destroy Moses for not practicing his own message. Circumcision was essential for inheriting the land of promise, and his own son was uncircumcised. God's wrath was turned away from Moses when Zipporah circumcised their son. She is believed to have been a supportive wife during those long 40 years in the wilderness when Moses must have been very discouraged.

Rahab - Although she was known as a harlot in Jericho, when she came in contact with the God of Israel, she put all her trust in Him. Her faith was demonstrated by works when she hid the two spies and asked for mercy when Jericho fell to Israel. Rahab had a heart of love beneath the hard shell of being a harlot. She cared for her family and relatives and longed for their preservation. Later she married a mighty prince of Judah named Salmon. Together they had a son named Boaz, who was a forefather of King David. Rahab became part of the Messianic line (Mt.1:5; Heb.11:31), and is mentioned among the heroes of faith.

Deborah - A prophetess and judge of Israel, Deborah was perhaps the greatest woman leader Israel ever had. She was married and not dominant over men. Barak the general was always in the forefront, and she encouraged him with prophetic guidance.

Achsah - She *moved her husband* to ask for the upper and nether springs. These springs of water represent the double portion of the Spirit. She encouraged her husband to seek for the greater blessings of God. Achsah moved her husband in the right direction. Wives should encourage their husbands to seek for more of the eternal treasures and not just be content with the superficial.

Delilah - She is a woman known for treachery, though she was charming and beautiful. She nagged, begged, urged, cried, and pleaded until she wore men out and made them do what she wanted. She is the epitome of *manipulation, selfishness and self-will* in fallen woman.

Naomi - Naomi means "pleasant." Truly her life caused her daughter-in-law to want to know the God who made her so wonderful. May our life, as Naomi's, cause others to *yearn* for God.

Orpah - She was one of Naomi's daughters-in-law. She deeply loved her mother-in-law, yet did not find the fortitude to fully follow her or take care of her in her old age. Emotions, tears, and promises are not the things that impress the Lord. Actions and faithfulness are the qualities God respects.

Ruth - Ruth was the young woman who was willing to go with her mother-in-law to a strange land to take care of her. She was also willing to risk never being married again. God saw this deep humility of spirit and rewarded this Gentile girl with something no other woman had in her generation! Being in the right place, she met the right man, and she came into the Messianic line. Ruth became the great grandmother of King David. God is testing us when we least expect it.

Hannah - Hannah is the mother of the prophet Samuel. She experienced great barrenness at first, and was reproached by her peers. She was even misjudged by her pastor. Yet she was able to keep her heart open to receive a word from God through him. Faith quickened her, and she conceived and bore one of the greatest men in history. "Blessed are they who are not offended."

Michal - This is King Saul's daughter. She is best known for disdainful her husband (one of the most spiritual men in her generation) and mocking the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Michal had the spirit of her father, Saul. She had sentiments toward her father, but resented her husband. The venomous words she blurted out in private were heard by God, and she was smitten with barrenness for the rest of her life. "In the tongue is the power of life and death" and "by our words we will be justified or condemned." Let us watch our words, especially at home and in the private place.

Abigail - Some women are attractive but are not *sweet* in their countenance. This lovely woman is known for her beautiful countenance, and good understanding. She was unequally yoked with an illogical, irrational son of the devil. Yet she held her head up high, and maintained good prophetic vision. Abigail knew how to talk to a man. She was calm, objective, and her rationale was clear and not clouded with hysteria. The words she spoke to David, when she kept him from avenging himself with his own hand, show the caliber of her deep spirituality. She is an encouragement to all women who are joined to a less than admirable spouse.

Bathsheba - Bathsheba is best known for being that beautiful woman who was bathing herself on the roof, in plain view of the king. She should have made herself *less conspicuous* for she was stirring up the passions of a vulnerable man. Notwithstanding, Bathsheba was a deeply good person. She loved her husband, and was grieved exceedingly when he died in battle. Later in life she bore Solomon, a man beloved of the Lord, but also a man with the inherent weakness of lust. Lust was a propensity in both David and Bathsheba. Let us guard against all appearance of evil. Let us never use our charm or beauty to ensnare or be a stumblingblock to another. We must never play with the emotions of another, or our own.

Widow of Zarephath - She is famous for her willingness to give her last meal to the prophet. In doing so, she was acting in faith, and God granted her provision for the remainder of the famine. God later raised her son from the dead, a feat not even accorded an Israelite up to that time.

Woman of Shunem - Her spirit of hospitality and the honor she showed God's prophet in ministering to his natural needs earned God's respect. He later rewarded her by raising her son from the dead. In showing mercy to the least of the brethren, we are showing it unto God.

The Little Maid - This young girl was taken captive by the Syrians. Instead of hating her captors and being embittered by her circumstances, she kept a rejoicing spirit and the faith of God in her heart. Thus, she was able to speak of God's power to heal Naaman of his leprosy. This resulted in Naaman traveling to Samaria where he was instantly cured, and all Syria knew that there was a God in Israel. Keeping a right attitude amidst unhappy circumstances can bring deliverance to others.

Jezebel - Jezebel had a lust for power and influence. She stirred up her husband to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord. When Naboth would not sell his vineyard to Ahab, the king sulked like a little boy, and was just going to let it go. Not Jezebel! She went the extra mile. She hired men to lie about Naboth and have him murdered. Jezebel was responsible for the blood of many prophets. She openly fought against the Lord God of Israel, and inflicted damage on many generations to come. She and her husband "*sold themselves*" to Satan to work evil in God's sight (1 Kg. 21:25).

Athaliah - Daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, *she was just like her mother*. She was without natural affection and given over to a reprobate mind. Athaliah was willing to murder all her grandchildren in order to gain control of the throne of Israel. She was the only woman to reign on the throne of Israel, and she usurped it by the bloodshed of innocent children. Athaliah was beyond feeling.

Huldah - This woman was a prophetess and had a reputation for faithfully and accurately declaring God's message. Her life appears to be one that was shut away with God. There were other notable prophets in the land such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, but God chose on one occasion to speak to the king and to the nation through this devout woman.

Esther - Esther was a beautiful type of the Bride of Christ. There are many fair virgins (or blood washed believers), but only one queen. Not every believer will rule and reign with Christ or qualify to be His Bride. Esther came to the throne because of the graciousness of her words, attitudes, and manner of life. If we are going to reign with Christ on His throne, there are five words that sum up what we must do. He said: "Even as I also overcame" (Rev. 3:21).

Vashti - She was a deposed queen. Her disrespect to the king was a public rebuke that could not be tolerated. She was setting an example to all the other women to dishonor their husbands. It is one thing to have a position, but quite another thing to *maintain* it. Many have lost opportunities to be great in the kingdom of God because of acts of folly that demoted them and brought them low.

Zeresh - This was a woman known for feeding her husband's anger and hatred, instead of trying to calm him down and help him think objectively or see another perspective. Her advice to build a gallows for the man he hated, hung not only her husband, but also her ten sons. What seed was she planting in the hearts of her children with advice like that? Women like Zeresh destroy their own homes, and help send their sons to prison and to the gas chamber. Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

OTHER WOMEN

There are a number of other women in the Old Testament that we have not mentioned, simply because little is said of them, yet much is implied. There are several women in the Book of Judges of which we could make comments.

Jael - Deborah prophesied that "the Lord would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Jud. 4:9). Sisera was the captain of the enemy hosts, and Barak was to go against him in battle. Yet, the one who would slay him would be a woman named Jael (see Jud. 4:17-24). When Sisera was weary, she invited him into her tent, and when he was fast asleep, she thrust him through with a nail. In much the same way, God uses women today in prayer and intercession to destroy far greater enemies than these, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.

The Woman at the Tower - God was about to judge a wicked man named Abimelech. When he attacked the village of Shechem, the people all fled to a tower for refuge. While he was attempting to break down the door of the tower, a woman cast a piece of millstone down upon the head of Abimelech that led to his death (Jud. 9:45-57). Thus, once again, God used a woman to judge the enemy. Intercession is the instrument God uses to bring down evil men, and evil spirits.

The Wise Woman of Abel Beth-maachah - A man named Sheba had led a revolt against King David and tried to divide the nation. David sent his captains to stop the rebellion, and Sheba fled north to Abel Beth-maachah. As Joab besieged the city, a wise woman asked for the battle to stop in order to speak with Joab. The wise woman asked why Joab was attacking the city, and Joab replied that he only wanted the culprit Sheba. She made a commitment to Joab that the city would turn him over to him, and then she persuaded the city to do so. Here, then, is an example of a woman who saved a whole city by her wisdom and intervention (2 Sam. 20:1,2; 13-22: See also Eccl. 9:14-18).

Job's wife - The main thing we know of her is that she told her husband to “curse God and die” when they had been stripped of all they owned. Satan had asserted that Job would “*curse God to his face*” in his time of trouble. In a sense, Job's wife had given her ear to the adversary and was in agreement with him. Discouragement is the fruit of listening to the evil one. While we are in sympathy with the anguish of her heart in the loss of all her children in one day, still it is never right to *curse God*. Thus, Job admonished her to accept calamity as well as prosperity, and not to speak hysterically (Job 2:9-10). She was quite incapable of offering him any consolation during this time of extreme testing. In fact, he was repulsive to her (cf. Job 19:17). After the captivity was turned, she was restored to a good relationship with her husband and had ten more children. In short, I think we could say that she was a good woman, but not an exceptional one.

Isaiah's wife - Isaiah 7:10-16 concerns the birth of a child as a sign. In Isaiah's time, the birth of this child was literally his own son, but was *a type* of the virgin birth of Christ. Before the child could grow up to know good and evil, the land that was oppressing Judah (Syria and Israel) would be forsaken of both their kings. In 8:3, Isaiah went unto the prophetess (his wife) and she conceived. She was the virgin that conceived a son. Virgin has a limited meaning of “purity.” This episode, however, created a prophetic setting for the birth of another son by a virgin in a future generation. This Son was none other than Emmanuel Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah's wife, therefore, is a type of the virgin Mary.

Ezekiel's wife - Little is said of the prophet's wife except that she was called “the desire of his eyes” which signified that he loved her very much. In Ezekiel 24:16, the Lord said to Ezekiel; “Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with [one blow]; yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.” In verse 18, it continues: “So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at evening my wife died.” The prophet was a sign to Israel. Many of the people back in the homeland of Judah were going to pine away from starvation and pestilence. They would be so numb from the horrors that they would not even cry or mourn for the dead. Thus, Ezekiel was a sign to them when his own beloved wife died. Being a major prophet was no easy task. Ezekiel's wife was taken; Jeremiah was told not to marry; Hosea's wife was unfaithful; and Isaiah's wife was a sign. Daniel was a eunuch. Perhaps the best lesson we could learn from Ezekiel is that a happy marriage is when both the husband and wife have each other on the altar. Nothing should be an idol—not a ministry, a call, a reputation, a child, and not even our mate.

Hosea's wife - Hosea was told to marry a woman named Gomer. Hosea 1:1 “... And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.” A *wife of whoredoms* could mean that Gomer was an illegitimate girl who became unfaithful as a wife. Hosea suffered immensely from her unfaithfulness, and all the children had evil names too. He was a sign to Israel. Although God was married to adulterous Israel, yet He would take her back after a time of probation. So it also happened unto the prophet. God would not divorce Israel for her adultery, neither was Hosea to divorce his unfaithful wife. Although divorce was granted by Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, it was not in the spirit of the law for God later said He hated divorce in Malachi 2:16. Christ interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-4, saying that Moses allowed it because of a hardened heart (cf. Mt. 19:7-8). However, hardness of heart always brings *judgment*. Therefore, permission to divorce under the law was a judgment.

