

# **Women of the Bible**

## **The Challenges of Womanhood - Part I**

*Studies on Women of the Bible  
With an Overview of Biblical History*

**A Creative Living International Publication**

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# Foreword

*Welcome to this life-enriching seminar for men and women who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and others who may be seeking Him.*

*The seminar is led by the volunteers of \_\_\_\_\_*

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# The Challenges of Womanhood Part I

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## **BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .**

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us...” (1 Corinthians 10:11), Paul declares. He is writing about the value of the Scriptures as they document the life experiences and choices of men and women of past ages. Here is the value of studying the 25 women we will observe in this study. Each woman will help us learn something about healthy, constructive living—things to avoid and things to pursue. We will see that while societies and customs come and go, God and His truth are trustworthy and unchanged by the years.

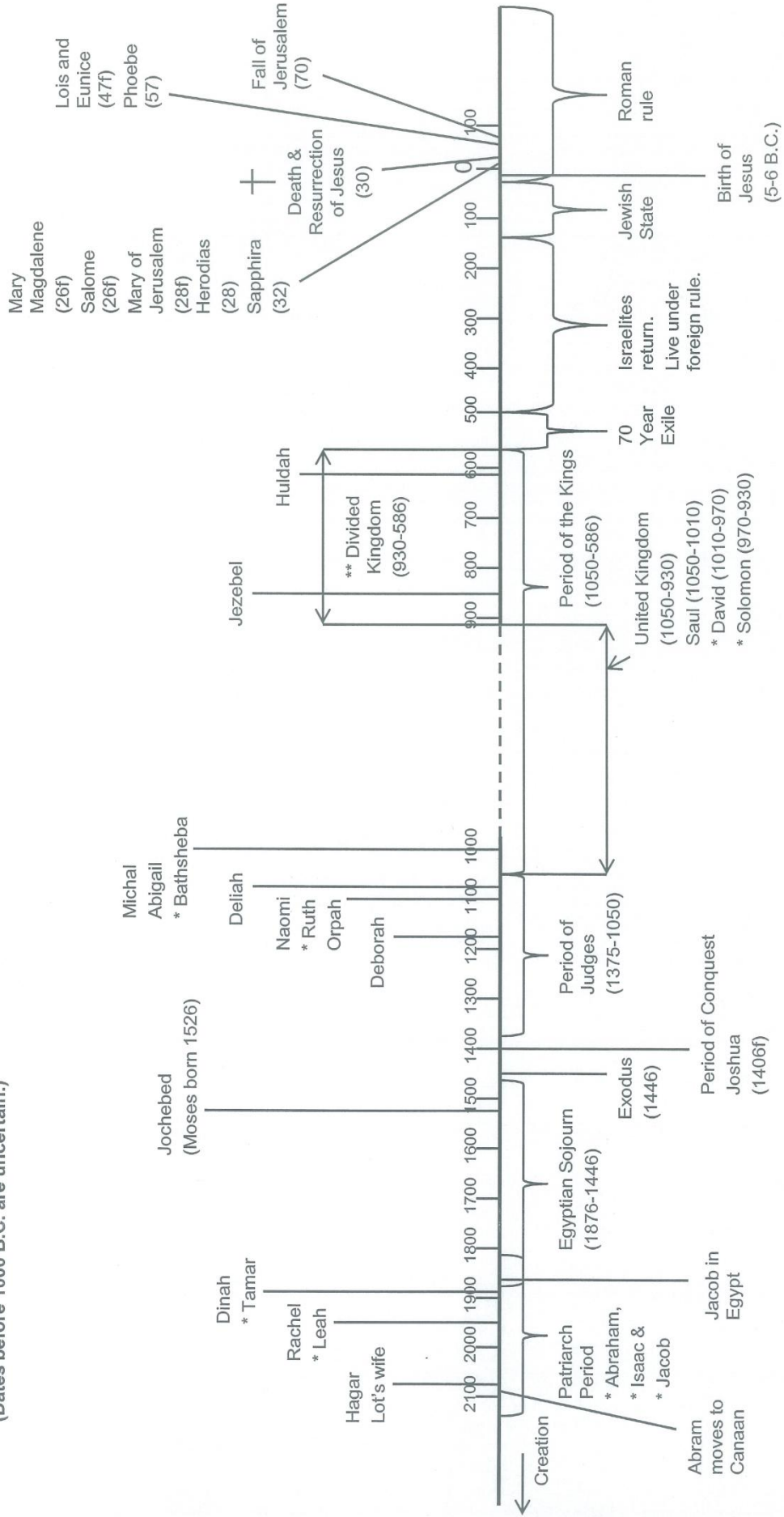
We will also study these women within the timeline of biblical history as it records the unfolding of God’s wonderful plan of redemption for mankind. This will enrich our understanding of the Bible as a whole with its amazing continuity and harmony.