**NEW TESTAMENT
WOMEN**

Chapter Four

NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN

The Christian woman of today faces many challenges. Her God-given role as wife and mother in the home makes her sphere of influence tremendously important. She is the one most intimately involved in rearing and training the children. This is, of course, a serious obligation; yet it is also a great opportunity to make her influence count for something in God's kingdom. A woman's good and godly wisdom can turn her home into a haven. She can turn it into a place of refuge from the storms of life—a place where her family can dwell in peace and safety all the days of their lives. A woman has a wonderful opportunity to use her powerful influence for good or evil.

Today's Christian woman finds herself in a battle that is raging. She is in the forefront of the fight against forces that seek to destroy all she holds dear—her home, family, and Christian values. Day by day, her ability to resist these forces depends upon her own inner God-given strength. It also depends upon her ability to choose rightly for herself and her family. Like the Bible women whose lives are a living lesson for us, the Christian woman must be totally dedicated to the defense of godly convictions. In some cases, she must even be willing to die for them.

As we have already said—women have their choices. It all started with Eve, a perfect woman in a perfect world. She had a perfect relationship with God and with her husband. She was complete. She had it all! She was free to be all that any woman could ever hope to be. As we look at Eve's perfect life in the garden, we see what God had originally intended for women. Yet we also see the awful consequences of a wrong choice. Perhaps her choice at the time did not seem very important. After all, it was just a piece of fruit she indulged in for a few moments! But we can see how this decision affected the entire human race for all time.

Man's driving desire is to do his own will—his own thing. This was also Satan's greatest mistake because it caused him to be thrown out of heaven. Isaiah 14:12-15 gives us a clear picture of the consequences of his wrong decision. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."

Everything that is important to us is wrapped up in the will of God. Doing His will is our only way to survive, and the only way to come into the promises of God (cf. Heb.10:36). It is our only way to bless others as well. People need to see the fruit of a life that is yielded to the will of God. Therefore, our lives should be a perpetual garden of growth for others to look upon and emulate. We are free to choose His will or our own. We are free to live with or without God (Acts 13:46). However, the consequence of saying "no" to God is separation. After their sin, Adam and Eve were separated from God. They also experienced a separation from each other as a result of their wrong choice. What a terrible consequence. To be sure, this decision brought Eve what she had asked for—the experiential knowledge of good and evil. But at what a price! Knowing what she knew of godliness and innocence, then to lose it, must have been a horrible reality for her. Her anguish must have been greater than anything we can imagine. Yet as we look at this event in the light of God's mercy, we, too, have hope because of His *goodness* toward both of them.

At that moment when they felt the sting of their wrong decision most keenly, on the day when they were cursed and driven from the Garden, God gave Adam and Eve a promise. In His mercy, God declared His vengeance upon the serpent. *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, (the serpent) and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Genesis 3:15). In these verses we have the first recorded announcement of the Gospel.

Can you imagine how Eve must have felt as she heard this promise being spoken and declared. Her heart must have been so heavy, her guilt so deep—yet God was making a way out for future generations. Redeeming grace had entered the scene, not yet in the form of a God-Man—but nonetheless, she had heard the Father’s promise of redemption. Though the world as she knew it had changed drastically since her encounter with the serpent, Eve was reassured that it would not always be like this. At some time in the future her offspring would crush Satan’s head. They would win over that one who had just caused humanity to lose so much!

This promise did not become a complete reality for the Old Testament women, but it surely did for those who began their lives under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. And thank God that we who live in this age have access to this wonderful promise. The foe is defeated and we are able to overcome through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So what had first begun with Eve was now about to begin again in a young girl named Mary. The promise was coming. The Redeemer was coming. Salvation was coming. And Eve’s offspring was about to crush Satan’s head.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Meaning of Name: Bitter

Scriptures: Mt.1:16, 1:18-25, 2:11-23, 12:46-50, 13:55, Mk. 3:31-35, 6:3, Lk.1:18-25, 2:1-51, 8:19-21, Jn. 2:1-10, 19:25-27, Acts 1:14

Characteristics: Submissive, Humble, Obedient, Faithful, Prayerful

When we consider Mary, the mother of Jesus, we realize she was an exceptional woman. God selected her to be the mother of His Son. What an honor it was to be chosen, and how special she had to be. Mary was the daughter of Heli, of the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of David. Thus, she was qualified by genealogy to be His mother. In a sense, Mary was a human instrument chosen to do the greatest task God had entrusted to any human being; yet she was still just an instrument. It was Jesus Himself, and not His mother, that counted in the great scheme of God's overall redemptive plan. Yet her honored position as His mother sets her apart from all others. To her was entrusted the task of giving birth to and caring for God's own Son. Mary's character must have been outstanding, but contrary to the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, she still had the fallen human nature of sin. She was a humble, patient, faithful, loving woman, but she was still a daughter of Adam and Eve.

We see Mary's humility when the angel Gabriel appears to her. Her humble spirit caused her to trust him and accept what he was saying to her, even though she could not understand how such a thing could be possible. A person of pride must examine and debate. Mary just accepted these things, while she continued to ponder them in her heart. Mary had a choice laid out before her, and she simply chose to bow to the will of God. She chose to obey and believe, even against everything that seemed rational or humanly possible. Why? Because somehow deep within her, Mary knew that God was going to fulfill His promise to His people, Israel—a promise made in the Garden of Eden thousands of years before!

Mary *instilled obedience* into the heart of her Son, for she herself was most obedient. Her words, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it" shows the compliant heart she possessed (Jn. 2:5). She raised the most obedient Son ever born to man. The life of her Son revolved around one thing: "I am come to do thy will, O God." God had chosen a mother whose heart pulsated with *the spirit of obedience*.

Mary was submissive and obedient to the word she received. She knew she would be misunderstood and perhaps even rejected by her family, friends and neighbors. She realized that many would assume she was an impure woman, unable to maintain her virginity until after marriage. Yet she was willing to face the scorn, the surprise, and the misunderstandings that would accompany her acceptance of the angel's decree. This shows a real dedication to the will of God.

Mary was about nineteen years old when the angel Gabriel visited her. She was from a poor family and she married an ordinary man. God's Son, contrary to the popular teachings of the faith and prosperity movement, was Himself reared in a low-income family. He learned the hard work of a carpenter in order to meet the common necessities of life. Yet theirs was a family rich in faith, not material goods. The poverty and hardship associated with the birth and life of Jesus gives us an important message. It is a message of sacrifice, self-denial and service.

It is the same message that Jesus taught as He walked the earth in humility. In our affluent society there is a much greater need for parents to stress this truth to their children.

In many Christian homes the children are spoiled and allowed to have their way too often. As a result, they expect much and ask for more, and show little gratitude. The way of sacrifice and self-denial is often not a real part of their daily life. For this reason, parents must stress the dangers of worldliness and unthankfulness. We should continually emphasize the importance of having faith and being obedient to the will of God. This was the atmosphere of the home in which the Son of God was raised.

Mary had a faith and obedience to the Word and will of God. She never allowed her lack of understanding to interfere with her faith. How we need to be like Mary! So many times we struggle to understand with our logic rather than allow our faith to operate from a heart of love and devotion to God. Mary's faith stayed strong, even when she did not understand all that was going on. We need Mary's kind of faith.

Fondly, Mary watched her beloved Son grow in grace and favor with God and man. In wonder, she marveled at His wisdom and understanding of the Word of God at age twelve, as He stood before the theologians of His day. Knowing her Son was destined for great things, Mary was still privileged to see Him follow in His adopted father's footsteps, becoming a carpenter like Joseph.

It was abiding faith, however, that carried her victoriously through her life with the Son of God. Because of her faith in Him, she was able to watch Him perform His first miracle at the wedding in Cana, which launched his three and a half year ministry of miracles. This faith also sustained Mary during the most difficult time of her life, as she courageously stayed with him during his most horrible moment, the cross of Calvary. She was willing to endure the pain with Him, not content that He should bear this agony alone. What a crushing blow this must have been to her.

Mary was also numbered with the one hundred and twenty who tarried in prayer in the Upper Room until the Holy Spirit was poured out. It is interesting to note that the last thing recorded of her (cf. Acts 1:14) was that she continued in prayer. Most certainly, Mary's life was a life of prayer. Throughout the years, being aware of the unique beginning of Jesus, and hearing the things that were said about Him, she must have lifted up her heart many times in prayer to God for guidance and strength. Her life was a life of prayer and obedience to God.

As we reflect upon Mary and remember her wonderful qualities, may we also have that same kind of unquestioning humility and faithfulness that qualified her to become the most blessed woman in all of history. In all of life's challenges may we too find ourselves saying, "Lord, be it unto me according to thy word" (Lk.1:38).

ELIZABETH

Meaning of Name: “God is [my] Oath”

Scriptures: Luke 1:5-41

Characteristics: Godliness, Devotion, Humility, Faith

Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. She was a descendant of Aaron, the first High Priest. Her life is briefly summarized in Scripture by this verse: “*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments, and ordinances of the Lord blameless*” (Lu.1:6). This is so beautiful. She and her husband were both walking in the fear of God, and they were commended by the Lord for their dedication and devotion to His purposes. Children of such marriages are beautiful children. Elizabeth was a cousin (kinswoman) of Mary, the mother of our Lord (Lu.1:36).

In Luke 1:7, we see that she is a virtuous woman living a blameless life though she was barren. Back in those days, barrenness was a reproach. It was a sign of God’s disapproval. Therefore, Elizabeth had to endure misunderstanding and probably accusations from those around her. Yet in the midst of this pressure, she maintained an unswerving devotion to God. Because of this, He answered her prayers beyond what she could have ever hoped for in the natural. When God keeps His people waiting for a promise for a long time, it often pleases Him to recompense them more richly than they ever imagined (cf. Isa. 64:4). This certainly was the case with Elizabeth.

Being misunderstood is one of the greatest heartaches of life. How many of us have been misunderstood or judged wrongly by others? And how often have we ourselves misunderstood the dealings of God in our lives? During these times, our reactions perhaps have been less than godly. Perhaps we complain to Him that we do not deserve what has happened to us. It seems like everyone is pointing the finger at us and shaking their heads at us, and saying, “We thought she was a better Christian than that!” Because of our emotional makeup, being misunderstood is especially difficult for a woman. How difficult it must have been for Elizabeth because of her barrenness. Yet she bore it all with fortitude and quiet, loving submission to God. Walking blamelessly, in the end she was rewarded with a son like John the Baptist. The Lord Himself said of John that he was the greatest man born among women. What a lavish honor. What a testimony of God’s faithfulness to this barren but faithful woman!

It is interesting to note that after Elizabeth conceived, she “*hid herself for five months.*” Five is the number of separation. This was another evidence of her humility of heart and her devotion to God. She evidently purposed to take this time alone to pray and praise the God who had honored her. She was also protecting and guarding this life that God had put within her, for now her reproach had been taken away. Even though she was past the age of childbearing, Elizabeth, unlike her husband, never doubted for a moment that God could bless her with a child. This gift of faith is what we would expect in a woman so highly honored by God, for she was chosen to be the mother of the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He was the messenger prophesied of in Isaiah and Malachi.

Every woman who is a mother is blessed of God. Yet motherhood carries with it a tremendous amount of responsibility. For this reason God has given us such fine role models as Elizabeth in His holy Word. To be faithful and diligent in the duties of motherhood, every mother needs to live a life wholly dependent upon God. Without a dependent, devoted attitude toward Him, we will fail our children, our husband, and ourselves. This is the lesson that we learn from the life of Elizabeth.

ANNA

Meaning of Name: Grace

Scriptures: Luke 2:36-38

Characteristics: Devout, self-denying, Prayer Warrior

Anna is only mentioned in three verses of Scripture. However, she is a remarkable woman. Being a prophetess and a woman of prayer, it is obvious that she had understanding of the Scriptures above other women, and most likely made it her business to instruct the younger women in the things of God. A life of prayer enabled her to see and immediately recognize the One whom most of her generation missed—the promised Messiah. She was married when she was young, living only seven years with her husband before he died. After that, she gave herself completely to fasting and praying, while she lived in the temple. She was eighty-four years old when the Spirit led her into the sanctuary at the time Jesus was being dedicated. Anna then concurred with Simeon, making an open profession of her faith in the infant Son of God. She then began to praise God, prophesying about the mysteries of redemption that Christ would open up to the world.

The world today needs many more like her—those with a vision of the power and importance of a ministry of prayer. The Church needs women who will spend time praying earnestly. One of the most awesome privileges of the Christian life is prayer. When people do not care enough to take time to pray, God does little or nothing here upon earth. Through prayer, He brings to us His will upon this earth. Isn't it wonderful to know that God has chosen to involve us in His plan!

Someone aptly likened prayer to a safe deposit box. Two keys are needed to open the box, one from the owner of the box, and the other from the bank. In prayer, the first key is God's divine will. The second key is our participation in prayer. When we combine these spiritual keys we have answers to our prayers. Praise the Lord!

Anna prayed and God answered. It was a great responsibility for her to devote her entire life, day and night, to prayer. However, it was also a great privilege. Prayer brings down God's power. There is power in our spoken petitions. There is spirit, heart and attitude behind our words. Every time we pray we can bring life or death, blessing or cursing (Jas. 3:9-10; Prov.18:21). This power comes from the spirit that is behind our words. When we pray in God's will, we activate the power of God and His Spirit brings *life* into our situation.

That is why this account of Anna is so important for us to consider. Her prayers brought life, and our prayers must do the same. Prayer is the key to every victory in our lives. We may look at this account and say: "But Anna was an exception. She had a unique situation—no husband, no children, no complicated life. Me, on the other hand—well, I'm so busy. I have so many responsibilities. I just cannot devote that much time to prayer. It is impossible!" While it is true that Anna's situation was unique, we also need to see that she faced many choices. After the death of her husband, she could have easily pursued another husband, or perhaps a career. She could have elected to live a perfectly balanced life in a thriving community where her sweetness and charm would have attracted many. Yet she chose to give herself entirely to God. She chose to forsake the joys of this world in exchange for His favor and blessing. Hand in hand, heart to heart, Anna spent her life in communion with a holy God. For this she is to be highly commended, as intercessory prayer is a high and holy calling.

Anna had discovered the secret of power—it was in her prayer life. We, too, need to discover that secret. Many people would perhaps think of her life as dull, empty, or even sad. A cloistered life, void of entertainment and frivolity, a lonely separated life full of burdens and griefs for others, does not seem like a very happy existence. Yet Scripture shows us she was content to live and pray for others, while she devoted her entire life to prayer. In this separation from the world, however, Anna discovered another secret. She realized well the privilege of carrying the burden of the Lord, of hearing His heart, of grieving when He grieved, of rejoicing when He rejoiced. The Lord and Anna had a sweet relationship, a special communication; and she would not trade that special link with her Creator for a thousand earthly relationships.

Anna had discovered a truth that we must discover also—that God is a prayer answering God. It changed her life, and if we will commit ourselves to a life of prayer, it will change our lives as well. While we may not find ourselves as free as Anna to give our entire time and effort to prayer, we can still do our part to be available to God. We can still adjust our priorities and make ourselves more accessible to Him. God longs to move in power through His people, but He will only move through a prepared vessel. Are you a candidate?

God is getting ready to bring a people into a time of creative power in prayer—a time when all their words will bring life. It is the same power that cried out into the darkness and void, saying, *“Let there be light, and there was light”* (Gen.1:3). It is the same power that brought forth an immaculate conception within the womb of a young girl named Mary. *“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus”* (Lu. 1:31). It is the same power that can heal the body when He gives His Word. *“Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “Be cleansed”* (Mt. 8:3, Mk.10:52). The power of His Word can make the winds and the seas obey Him. *“Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm”* (Mt. 8:26). The power of His Word can restore life to those who are dead. *“Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise. And he who was dead sat up and began to speak”* (Lu.7:14,15).

May we, like Anna, give ourselves more and more to prayer, so that we may also delight the heart of the Father and share in His purposes upon this earth through a life of prayer. Remember, nothing is accomplished upon this earth without it!

MARY OF BETHANY

Meaning of Name: Bitter

Scriptures: Luke 10:39-42, John 11:1-45, 12:3-8

Characteristics: Love, Thirst for God

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, lived at Bethany, a village near Jerusalem. They were close friends of Jesus. He and His disciples often visited their home because this was where they could find rest and good hospitality. Their home was a sanctuary, a place where He could withdraw briefly from the pressures of the ministry. We see from Scripture that Martha was the bustling, busy worker that always served and catered to all the needs of her guests. Mary, on the other hand, seemed to always like to settle at the feet of Jesus, while Martha busied herself with the various household chores that came as a result of a house full of company. In Mary, we see the quiet, peaceful soul of one at rest. Hers was a calm, serene nature, not easily aroused to anger or agitation. Her love and devotion to Jesus was evident. Therefore, she is symbolic of one who has a pure heart of love. She loved much and was willing to show that love. In total devotion, she sat at Jesus' feet, thinking not of food and temporal blessings, hungry only for the Bread of Life. Mary had a deeply sensitive nature that was easily stirred by the Spirit of God. She was a contemplative woman, whose greatest joy came when she sat in the presence of Jesus.

In John 12:1-9, we are given another touching example of Mary's total love and devotion to her Master. Again, we see her at the feet of Jesus, this time breaking an alabaster box and pouring out very expensive ointment (valued at a year's wages) upon the feet of that One she loved so dearly. By this act, we see *symbolically* that Mary was willing to humble herself and pour out her life for Him. She was willing to be broken and poured out in the service of God. The disciples (stirred up by Judas) were indignant, and looked at this act of devotion as a waste of expensive ointment. But Jesus saw the love in Mary's heart and knew also the prophetic significance of what she had done. This was only six days before His death. Jesus, therefore, highly commended her act of devotion.

John 11:29-45 tells us the story of the death of Lazarus. Mary and Martha had sent word for Jesus to come quickly; yet He had tarried and had now arrived too late. "*Then when Mary had come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" There she was, down at His feet again! Yes, perhaps her faith was tested by the Lord's delay, but it was not destroyed. There was disappointment, but there was an expectation as well. Further on in the story, we see that her faith was well justified, for Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

How we need to have unwavering faith. If, according to our own reckoning, God arrives on the scene too late in our own circumstances and things are not working as we think they should, we must have faith that it is still not too late. God is always on time. Human nature is impatient and does not see the whole picture. We try to foresee how things are going to work out, but often God does not operate according to *our* plan. When circumstances take a different turn, we can either give up in despair or we can expectantly wait with divine hope until we see the end of the matter. For the Christian, *waiting* is a sign of maturity and our commitment to Christ.

Like Mary, have you ever asked God for something you thought was very important, and then you discovered that He answered your prayer in a totally different way than you had expected?

Did the answer disappoint you? In response, did you feel like questioning God's decision? Probably all of us from time to time have been tempted to feel like that. But the difficult moments are designed by God to produce a faith and trust in Him.

In our humanness, we often prime the pump of prayer with a preconceived picture of the answer we believe is the right one. However, we must remember that we are to pray with God's will in mind and not our own. Often, when we are least expecting it, God will surprise us with a “yes” to a prayer. At other times, He will answer “no” to something for which we have prayed long and hard. Still other times, He will tell us it is time to *wait*.

Waiting for God does not mean that we adopt a passive attitude where we stop seeking or crying out to Him for answers. Quite the contrary, waiting should cause us to seek Him more fervently. While we wait, however, we must trust Him to bring answered prayer into our lives in His time, not ours. Psalm 37:7 tells us to “*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.*” God's wisdom controls the universe, and He controls our lives as well. He alone knows what is best for us. Therefore, we must give Him the freedom to decide how to answer our requests in His own way.

That is why this story of the raising of Lazarus is so important to us. If Martha's and Mary's prayer had been answered the way they believed it should, Lazarus would have only been healed, not raised from the dead. The simple question that remains is this: Which answer brought God more glory, the former or the latter?

Oh, that we may learn well the lesson of waiting upon God, for the process of waiting stretches us and causes us to learn to place our hope and confidence only in Him. We need faith and patience to inherit the promises. There will always be times when our circumstances will seem as impossible as they did for Lazarus, but it is then that we must cry out all the more to a loving Lord to whom nothing is impossible.

When things seem at their worst, like Mary, we must also fall at the feet of Jesus and cry out to Him for mercy (Jn.11:32). Mary was a worshipper. She was always found at His feet. Her devotion to Him brought her much joy and satisfaction, but Scripture also shows us that it produced eternal fruit.

“*Then many of the Jews **which came to Mary**, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him*” (Jn.11:45). What a revelation of the fruit that comes from being a devoted follower of Jesus. The raising of Lazarus got the attention of the people, but when they wanted to know more about the One who raised him—to whom did they go? The Word tells us that they went to Mary, and they believed. There was something within her that drew her heart to the Savior, and now after the death and resurrection of her brother, she was drawing many other hearts to Christ. In this, may we desire to be like Mary. Let us possess a heart like hers that draws others to the Savior.

MARTHA

Meaning of Name: Lady, Mistress

Scriptures: Luke 10:38-42, John 11:1-46, 12:2

Characteristics: Hardworking, Helpful, Anxious, Fretful

Martha was never idle. She was a woman who was always in motion doing something constructive. When Jesus came to Bethany, He could always count on a glad, warm welcome from this industrious woman. She never cared about the extra work, she was just happy to welcome the Savior to her home. Hospitality was her gift, and she loved being busy and productive. Most likely, Martha was one of those super women types that always seem to thrive in situations of pressure.

On one particular day, however, we see Martha's patience wearing very thin. It was one of those days when she was busier than usual trying to get things ready for Jesus and His disciples as well as her family. Because we are aware of Mary's kind, gentle nature, we can assume that Mary was accustomed to giving her older sister a helping hand. Today, however, when Martha needed her most, she was sitting at the feet of the Master just listening to Him. Martha felt close enough to Jesus to complain about her younger sister. After all, the food was probably getting cold because she had to do all the last minute things all by herself. Or perhaps something special she was preparing did not turn out just as she had planned. Whatever the case, Martha complained to Jesus about Mary's lack of industry.

In His gentle way, Jesus does not speak against Martha's enthusiasm to serve. However, He does let Martha know that Mary's dedication to Him was a sign of her holiness—not her laziness. Though very different from her sister, Martha was a most conscientious and worthy woman; and Jesus loved her. When she complained that her sister was not sharing in the necessary housework, He did not upbraid Martha for her industrious spirit; He simply *corrected her outlook* by telling her that Mary had chosen the better part. Martha was no less devoted to Jesus than Mary, but she failed to see the method of receiving Him which would please Him most. Thus He said to her, "*One thing is needful.*"

The Marthas are valuable to God! Our churches, communities and families could not function effectively without women who love to be doing for others. We need the cheerful, bustling women who cook, clean and oversee with inexhaustible energy. God loves the Marthas of His Church. Yet how important it is to learn the lesson that this story teaches us. We are not to be so busy and occupied with the cares of this life that we don't take the time to sit quietly and learn from Jesus.

God is interested in a balanced Christian life. He appreciates and needs hard workers like Martha, but most of all, He desires a heart that is hungry for Him. Many Christians like Martha are always busy, but they miss out on what is important. Consequently, they do not choose *the better part* like Mary did. They are very active in God's kingdom, and they are productive in their efforts for Him, but, like Martha, they have a wrong concept of what is *most* important.

May this story of Martha challenge us to examine our own lives. The sharp contrast between these two women was this: Mary was a seeker, Martha was not! Seeking should be first and foremost in our hearts. Even as water and air are essential to our physical bodies, so too is a seeking heart essential to our spiritual life. In Romans 14:17, we are told that "*the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*"

Yes, we need the food and drink (the blessings of provision) but God's righteousness, peace and joy are the most essential ingredients of His kingdom. Therefore, what we need to put our utmost effort into are those things which will last. Christ's words said to Martha are the same words He speaks to us today. In fact, every time this message is preached, that which is in the heart of God is echoed over and over again. It is the very essence of His kingdom and who He is. Matthew 6:33 makes this truth even clearer when it declares: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, provision] will be added unto you.*"

Martha was *distracted* by the cares of life. She was more interested in meeting the physical needs of her family and friends than concentrating her efforts on their spiritual needs. As a result, her priorities got out of order, and she became more interested in pleasing and serving man than pleasing and serving God. Thus, this story serves as an admonition to us. As ever-busy 21st century wives, mothers and homemakers, we must not fall into the same trap as did Martha. Remember Christ's exhortation to her: "Mary has chosen the best part." Oh, how we must hear the heart of God as He speaks to us through this message. It certainly is not wrong to be busy, for there is much work to be done in His kingdom. However, the Lord is looking for worshippers, those who take the time to sit at His feet and learn from Him. Mary had learned that valuable lesson, Martha had not. May we purpose, therefore, to be those who have *learned* to sit at His feet in worship and adoration.

In closing, we must also remember Christ's attitude toward Martha. He loved and appreciated her very much. When we think of a woman who served (doing the little necessary things that make up the bulk of the lives of wives and mothers), we think of Martha. Unfortunately, we often tend to remember people's faults and forget their virtues. With Martha, we tend to remember how she scolded her sister Mary for sitting at the feet of Jesus when she should have been helping with the many necessary meal preparations. We think of her as that one who complained and who is always compared unfavorably to her sister, Mary. However, Martha is much more than just a busy woman. She was also a woman who had faith.

Although Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha declared that had Jesus been present, her brother would not have died (Jn. 11:21-22). In reply, Jesus told Martha: "I AM the Resurrection and the Life [present tense]: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (see Jn. 11:23-26). Then Jesus questioned Martha by saying, "Do you believe this?" Without a moments hesitation she declared her belief, professing Jesus to be the Christ. Even with her limited understanding, Martha's heart had triumphed in faith. She believed in Jesus, and she believed in His power to heal and resurrect the dead.

So when we think of Martha, let us not just think of her as a busy, industrious woman who needed to learn to control her busyness. Let us think of her also as a woman of faith. Though she lacked some of the spiritual insight of her sister, she deeply loved Jesus. She was a woman of many admirable qualities—faith, an abiding love of Jesus, and a selfless devotion to her family. And as we take seriously the heavenly calling of being wives, mothers, and housekeepers, may we seek to possess this same spirit of enthusiasm toward the daily drudgery that sometimes weighs us down and discourages us. Fortified with Martha's qualities, the Christian woman will find that her endless chores cease to be mere drudgery, and all that she does can take on new meaning.

MARY MAGDALENE

Meaning of Name: Bitter

Scriptures: Mt. 27:56,61, Mk.15:40, 16:1,9, Lk. 8:2, 24:10, Jn.19:25, 20:1-18

Characteristics: Thankful, Generous, A Seeker

We are introduced to Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2-3. She and certain other women (Joanna, Susanna, and others) followed Jesus and His disciples from village to village ministering to Him. Many of these women were women whom Jesus had healed and delivered. Mary herself had been delivered from seven demons. Much was forgiven her; therefore, she loved Jesus very much. It was her delight to serve Him, and her joy to be present with Him where ever He went. There are many examples in Scripture of those who successfully fulfilled the role of servant, but Mary of Magdala is one of the best. Scripture tells us that she and the other women followed Him and “*ministered unto Him of their substance.*”

Throughout her brief time with Jesus, Mary Magdalene demonstrated remarkable devotion to Him. So much so that she followed Christ to Galilee, to the cross, and even after He died, she still felt compelled to minister to Him. “*And Mary Magdalene beheld where he was laid*” (Mk. 15:47). We are told that the other women stood afar off, but not Mary. She followed them to find out the whereabouts of her Beloved. Instead of becoming emotionally overwrought and undone because of His untimely death or wallowing in self-pity, she followed Joseph of Arithmathea to the tomb. She would not allow her grief to stop her from serving Him even now! Her actions were just a natural result of her devotion and dedication to him—a natural result of her servant’s heart.

Perhaps her great love for Him was the reason she was granted one of the master’s choicest privileges. *Mary was the first to see the risen Lord.* Oh, how true it is—the closer we cleave to Jesus, the sooner we shall see Him! Just imagine her utter delight as she sees Him whom her soul loves, and He sweetly whispers her name. His face is not familiar, but as He speaks to her there is something strangely familiar about the sound of His voice. He speaks, and the sweet fragrance of His Spirit opens her eyes to the truth. He is alive! What a precious moment that must have been. Almost immediately, however, Jesus breaks the spell by saying, “*Do not detain me.*” In other words He had to yet ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17-18). She was to go immediately and tell the apostles He was risen and now ascending to the Father.

Jesus knew that Mary had learned valuable lessons during her time of serving Him. He knew she would understand quickly, then obey. He was sending her off on a special mission—she was spreading the Good News. And what was her reward? Mary, for now and always, would be recognized as that one who saw Him first. She was the first to carry the Gospel. Her seeking-serving heart was satisfied. Her Lord was alive, and now she was being commissioned to go and tell others.

This honor shows us the depths of God’s forgiveness. He cared nothing about what she had done in the past. What mattered to Him was that she had repented and now she loved Him with all of her heart. We too have been forgiven much. Jesus paid a great price to set us free. Some have known much more of the depths of sin than others, but we all have known the tremendous saving, keeping power of the Lord. Therefore, we should feel compelled, even as Mary, to show much love and appreciation to Jesus. He has set us free from so much. The bondage of sin is broken in our lives, and we have been brought into glorious freedom as the children of God.

In a very real sense, Mary Magdalene represents Christ's Bride, the Church. Just as He forgave Mary, He forgives His Church and brings her unto Himself. "*He brought me to His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love*" (Song 2:4). Just as He revealed Himself to Mary in the garden, so does He reveal Himself to His Church today. "*Behold, He standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing Himself through the lattice*" (2:9). Just as He asked Mary to follow Him, so does He ask the same of His Church. "*My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my fair one, and come away*" (2:10). Even as Christ came to Mary in His resurrected state, so does Christ continue to come to His beloved Church, taking them step by step from glory to glory. "*Oh, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs*" (2:14). Oh, what a blessed place to be, standing upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. What a privilege to be hidden in Him, having access to His presence that takes us deeper and deeper and higher and higher by his divine stairway.

Mary Magdalene teaches us the value of loving Jesus Christ out of a deep devotion as well as a deep conviction. If our goal is to spend all eternity with Christ our Bridegroom, we cannot be halfhearted in our love for Him. We cannot be neutral about our feelings. In Revelation 3:15, Christ tells us that He hates lukewarmness. An attitude like that will have eternal consequences. God has always been willing to accept us as we are—blemished and marred by sin. He was willing to identify with sinful man through His Son, Jesus Christ. He loves us, but He also expects us to love Him in return. He is interested in a relationship, and that is why Mary Magdalene was so highly favored of the Lord.

At one time, everything in the natural seemed to be against Mary Magdalene. Then this wonderful God-Man walked into her life and everything changed for her. His pure love, so much different than all the inadequate human love she had known in the past, had captured her heart forever. The beautiful relationship between them reminds us of the Song of Solomon. In allegory form, this is a story of a shepherd and His shepherdess. This Book shows us the progression of an experience in God that leads the Bride to her heavenly Bridegroom. It is an illustration of the mutual affection between Christ and His beloved Bride—that one who is willing to pay the price to follow hard after Him. God has betrothed a people unto Himself. Betrothal is only *a promise* of marriage. Thus, we are being prepared to be His Bride, but we must qualify. God has given abundant proof of His great love for us, and He expects love in return, just the way any Bridegroom would expect it. He will not be wedded to a half-hearted bride, and neither would any man do so.

Mary loved Jesus dearly, and this is why she was so special to Him. However, there is an inherent truth within this story that is even more important. That truth is this: Mary knew with confidence that Jesus Christ really loved her. Not only did she know it, but she depended and relied upon that love as her *only* source of love, comfort and provision. Yes, Mary loved Jesus with all her heart—as much as was possible in her humanness. But their relationship was based upon *His* divine love, not upon her ability to love Him. Time and time again, human love had failed her. Life had taught her well that human love could never satisfy, nor could it ever be pure enough or deep enough to change anything within or around her. Only His divine love could change and transform her.

We must realize that Mary was a broken vessel when she came to Jesus. She had nothing in the natural to give Him. Everything good and right had been wrenched from her being. Mary came to Jesus empty handed. As she discovered His divine love, she was not disappointed. This truth is expressed in I John 4:19. "*We love Him, because He first loved us.*" Mary's experience made her dependent upon His love. His love became life and breath to her. Therefore, Mary represents all those who reach a place of complete devotion to Christ where His love for them is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts. She belonged to Him and that was enough for her. May that be said of us!

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Meaning of Name: Name not given

Scriptures: John 4:4-30

Characteristics: Hunger, Believing heart, Evangelistic spirit

As Jesus rested by Jacob's well near the village of Sychar, a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jewish custom was very strict in regard to a man conversing with a woman in public. Thus, she was startled when Jesus said, "Give me a drink." To make matters worse, the Jews looked upon the Samaritans as outcasts and would have nothing to do with them. Yet here we see the compassion and love of Jesus being poured out upon this poor, lost soul. The woman at the well was an adulteress. She was probably ostracized in her own community, and obviously she was a very unhappy lady. But Jesus was directed by the Holy Spirit to stop at this well. God saw this needy heart and wanted to rescue her from her lifestyle and make her a vibrant witness for Christ.

In this story we see the beautiful reality that Christ's Gospel has no boundaries. His love and grace is as far reaching as the heavens. The Gospel is the power of God to *everyone* who believes. Christ told the woman at the well that the water He could give (meaning the waters of Salvation) would quench her thirst forever. Because she was in need, the woman at the well reached out to Jesus and asked Him for this water He spoke of. But Jesus took the lesson a step further. He wanted to quench her thirst, but He also wanted her to believe in Him. In order to do this, He revealed to her His knowledge of her personal life. He told her that she had had five husbands, and the one she had now was not her own. From this, she knew that Jesus was a prophet. Consequently, when He told her He was the Messiah, she believed. More importantly, her testimony caused a whole town to repent and come to Jesus. "Come," she cried out to all her neighbors, "Come, I will show you a man who told me all the things that I ever did, He is the Christ!" Then she brought many of them back with her to the well, and Jesus was able to teach them, and a whole community was converted.

No other quality of God is so easily seen in the life and teachings of Jesus as the quality of love. Love is the central theme of the character of God. Love has many levels of intensity and purity, but divine love is the highest of them all. The love of Jesus is not just a sentimental, romantic kind of love. Rather, it is the kind of love that reaches down in compassion to someone like the woman at the well. It is a love that encourages the depressed and weary. It is a love that longs to give forgiveness and blessing and a better way of life to all those who are oppressed. His love is the key to peace and rest in this life and in the life to come. Christ made this woman of Samaria worthy of divine love. This story shows us graphically the love and forgiveness of Jesus. No one, no matter how downtrodden, has ever been excluded from God's love. The only people who perish are those who reject God's love. Yes, she was an adulteress, even a Samaritan. But this woman at the well wanted to drink from that which was eternal. She was hungry, open and eager to hear His message. She was, therefore, rewarded accordingly and became the instrument of bringing others to Jesus.

To carry the Gospel to someone else should be the compulsion of every Christian who has found the Lord in his life. The Samaritan woman felt compelled to shout out the Good News. As a result, she led many to the Savior. Truly, this woman was changed by the touch of the Master. Consequently, her all consuming desire was to tell others of His love. This same joy comes to our hearts when we share our experiences in God with others. So let us be challenged by her zeal to share the Gospel. Let us not be silenced by the fear of reproach, embarrassment or shame.

HERODIAS

Meaning of Name: Feminine of Herod

Scriptures: Mt.14:1-11, Mk. 6:14-28, Lk. 3:19-20

Characteristics: Unscrupulous, Resentful, Immoral, Proud

The Bible does not give us much information concerning Herodias, only as it relates to her being responsible for the death of John the Baptist. However, secular history not only corroborates the Biblical account of her, but gives an even clearer picture of her disgraceful conduct. She was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was also the wife and niece of Herod Philip I, the half-brother of Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was married to an Arabian princess; yet while he was a guest in the home of his brother, Philip, he and Herodias plotted together and then eloped. This was scandalous conduct, even for the immoral Romans. To the Jews to whom Herod Antipas was tetrarch, it was even worse. Therefore, John the Baptist rebuked Herod openly for having taken Herodias as his wife. John was put in prison for daring to criticize them. Herodias hated John the Baptist and wanted him killed immediately. However, Antipas feared John, acknowledging that he was a just and righteous man. Also he did not want to lose the popularity of the people because all men counted John to be a great prophet. Thus, he refused to have him beheaded.

Then came the day of his birthday celebration. Herodias had her daughter, Salome, dance for Herod. As a reward for pleasing him, Herod asked her to make a request. Salome promptly asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Of course, her wicked mother had put her up to this! Herodias had put her husband in a difficult situation here. He did not want to kill John because all the people respected John, but also he had given his word and many dignitaries were looking on. Herod reluctantly complied, and so ended the life of the “greatest man born of woman.” The story, however, did not stop there. At the insistence of his wife, Antipas later went to Rome, demanding a greater part of the kingdom that had been promised in the will of his father. While there, claims of treachery were made and proven against Antipas and Herodias. As a result, they were banished from the kingdom. They were sent into exile to Spain and all of their riches were seized. So was the tragic end of this infamous, self-seeking, ambitious woman. Immorality, treachery and greed sealed her fate!

Herodias was a proud, immoral woman. The philosophy of today says we need no morals. There are no absolutes, therefore, no boundaries are necessary. The Biblical standards of right and wrong are no longer valid or convenient in our world. Instead, the world teaches us that morality brings “bondage” and is something evil. But as we look into the lives of people like Herodias, we see the fallacy of such teaching. Immoral people produce horrible movies, boasting loudly of their freedom to be totally self-expressive. They proclaim liberty on political platforms, speaking out in favor of women’s rights, abortion, and laws to protect and legalize homosexuality. They openly ridicule those who speak up for the necessity of returning to the standards of the Bible. Yet the life of Herodias also shows the end of this type of freedom and blind ambition. God will not be mocked.

The story of Herodias vividly reminds us that God’s judgments are real. There is a time of reckoning for everyone. No one ever gets away with anything. We reap what we sow! Everything in nature teaches us that we live in an orderly universe. Everything has its cause and effect. So, too, in the kingdom of God. Sooner or later our sins will find us out and destroy us, even as they did Herodias. The purpose of God’s judgment is not to destroy, but to redeem. His judgments are meant to teach us the better way, the way of the Lord.

When John openly condemned the sin of Herodias, she had a choice. She could repent and accept correction, or continue in her sin. She chose to harden her heart and follow her own ways. Consequently, she was destroyed. Judgments are unto life or death; it depends upon our response.

As God brings us to the refiner's fire to judge those things that are not of Him, may we be quick to heed His call to repent and change our ways. As Christians, it is imperative for us to know the truth about God's judgments. We must learn to see judgment from His perspective. So often, judgment carries a negative connotation because we tend to see judgment as being only for the wicked. However, judgment is for the righteous as well. God's judgments make us upright. They judge what is evil in our hearts. Judgments prepare us to be His lovely, spotless bride for all eternity.

Everyone resists judgment. It is a natural reaction to shrink from the possibility of a negative conclusion or decision concerning us. But as we take a closer look at the original meaning of the word *judgment*, we see that it does not always end in a guilty verdict. Within the context of what the word judgment means, we see such phrases as: "to plead the cause; to pronounce sentence for or against; to call into question; to condemn or defend; to vindicate or punish." When we see words such as *for* or *against*, *condemn* or *defend*, *vindicate* or *punish*, we can take heart—for He will not always declare us guilty! That is because God's judgments are ultimately designed to make us free.

Understanding this word more fully should make us realize that God's judgments upon our lives are not just some negative, consequential result of being a bad or carnal Christian. It is simply that God wants us to be pure and holy like His Son. Otherwise, how could we walk with the Holy One? Righteousness is God's pathway to life, but His judgments are the means by which He moves us in the right direction. Judgments are God's agency to bring us to an expected end.

God's judgments lead us to something good. Initially, God's judgment leads us to *salvation*. "*My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples*" (Isa. 51:5). Then it leads us to *separation*. "*But God is the judge: He puts down one, And exalts another. . . All the horns (or strength) of the wicked I will also cut off, But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted*" (Psa. 75:7-10). God's judgments separate evil from our life. They ultimately lead us to *sanctification, love, life, rewards, and even glory*. Are these things not worth the price of judgment?

God's judgments help us to know Jesus Christ in a deeper, more intimate way. It causes our dependence upon Him to grow stronger as it weakens our self strength. His judgments always lead us to the foot of the cross, and intimately involve us with the Lamb of Calvary. Most assuredly, God's judgments reveal who we really are. They reveal wrong reactions, wrong motives and wrong thoughts. Yet through them, He is transforming us into His image.

When we submit to the righteous judgments of God, we bring Him glory. How important this truth is to our souls. For a moment, let us consider the Cross. This was the ultimate in righteous judgment. Yet the victory of the Cross brought glory to the Father and the Son. Why? Because the Cross brought death to the power of sin in this world. It also defeated Satan. Likewise, we must accept the Cross in our own lives—and we do this by accepting His righteous judgments. We must not be like Herodias, who disqualified herself from God's kingdom because she refused to accept His righteous judgments. Herodias had a choice, and when she chose evil, she was judged—but her judgment was *unto death*, not *unto life*. May we continually ask God for an anointing of the fear of God so that we will be pliable in His hands, and not be hardened with sin as was Herodias.

THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

Meaning of Name: Name not given

Scriptures: Mk. 7:24-30, Matt.15:21-28

Characteristics: Humility, Persistence, Faith

In the Gospels, we have the account of the Syrophenician woman. Her name is not given, but her story is recorded twice in the Gospels, which signifies its importance. Matthew tells us this woman was from Canaan, but Mark calls her a Greek. Often the term Greek was used to distinguish Gentiles from the Jews. Whatever the case, she is a Gentile. While Jesus was in the region of Tyre and Sidon, this woman came to Him for help. Her background tells us that she would have been a descendant of Baal worshipers; yet we see her begging the Messiah to deliver her daughter who was demon possessed. She was a loving mother. Obviously grieving much for her daughter who was an incurable demoniac, she was determined to bring relief to her troubled child. Because she had heard that Jesus was performing many such miracles, she went to Him with an unreserved determination to see her daughter healed and made whole.

Presenting her plea to Jesus, she cried unto Him, saying, *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil”* (Mt.15:22). It is interesting to note here that although she is not an Israelite, she respected Him as the Messiah and called Him, Lord. This same courtesy, however, was not immediately returned to her by Jesus. In fact, He seems to totally ignore her as He walks away from her. Soon, even the disciples implored Him to send her away, for she was crying out continually to them as well. When Jesus finally responds to her desperation, His words seem impersonal. *“But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Vs.24). But all this was a test! Jesus had a plan.

The distress of her situation brought her to Jesus. She came to Him not for teaching, but for the healing of her daughter. Yet she came in faith, so much so, that His words do not deter her from her mission. She was not approaching Him on *her* merit, therefore she was not disappointed when He seemingly rejected her. She was relying only upon His mercy. It is also interesting to note that this repeated rejection leads her not to anger, but to worship. There was a sincere humility in this woman. (How many of us could say this of ourselves?) *“Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me”* (Vs.25). Worship and reverence came forth from her desperate heart, not frustration or even anger. Yet Jesus still says nothing to her.

Finally, Christ breaks the stony silence as He speaks firmly to her once again. *“It is not [right] to take the children’s bread, and cast it to dogs”* (vs.26). We would think this to be the ultimate insult to this poor, desperate woman, but she is quick to respond with the answer Jesus is looking for. *“And she said, True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table”* (vs. 27). It is an answer filled with wisdom, but also great faith. It is the answer He has been waiting to hear. *“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire”* (vs. 28). What a tremendous example of tenacious faith!

Nowhere in all the stories of Christ’s ministries do we see someone meet with such discouragement. First, He gives her the silent treatment. Then, He refuses her the second time. His third response nearly borders on reproach, and yet she continues to plead for mercy. Let us make no mistake here. Jesus knew what was in her heart all along. He knew the strength of her faith.

He knew her ability to break through such discouragements. This was a trial of her faith that would eventually be found unto praise, honor and glory (cf. 1 Pet.1:6,7). When this trial was over, she would be able to say with Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

To thoroughly understand the dynamics of this story, we must understand the heart of God toward her. Nothing pleases Him more than great faith. He takes pleasure in that one who will cry out to him with all importunity. His purpose, therefore, was neither to disgrace her or hold back any blessings. His purpose was to increase her faith. He knew she was capable of great faith, not just mediocre faith. Thus, he tried her all the more. And in the processes of God, this is what He will do with us if we will allow Him. Surely, then, this story is recorded for both our instruction and edification.

Another important principle we learn from this story is this: If Christ would honor us, He must first humble us, even as He did the Syrophenician woman. Like her, we must eventually come to that place in our Christian walk where we see ourselves in utter humility—as those only worthy to partake of the crumbs from our Father's table. If we want to become like Christ, the most Humble One, this humbling process is essential to our soul. If we gain anything in this life it is because of His grace. Whether we receive healing, gifts, fruits of the Spirit, or provision—it comes to us only through His mercy. Any victory we receive comes from the strength of His right arm, not our own. The Syrophenician woman, untrained and unskilled in the ways of God, knew these truths instinctively. Unfortunately, we Christians often forget that humility is the key to any victory in Jesus. Humility is the soil from which any of the Christian graces are allowed to grow within our hearts. It was humility that made this Gentile woman glad for the crumbs, but the same humility caused her only to expect the crumbs!

The Syrophenician woman had something we all need. She had a strength of faith. She had a *resoluteness* that helped her break through all the discouragements that Christ had placed before her. Her faith found a source of encouragement even when the hand she was reaching out for was brushing her aside. By this persevering faith, she was made by God a true daughter of Israel. Her faith had prevailed and she was touched by Christ, who said to her: “*O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt*” (Mt.15:28). This is the great lesson we learn from this humble, faith-filled woman: If we will deny Christ nothing, great shall be our reward—for He will give beyond our fondest dreams or expectations, and He will deny us nothing!

SAPPHIRA

Meaning of Name: Beautiful

Scriptures: Acts 5:1-10

Characteristics: Deceitful, Self-seeking, Covetous

Sapphira is mentioned in Scripture with her husband, Ananias. This couple holds a special place in Church history, for this was the first recorded case of believers who were judged for lying to the Holy Spirit. Their death caused great fear to come upon the Church, as well as all those who heard of it. This was a *holy fear* which Scripture describes as “the beginning of wisdom.”

Ananias told a deliberate lie, whose express purpose it was to deceive. He told Peter that he had sold a portion of land and that they were giving *all* the proceeds to God. However, it sold for more. He and his wife had *agreed together* to keep back part of the money which was their privilege to do. Ananias and Sapphira were under no obligation to give this money to the church. The apostles had put no pressure on the people to give their all. However, this couple was guilty of deceit. They were claiming to be more generous than they really were.

Peter’s rebuke in Acts 5 explains their sin. The problem was not in how much they gave, nor how much they kept back. It was the *deception* in their hearts that led to their destruction. It was their property, therefore, they could do what they wanted with it. No one was forcing them to give up anything. It was of their own free choice. The evil we see here is that Ananias and Sapphira wanted the praise of men. They wanted everyone to speak of their generosity in giving the entire price of the land to the church, yet they still wanted to enjoy some of the pleasures that this money could buy. In reality, they were serving God and mammon, and the Scriptures are clear that we cannot do that. They thought it was a light thing to lie in the presence of God.

Ananias went to Peter first with the money, and Peter’s response was immediate. “*Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? . . . Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?*” (5:3-5). Yes, Satan had filled his heart, but something in his heart had allowed Satan to enter. An evil heart had allowed Satan to gain a stronghold in his life. As a consequence, he died upon the spot.

The punishment of Ananias may seem severe, but we are certain that it was just. It was an important time in the Church. The Holy Spirit had just been poured out and order was being established in the kingdom of God. If the Apostles, who were the promoters of that order, were not able to discern this lie, how then could they be expected to discover the deeper things of God? Most assuredly, this incident was designed to maintain the honor of the Holy Spirit who was working within the apostles. It was designed to deter others from similar presumptions.

Sapphira came in three hours later, not aware of her husband’s demise. Mercifully, Peter gave her a chance to confess the truth. He asked her if they had sold the land for a certain amount. With no knowledge of what had just happened to her husband, she assured him that the amount was true. Peter then said, “*How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?*” Peter said that the matter was conceived in the heart of Ananias (Acts 5:4). Here is a situation where the wife should *not* have been in agreement with her husband. She should have politely objected, and urged him to do otherwise. It would have saved not only her own life, but perhaps her husband's as well.

Here again we see the importance of making right choices. If, in fact, this had been her husband's idea which Scripture seems to indicate, she could have chosen to influence him to tell the truth. And when confronted by Peter, if she had had any reluctance to do this wicked thing, would she not have discerned by the Spirit what Peter was trying to ask her? Instead, three hours later Sapphira enters the scene expecting to be greeted by the praise of men, totally unaware of the consequences of their wrong decision. As a result, her sin is opened, sentence is passed upon her, and her doom is sealed.

This couple possessed no fear of God. Their relationship with God was superficial at best. It was just an act, a show. They did not regard His watchful eye; they were only trying to impress men. Yet we find them actively involved in the Church. Most likely they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Perhaps they even held positions in the Church. What was wrong with this couple?

Romans 13:11-14 provides an awesome warning to believers: *“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”* Ananias and Sapphira were Christians, but like so many believers of our day, they were living in a stupor. They were only going through the motions of Christianity. “Jesus satisfies” was only something they said; it was not real in their hearts. Evidently God did not choose to extend mercy to them because He knew they were not going to change.

In these Scriptures, God clearly informs us of our duty. Like a garment, we are to put on Christ. We are to act like Him, look like Him, sound like Him, and finally, we are to become like Him. In this sense, our life is a process of exchanging, one by one, our filthy garments for His clean, righteous garments. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom.12:1,2).*

We are to present our bodies to God, and we are to be clothed with all the attributes of Jesus. We are required by God to make holiness and sanctification our daily pursuit. As followers of Christ, we are to learn how to walk in His ways. We are to walk (not just talk) our Christianity. Talking well without living well never gets us into heaven. Ananias and Sapphira did not present themselves as living sacrifices before God. This includes every part of our being—body, soul, and spirit. They did not *cast off* the works of darkness in their lives, nor did they not *put on* Christ. Consequently, they were judged eternally.

This story, therefore, serves as a warning to us. Once we put our hands to the plow, we must never turn back. When we decide to follow Christ, we must follow Him all the way. Our aim should always be to please the One who has created us. In pleasing Him, we will become like Him. We are developing His character within us. This is such an important truth to remember, because those who will have the privilege of becoming His bride are those who have *“walked not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1).*

DORCAS

Meaning of Name: Doe, or deer

Scriptures: Acts 9:36-41

Characteristics: Generous, Loving

The name Dorcas only appears in one incident in the Bible. Peter was in a neighboring town of Lydda, where he had recently healed paralyzed Aeneas through the power of the Holy Spirit. Word concerning Peter's miracles spread throughout the surrounding communities. Dorcas lived in nearby Joppa, a seaport town in the tribe of Dan. Her Hebrew name was Tabitha. She was “a disciple” who had embraced the faith of Christ and had been baptized. Dorcas showed her faith by her works, being well-known in the town for her many works of charity.

It was in the midst of these useful endeavors that Dorcas fell sick and died. It was normally the custom of the Jews to bury their dead immediately, but her friends hoped that Peter would come and raise her to life again. After they washed her body and laid her in an upper chamber, they sent a message for Peter to come as soon as possible. When Peter arrived, he was surrounded by various widows who wept as they showed him the clothing that Dorcas had made for them. After he told everyone to leave, Peter commanded Dorcas to arise, and she was restored to life (cf. Mt.10:8).

Dorcas' deeds of love and generosity had prompted the people of Joppa to believe with a remarkable faith that she could be raised from the dead. An abundant gift of faith from a whole town had been the outgrowth of her selfless giving. Her love had caused them to love her. Her life of giving made them want to give life back to her. This is what a life lived unselfishly for the glory of God produces. Faith works by love (Gal.5:6). The more the fruit of love grows in our hearts, the more the fruit of faith will be seen. Over and over, day after day, Dorcas had sown that seed of faith by her life of love. When she received the gift of extended life, this love was returned to her in abundant measure. That is the lesson of this story.

So let us likewise sow great love, that we may reap a greater measure of the same. Above all, let us learn to have great faith. This Christian virtue is the mainspring of Christian action. Without faith the Christian is powerless. Without it, one cannot be a follower of Christ.

Jesus had so much to say about faith. He Himself had such complete faith in His Father that He was constantly amazed at man's lack of it. When Jesus talked to us about faith, He spoke of the mustard seed (Mt.17:20). Often we quote this verse, but use it wrongly to measure the size of our faith. By the use of this illustration, Jesus was not referring to the degree or measurable size of our faith. He was referring to the *nature* of our faith. Thus, we need to understand the nature of faith and how it works in our lives. What we mean is this: Man's faith alone cannot win his battles, nor can it move his mountains. Mountains are only moved when *the divine faith of God* is activated within a heart that is dependent upon God. Real faith is *divine*, and it is imparted to us by God. The condition of our heart is dependent upon whether or not God's faith is flowing through us.

The Scriptures tell us that we live by this faith. “*We live by the faith of the Son of God. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (see Gal. 2:20). If we really believe this Scripture, we can stand on the promise that we shall see much more than the raising up of Dorcas. “*The faith of the Son of God*” is a divine substance.

Faith is an anointing. Second Corinthians 4:13 says we have the “*spirit of faith.*” Christ dwells within us and produces His faith within our hearts. We can be confident that the Spirit of God who is working within us will produce the faith we need for every difficult situation we face. For this reason, we should not try to depend upon and muster up our own faith which fails, but rather upon His faith. It is His faith, not ours. When Christ said, “Where is your faith?” He meant, “What is wrong in your heart that My faith cannot flow through you?”

The Scripture clearly reminds us: “*Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).*” The account of Dorcas is a story of a people who believed that God rewards those who believe in His supernatural power. It is also a story of an ordinary woman doing ordinary things that often seem to go unnoticed by others. Dorcas, however, is a reminder to us that God places a special importance upon these “little things” that are done in the name of love. Quietly and humbly, Dorcas went about doing good, being *spent* for others.

She was not concerned with having a great ministry or great gifts, and yet she lived a fulfilling life. How could this be? The answer is simple—her greatest joy and glory came from blessing others. She was content to be a witness of the love of God as she went about doing good every day. She was happy to do the common, ordinary things that proved her genuineness as a Christian. Dorcas is a shining example to all of us. Her life shows that others can come to know Christ by our good deeds and charitable spirit.

RHODA

Meaning of Name: Rose

Scriptures: Acts 12:13-16

Characteristics: Faith, Enthusiasm

The account of Rhoda is mentioned briefly in Acts chapter 12, and brings us to 44 A.D., fourteen years after Pentecost. Persecution on a larger scale was beginning. Herod Agrippa I was determined to vex certain ones in the Church. Recently he had James the brother of John beheaded, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he also imprisoned Peter (cf. Acts 12:1-11).

In the home of John Mark's mother, prayer was going on without ceasing for Peter. Because of the recent death of James, we can be assured that the prayer that night was very fervent. What they did not know, however, was that their prayers for him were already being answered. At the very moment they had been praying for him, Peter was receiving a mighty miracle. Being positioned between two soldiers, God sent a mighty angel into the prison, and his chains instantaneously fell from his hands. Escorting him past the first and second guard posts, they came to an iron gate which opened by its own accord, and Peter was freed. Peter was so stunned that he thought maybe it was only a dream or vision. As he considered what had just happened, he came to himself and went to the house of John Mark's mother where the saints were continuing in prayer for him.

Peter, now at the outer gate of the house, began to knock loudly upon the door. In response to his knock, a young girl named Rhoda went running from the prayer room to the doorway. Rhoda immediately recognized Peter's voice as he identified himself from the other side of the gate. Joy and wonder filled her soul as the sound of his voice brought evidence of answered prayer. Quite beside herself with excitement, Rhoda turned and raced back into the house shouting, "Peter is at the gate! He is freed from prison." In fact, she was so excited that she forgot to open the door for Peter. So, while she ran to tell all the others, he was left standing outside.

I think we can assume that Rhoda heard Peter preach and teach many times before because she recognized the sound of his voice right away. She was obviously among those who were praying for Peter because we see the excitement produced within her by his presence at the gate. It is the elation and faith of a young believer who has probably just witnessed her greatest miracle to date. Bubbling over with delight, her first reaction is to run to tell the grown ups what has just happened. Much to her surprise, however, not one of the seasoned, mature saints believe the miracle. And yet, Rhoda determines in her heart to believe. It must have been confusing for this young mind to fathom the unbelief that was now confronting her. After all, so many in this room had been a tremendous encouragement to her youthful, immature faith. So many times their fervent prayers had bolstered her faith and made her believe for answers that to her young mind seemed impossible. Now she was proclaiming a miracle and they would not even listen!

When those who have been praying for him deny repeatedly that the voice on the other side of the gate could be Peter's, Rhoda tenaciously clings to the reality of her miracle. It was amazing to her young mind how so many of these prayer warriors could not yet dare to believe their desperate prayer for Peter had reached heaven, and brought the amazing results that they had hoped for. Actually, it was not until their loud, excited questionings were interrupted by the sounds of urgent knocking that they even ventured to open the door.

This is almost a humorous incident in the life of the early Church. Sometimes we envision the early Christians as almost super human, not possessing the same human flesh with which we struggle. They were praying for Peter but when God answered their prayer it was such a surprise that they could not believe their prayers had been answered. We are like that too! God tells us in His word that, “*Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*” (Isa. 65:24). We believe that passage and yet after a similar fashion we are often surprised by answered prayer.

Young Rhoda was not surprised at all, she was simply delighted to witness a miracle. So delighted, in fact, that in her enthusiasm to tell others, she left Peter standing alone outside the door. But her faith in the reality of the miracle was a testimony of her zeal as a believer. Also, her youth did not deter her from boldly proclaiming to all the adults around her, “Yes, it is Peter. It *is* him!” For these reasons, she is to be commended.

Rhoda had faith. Our mind, will and emotions must be wrapped up in the pursuit of faith. Unlike the adults, Rhoda did not let her mind persuade her that Peter could not possibly be out of prison and at the door. So often, our natural minds work against the pursuit of our faith. But Rhoda had a willing heart that was uncluttered with human reasonings. Therefore, she was quickly able to apprehend the faith to believe for Peter's release.

May we too, like Rhoda, look enthusiastically to the coming of answered prayer in our own lives. And when we receive our answer, may we be *responders* like young Rhoda. Then may we joyfully run to tell others what great things the Lord has done for us. May our hearts be ever ready to believe Him for miracles.

LYDIA

Meaning of name: A woman of Lydia. Perhaps not a proper name.

Scriptures: Acts 16:14-40

Characteristics: Influential, Receptive, Hospitable, Hungry for God

Lydia was an influential lady. She is said to be Paul's first convert in Europe. We read about her in Acts 16. Paul went to preach the Gospel in Philippi where Lydia resided. Lydia was a native of Thyatira and described as "a worshipper of God." This suggests that she was a proselyte who worshipped the God of the Old Testament. As the Lord opened her heart, she received the preaching of Paul who presented the new covenant and the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that Lydia was a seller of purple and implies that it was a lucrative business that gave her a more than adequate income.

We also see that even though Lydia was an industrious, productive woman, she had her priorities in order. She was a business woman, but she was also a deep worshipper of God. She found time to do her business, but did not forsake her love and devotion to God. In fact, so important was her spiritual life that she asked Paul and his disciples to reside in her home. What she said to them in effect was this: "If you take me to be a sincere, fervent Christian, show your confidence in me by coming into my house and abiding with me." Her receptivity of Paul and his team, as well as the Lord Jesus Christ, is obvious now. When her heart opened to Christ, it automatically opened to His ministers. As a result, she welcomed them to the very best that she had.

The Word here says, "*She constrained us*" (Acts 16:15). This may suggest that Paul did not want to be a burden to the family. But Lydia would not be dissuaded. It was her desire to know more about her new found Savior. She wanted further instruction from God's Word. Who could give it better than Paul, the supreme interpreter of the new covenant! If Paul and his group were residing in her home she could ask them questions, and perhaps she could even pray with them regarding areas of need. This was an opportunity that she did not want to miss. Certainly, this would affect the rest of her family as well, and Lydia wanted them also to be touched by the Gospel.

Lydia was a seeker. She was not content just to go to the house of God on the sabbath. She wanted to know all she could know about God. Lydia constrained those who had the truth to abide in her home and teach her the sacred things of God. She wanted to be taught the ways of God so that she and her family could prosper *spiritually* even as they were prospering in the natural. In this, we would do well to imitate.

God hides Himself and wants us to seek Him! We all have the opportunity to spend our lives like Lydia, pursuing a closer walk with Christ. We can (even with just a little effort) purpose in all our busyness to make time and room for Him, even as she did. We can make it an objective in life to live for Him and not just for our own comforts and conveniences. This is what the story of Lydia teaches us, and we do well to follow her example.

PRISCILLA

Meaning of Name: Ancient

Scriptures: Acts 18:2-26, Rom.16:3, I Cor.16:19

Characteristics: Hospitable, Adaptable, Unselfish, Zealous

Our story opens in Corinth at a time when there was much hatred and persecution of the Jews by the Romans. All Jews had been banished from Rome by an edict of Claudius Caesar because according to him, the Jews seemed to be a “turbulent” people. The reason for this was that some of the Jews were zealous for Christ, but others were against Christ. This, of course, caused much contention and rivalry between them. For the Romans, it just seemed easier to rid themselves of all of them rather than to try to distinguish between Jew or Christian (see Acts 18:1-2).

In Acts 18 we are introduced to Aquila and Priscilla, a well-known couple who had a church in their home. This couple became a great asset to Paul and his ministry. A number of times in Scripture, Paul commends them highly for their help, strength and friendship to him, saying they had “*laid down their own necks*” for his life (Rom.16:3-4). Although we are not given any information as to how this couple laid down their lives, we can assume that their association with Paul and his ministry made them quite vulnerable to criticism and scorn in many circles.

Aquila and Priscilla were tent makers (Acts 18:3) but Paul calls them his “helpers in Christ.” Paul stayed at their house, and together the three of them worked side by side to make a living and to preach the Gospel. When Paul later sailed for Syria (18:18), their relationship was so mutually acceptable that Priscilla and Aquila went with him. From there they traveled together to Ephesus. Paul then left them in Ephesus and sailed elsewhere.

While they were in Ephesus they had yet another church in their home. From their various contacts they met a man named Apollos, a Jew and a great orator who had come to Ephesus. He was a bold, fervent speaker, but he had only been taught the baptism of John. After Aquila and Priscilla heard him preach, they drew him aside and taught him the truth concerning baptism into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 18:24-26). Clearly, we see then that the Early Church rebaptized those who had been baptized before the Cross.

This is a beautiful example of a husband and wife working harmoniously together for God's glory. Not only did they work together in business as tent makers, we also see them ministering together in the Gospel. God had kindled a fire in their hearts that burned brightly, and they were careful to keep that flame alive wherever they found the opportunity. They were “instant in season” kind of people, and always ready with an encouraging word, smile, helping hand, or a spiritual insight to keep all those in their care uplifted. They were a unique team that blessed all who knew them.

Aquila and Priscilla later were able to return to Rome, where they continued to open their home to other believers.

The qualities that we see in Priscilla remind us very much of the qualities of the virtuous woman spoken of in Proverbs chapter 31. Priscilla was a good woman, spiritually and morally. She and her husband were willing to risk their own lives for the good of Paul. This shows us how much they were allowing the fear of God to rule in their life.

Like the Proverbs woman, she was proficient in all she did. While Priscilla was helping her husband with tent making, she was also busy taking care of Paul's needs, her family's needs, and the needs of those in the church that came to her home. The gift of adaptability is necessary in the ministry, and Priscilla was obviously more than willing to be flexible in her situations. Moving often, having a church in her home everywhere they relocated, meeting and getting used to many different kinds of people, and caring for the diversified needs of all those who entered her little world certainly kept her a very busy woman. Yet we see no evidence that it was anything but joy to Priscilla. Over and over again we see that Paul praises her and her husband for their sacrificial natures. We even see her name put before her husband, which is a tribute to the greatness of her character.

Many men have been hindered from fulfilling the call of God on their lives because of an unwilling and discontented spouse. How dreadful for a wife to go down in the eternal records of heaven as one who was an obstacle and liability to her husband and to the Gospel. Many ministers have been deflected from God's purposes because their wives have refused to follow the God-ordained path of their husbands. Instead of learning to adapt to the various challenges presented by the ministry, these women have complained, fought, and contended with their husbands every step of the way. This certainly was not the case with Priscilla. She was a woman who worked well with her husband. Together, in whatever capacity that was needed, they forged ahead, making much progress in the kingdom of God. Ladies, let's be like Priscilla and be known in heaven as a woman who helped her husband fulfill his mission and call in life!

The wives of the Apostles must have been very devout women. Paul makes it clear in First Corinthians 9:5 that most of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord were married, and they often travelled with their spouses. Bachelorhood was very rare in the Jewish culture.

"Have we [no right] to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" (9:5). In the context of First Corinthians 9:1-18, Paul is talking about the responsibility of the Church to take care of its leaders. Many of the apostles travelled with their wives. Paul said that he had a right to travel and have a wife, just as the other apostles, and that their natural needs should be met by the churches.

When a man is called to be in the ministry (especially a traveling ministry), he must marry a woman who has the same call and desire. If she is not called to the ministry, she should marry a man who also is not called to the ministry. God will hold a woman responsible for hindering her husband from fulfilling the call of God. We should also comment on the fact that sometimes God gives a call to a woman, and not to a man. Therefore a woman must not marry a man who does not have a divine call. Otherwise, there will always be strife. Aquila and Priscilla were divinely called of God and *together* they made a tremendous impact upon their generation.

PHEBE

Meaning of Name: Moon, bright, pure

Scriptures: Rom.16:1-2

Characteristics: Helpful, Conscientious, A Servant

Romans 16:1-2 *“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a [deaconess] of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the lord as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a [helper] of many, and of myself also.”*

We are introduced to Phebe briefly in the book of Romans, chapter 16. Writing from Corinth, which was quite a distance from Rome, the Apostle Paul sends Phebe to deliver his letter to the church at Rome. The name Phebe is the feminine of Phoebus, or Apollo, the sun god, which indicates that she was a convert from paganism. She was once a worshiper of the gods of Greece, but now a convert to Jesus Christ through the ministry of Paul. She was not known in Rome, so Paul introduces her and commends her to those in Rome as “our sister.”

She was a “deaconess” [or servant] in the church at Cenchrea, a town eight miles from the city of Corinth (Rom.16:1). Church history tells us that the early Church used women extensively in ministry, especially in the role of deaconess. In her position, her duties were to help the female converts especially. She helped them prepare for baptisms, visited the sick, and those in prison, as well as taking care of many other responsibilities in the church. By this, we see that Phebe was a true witness for the Lord Jesus in and among her own people and community.

Her sacrificial life is now rewarded as she has been given a wonderful opportunity to be the bearer of the good news of the Gospel of Christ. Phebe was probably a woman of business, called to Rome for her own purposes. However, because of her faithfulness in the church and to Paul, she was asked to carry this most important epistle to the Church in Rome.

We must not think lightly of Phebe’s willingness to carry the good news all the way to Rome. At turbulent times like this in the history of the Early Church, we must realize that it was very dangerous for a woman to travel. Christianity was not popular in Rome, and Christians were not welcome. Yet she joyfully carried the good news there for the sake of Christ. How true it is that we reap what we sow. Phebe had helped many others, and by it, had won a place close to Paul’s heart. He knew her to be a willing and able sister in the Lord, one who helped those in need. Thus, when he needed help, he gave her the privilege of helping him. He commends her highly for her friendship and assistance.

We know very little about Phebe’s personal life apart from this account. Yet it is not important. What God wants to emphasize here is her complete willingness to serve the Church. Everyone of us in our own way should strive to serve the Church in what ever capacity we can. When we do, we are serving God, and we shall one day be richly rewarded for our efforts.

CONCLUSION

We hope you have enjoyed this study of women of the Bible, and that you have learned much from their lives. Many of the women we have studied will become for us an abundant source of inspiration. The holiness and love, the dedication and humility, and the resignation to God's will that many of these great women of God displayed make them a model for women in every generation. Still, there are others that we should not follow—for if we do, we shall be doomed.

As we have already said many times before, our lives come down to a question of choice. All of these women who were so different in so many ways had one thing in common—they had a choice to make. Most certainly, the consequences of their life were determined by that choice.

Abigail was a beautiful woman, but she is remembered more for her beauty of character than for her natural beauty. The Bible tells us she was “a woman of good understanding.” She chose to walk and talk with discretion, even though she was married to a fool. Her attitudes were excellent and her countenance was sweet. A woman is wise if she chooses to walk in the ways of Abigail. Remember, a wise woman “builds her house, but the foolish woman tears it down with her hands.”

Deborah was a woman of keen mind, great courage, and abundant faith. For her good choices, Deborah received a unique honor of which no other woman can boast. She was given supreme authority in Israel by the consent of the common people. She became a judge in Israel, an honor normally only given to great and trusted men of courage in the community. She was also called a Mother in Israel—another great honor. In Deborah, we see courage but also resourcefulness. We see initiative and valor. For today's woman, Deborah is an example of that one who can use her influence to impact, not only her family, but her whole community as well. As she actively participates in preserving the godly principles that should guide our nation, she is preserving her own home from the dangers of moral decay.

Ruth's qualities of loyalty and devotion have been a source of inspiration for centuries. Her great capacity for love is a constant reminder of the greatness of womanhood. Her faithfulness to Naomi her mother-in-law is a lasting testimony of her beauty of character. Above all else, Ruth chose to love and honor her mother-in-law. This choice brought her own son into the line of Jesus Christ. Ruth's right choices served her well. A *capacity* for deep, abiding love is a God-given gift to women—but the depth of that commitment to love is our choice.

Esther risked her own life to save her people. She is a great example to us of selflessness and courage. Her famous declaration, “If I perish, I perish!” resounds through the ages, and continues to give women the courage to face their own particular battles head on. If necessary, she would lay down her own life for the sake of her people. What a noble act! The Word of God tells us clearly what He thinks of this kind of woman. “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn.15:13). Oh, how the world needs women who will choose to be like Esther!

Mary, the mother of Jesus is the most exalted and honored woman of all times. Although she was poor in the things of this world, Mary's heart overflowed with the riches of holiness and faith. She was a young, poor and unknown girl from Nazareth, yet she was chosen to give birth to the Messiah. The predominant cry of her heart was: “Be it unto me, according to thy will.” This she instilled into her Son who cried: “I am come to do thy will, O my God.” Oh, to have a heart like Mary.

Every nation can proudly claim its great heroines. Over the centuries, women have proven their outstanding courage in one way or another to their country, and because of it they became great in the eyes of their countrymen. We have studied the lives of some of these like Esther and Deborah who served their nation well. Yet there are other unsung heroines that are no less worthy of admiration than these.

We are referring now to all the “average” women who daily prove their courage in conquering the countless worries and problems that surround every wife, mother, and homemaker. Many of these are esteemed just as tall in stature in God’s eyes as some of the other well known women. God is choosing a Bride. He is sifting through the hearts of all His people for those who will qualify to reign with Him for all eternity. He will only select those who are clean and unblemished before Him. He is looking for those (irrespective of gifts, talents, or natural beauty) who, moment by moment, will make right choices in order to qualify to reign in His kingdom. Will you and I be numbered among them? Will you and I qualify to become His Bride?

Chapter Five

BECOMING HIS BRIDE

There Is Going To Be A Wedding! We are all called to be a part of the corporate Bride of Christ. Male or female, bond or free, it makes no difference, all are invited. Yet we must qualify for this eternal call. When Jesus Christ returns again, there is going to be a wedding. The marriage supper of the Lamb is coming, and He is going to be joined to a very special people. Earthly marriage is symbolic of the heavenly marriage to our eternal Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this reason the lessons we learn in our earthly marriage are so important. Many of the Bible women we have read about give us great insight into the qualities Christ is looking for in His Bride. For many of us, marriage becomes the real beginning of our lives. Children are born, nurtured, and brought to maturity through this union. Through the years, many other lives are enriched and blessed by the blending of two hearts that learn to beat as one.

Marriage is perhaps the greatest “school of the Spirit” in this earthly realm. It is a foreshadowing of that wonderful, completely divine relationship that we can have with Christ if we are determined to “follow on.” The lessons learned and the knowledge gained from being married are numerous and varied. This study of the lives of Bible women will give us many insightful keys to help us in our earthly relationships, but also in our eternal relationship with Christ.

The whole creation is based on one main thing—marriage. Just like the first man He created, the one thing Christ has foremost on His mind is a woman—His Bride. He created the human race with that in mind, and He has waited patiently for her for six thousand years. It is now time for Christ to enter into rest with His people, His Bride. Should it not be of utmost importance to us, then, to understand clearly just what the necessary qualifications are to become His Bride?

The Lord Jesus Christ is coming for a mature and glorious Bride whose garments are spotless and white (Rev.19:7-8). He will not be wedded to an immature Bride. He will only be wedded to those who are like Himself, to those who are conformed to His image.

Well, just what is the Lord looking for in a Bride? He is looking for the same things a man looks for in a woman. Thus, our earthly marriage is an important object lesson and preparation for the eternal marriage. It teaches us about our relationship with Him (Eph. 5:21-33, I Cor.11:3). Adam, the first man, was a figure of what was to come. In Scripture he is referred to as the “First Adam,” and Christ is called “the Last Adam.” For completeness, the First Adam needed Eve. It is the same with the Last Adam. The Bride is “the fullness of Him” that filleth all (Eph.1:23).

Our goal, therefore, is to become the Bride of Christ. To meet this goal we must have His beauty of character formed within us. He will not be wedded to someone incompatible. He will only select one who is much like Himself, who is transformed into His image. Psalm 45:13 aptly describes the beauty of the Bride: “*The royal daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is woven with gold.*” She is all glorious within. Here we see that the life of Christ is wrought deep within her being. Gold speaks of the divine nature. The gold that is woven into her clothing is a confirmation of the exchange of her character for His. She is adorned with gold as the Queen of Ophir, (v9) which speaks to us of her Christian graces—they are not temporal ornaments of gold, they are eternal.

A woman's *home* is indicative of her personality and character. A *city* is a reflection of its inhabitants. Thus, the Bride in Revelation chapters 21 and 22 is portrayed as a great and holy city. The city is a very literal city, yet the inhabitants bear the characteristics of the glorious city. The holy city, adorned as a bride for her husband, is a beauty that God desires for every Christian. Yet we must *qualify* to become His Bride. Listed below is a description of her divine attributes:

1.) She Has an Overcoming Spirit. We qualify by being *an overcomer*. It is only the overcomer who inherits all things (Rev. 21:7). Only the overcomer will be found worthy to be wedded to the heavenly Bridegroom. See Revelation 3:21.

2.) She Has the Glory of God. Like the holy city in Revelation 21:10-11, we must have the glory of God upon us. This is a glory that can be seen (Isa. 60:1-2). This glory only comes as we have paid a price, as we have purposed to allow God through His diverse processes to make us all glorious within. All have sinned and come short of God's glory. Thus, we see that the mark and goal for our lives is to come to glory. Anything less is sin (Rom. 3:23). If we fail to go on with God we are sinning.

3.) She Has the Undistorted, Transparent Light of Christ. Revelation 21:11 tells us that the Bride is full of light. *“And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”* This one is clothed with the armor of light because she is free from sin. She is pure and undefiled, therefore, her light is clear and *undistorted*. Precious stones, light and crystal speak to us of *transparency*. The Bride of Christ is transparent.

Her foundations are garnished with precious stones, which tells us that something has been worked out in her. Precious stones are not created overnight. They are formed through the pressures of life. The Bride of Christ has been subjected to many breakings, but they have changed and transformed her. Job 41:25 tells us, *“By reason of breakings they purify themselves.”*

As the moon reflects the sun and has no light of her own, so the Bride is only a reflection of her beloved Bridegroom. *“And behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne, and He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance.* Jesus is the Light of the world, but His Bride has allowed that light to thoroughly search her heart and she is filled with light and is a reflection and expression of Him.

4.) She is a Separated Vessel. Revelation 21:12 tells us that the city (Bride) has a great high wall with twelve gates. Walls and gates are boundaries, and they speak of separation. Without separation in a believer's life, there can be no victory. We must live a life of separation from sin, and from all that would defile. *“And the construction of its wall was of jasper.”* Jasper is a type of quartz stone that is often red, yellow, brown or green in color. Here we see that it is crystal clear. In other words, her walls are so clear, so transparent that you can see through them. What a true picture of the Bride of Christ. Her walls separate her, or set her apart, but they are as clear as glass. Why? Because she has nothing to hide. Her life is transparent and visible to all the inhabitants of heaven.

5.) She is Fruitful. *“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits.”* (Revelation 22:2,3) The tree of life speaks to us of fruitfulness. The twelve fruits speak to us of government in every realm of needed provision. Thus, we see that the heavenly city (the Bride) is a city of refuge, a place of healing for the nations, but the city, (the Bride) would be nothing without the presence and character of her Bridegroom.

She is part of Him and one with Him. Therefore she partakes in all He is, sharing in the fruit of His labors, and becoming a life-giver with Him. She too has the privilege of imparting life to others. The Bride is “a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well: whose branches run over the wall” (Gen. 49:22).

6.) She is a Servant. *“But the throne of God, and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads”* (Rev. 22:3). On the earthly plain, the Bride lived a life of serving and sacrifice, longing to release life to others so that they could be healed and blessed. Now, in her heavenly glory, she has partaken of the tree of life and brings life to the inhabitants of heaven. To her utter delight, she has become food and life for hungry hearts. Revelation 21:24-26 shows us clearly that the Bride is actively involved in the ministry of serving others. *“And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. (The city, i.e. the bride.)”*

Heaven is a very active place, and we must realize that we shall continue serving and drawing others to Christ even as we move on from glory to glory. The Bride is called not only to rule and reign with Christ on earth for 1000 years, but also throughout all eternity. The Bride is a servant, therefore, she has learned her proper place. She is only to be a reflection of her husband. The Bride has no hidden agenda, and she is not caught up with her own importance. Her life is to serve Him, the One who gives her life. Unlike Lucifer, who fell because he wanted to draw all attention and worship to himself, the Bride’s only desire is to deflect all honor and praise to her husband. She desires to draw others only to Him, not to herself. Lucifer failed the test because he was arrogant and proud. The Bride has passed the test that he has failed. For this reason, she is chosen to rule and reign with Him for all eternity. That is why she has the honor of His name being inscribed on her forehead (22:4).

7.) She is Faithful. Revelation 22:14 tells us that, *“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”* The Bride has been a faithful one. She is one who has “fought the good fight of faith.” Therefore, she has gained access to the holy city, the New Jerusalem. Being found faithful to enter, she is now adorned as a bride for her heavenly husband. Because she has “made herself ready” she is granted to *“be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Rev. 19:8). She is now the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, for all eternity. And this is her testimony, *“How precious is your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light (Psalm 36:7-9).”*

There were many virgins in the time of Esther, but only one was chosen to be the queen. Solomon had sixty queens, eighty concubines, and he had virgins without number. His undefiled, however, was but one (Song 6:8-9). These truths symbolize something very important.

There are many blood-washed believers, but only some qualify to make up that company called the Bride. In the story of the ten virgins, all were virgins (blood-washed believers) and were conscious of the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. Unbelievers do not believe in His return. Yet, half of them were lax and were denied entrance into the marriage feast. They were not counted worthy to rule and reign with Christ. This privilege is only granted to those who have suffered with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Only those who receive “abundance of grace” are able to reign in life (Rom. 5:17). We must understand that there are qualifications to meet in order to be chosen to be a part of His Bride.

There will be many Christians who go to heaven with unfulfilled calls, and tasks they have not completed because of incomplete obedience to the will of God. These will have to settle for an inferior resurrection (Rev. 20:6) and a lower place in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:19). Christ will not share His throne with spiritual infants and those who have never grown or developed. This is reserved only for the overcomers (Rev. 3:21).

Christ wants a Bride:

- Who is in love with Him wholeheartedly, like Mary Magdalene.
- Who sides with God, rather than her native country, like Rahab.
- Who understands Him intuitively (Jer. 9:24), like Abigail.
- Who is not guarding her identity or individuality, like Esther.
- Who is willing to abandon herself to follow another, like Ruth.
- Who is not deceitful, taking matters into her own hands, like Rebekah.
- Who is not self-seeking or taken up with her own opinions or importance, as Miriam.
- Who has conquered hysteria, criticism, and a dominant spirit, like Sarah.
- Who has learned contentment and how to raise a family, like the older women in Titus 2:3-5.
- Who is free from boredom, like Dorcas,
and seeks to serve others like Phebe, Joanna, Suzanna, and others.
- Who is a good support to her husband, like Priscilla and Zipporah.
- Who will always guard His good name, and not disgrace Him in any way,
and cares what His house and children look like, as the Virtuous Woman of Proverbs 31.
- Who is not demanding, nagging, and manipulative, like Delilah.
- Who is accepting of circumstances, and not vindictive, bitter, or resentful, as Job's wife.
- Who has conquered unhappiness and a sorrowful countenance, like Hannah.
- Who will not settle for a lower realm of blessing, like Achsah.
- Who finds her joy in Him, not in materialism or the praise of others, as all the godly women.
- Who is not easily offended and holding grudges, like the Syrophenician woman.
- Who maintains an anointed life (like Mary of Bethany), and sits at his feet.
- Who does not expect her husband to meet all her needs as Rachel, but looks to God for help.
- Who will not encourage her daughters to love the world, as Lot's wife.
- Who will not request that her sons be first in the kingdom or have positions not ordained of God,
as the mother of James and John.
- Who will bring down spiritual enemies, like Jael and the woman at the tower of Shechem.

**Let us make ourselves attractive and appealing to the King of kings, and Lord of lords.
Remember, the same things a man looks for in a woman, the Lord looks for in His Bride.**