When women start talking about the real life experiences of other women, there is no loss for discussion. Add to this the topical studies on the challenges we face as women, and things come to life. But it is my prayer that this study will also draw you closer to God as we study the timeless wisdom and truth He offers for the challenges we face as women.

Diana Schick  
Author  
Creative Living Bible Studies

# Timeline

(Dates before 1000 B.C. are uncertain.)



\* In the line of Christ.

\*\* Fall of Northern Kingdom (Israel) to Assyria (722 B.C.)  
 \*\*\* Fall of Southern Kingdom (Judah) to Babylon (586 B.C.)

# LESSON 1

## *INTRODUCTION*

Anyone who studies the universe stands in awe of the miracle that brought it into being. Scientists know that the universe, with its 300 billion galaxies with billions of stars in each, had a beginning. Some call it the “big bang,” which it most likely was indeed. Regardless, Genesis chapters 1-3 declare that God brought about this miracle. Genesis states the universe did not appear by itself out of nothing, but rather, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God—a timeless, spaceless, all-powerful, eternal Being—said, “Let there be...” and it came into being.

The gargantuan expanses and precision dynamics of the universe were formed at His command. God spoke again, and our tiny world was positioned in just the right place in the universe to support the magnificent life forms God then created upon it. And among those life forms, God created man like Himself to be a moral being, able to make choices and to relate personally to God and other people.

Then, we are told, God gave the first couple, Adam and Eve, a choice to either follow Him and live or disobey Him and die. They disregarded God’s warning, chose not to obey Him, and the results in our world were catastrophic. As God had warned, they died spiritually (were cut off from a relationship with God) and would also, along with all their descendants, die physically. Nature fell under the spell of evil, too, as it began suffering from decay and death (Romans 8:20-21).

But Genesis also tells us that even as God exacted the foretold consequences, He promised a Redeemer would come (Genesis 3:15b). The rest of the Bible, with its 66 books written over a period of 1500 years in three languages on three continents by more than 44 authors, tells the unfolding story of this plan of God to fix mankind’s broken relationship with Him. This plan began to unfold as God called one man, Abraham, to leave his homeland and follow Him to the land God would show him. There, God

promised Abraham that a great nation would come from his offspring, and out of that nation, blessing would come to the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3). We know now this would come through the knowledge of God from the Scriptures and ultimately through the incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. He would take the penalty for man's sin on Himself on the cross (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22), making it possible for those who believe in Him to be declared righteous and live with God forever.

The women in this study will span the 2200 years of history in which God's plan of redemption unfolded. We will start with Hagar in the time of Abraham and will end with Eunice and Lois who lived during the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles in the first century A.D. Though the cultures of these various women are foreign, we will see that we still have much in common. The choices we face—about God, about life, about doing good or evil—have not changed through the ages. Neither has God's love, His truth, and His wonderful plan of redemption.

As we study these women alongside a survey of biblical history, we have an exciting opportunity to receive a double blessing—of wisdom for daily living *and* security in the eternal plan of a loving heavenly Father.

## ***HAGAR***

God called Abraham to leave all that was familiar in his Chaldean homeland of Ur and follow Him to a foreign land where God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation. In time, his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan and would bring blessing to the entire world (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:8).

Abraham believed God for these great promises, and at 75 years old, he and his wife Sarah, who was 65, along with his nephew Lot and family, moved to the land of Canaan where they lived a nomadic life dwelling in tents.

However, years passed, and Sarah remained childless. For God's promises to be fulfilled, they needed an heir. In her desperation, Sarah insisted she

and Abraham resort to a custom of the times to bear a son. With Abraham's agreement, she gave her Egyptian maid *Hagar* to sleep with him.

According to the custom, Hagar's child would be considered Sarah's,<sup>1</sup> and could provide the heir needed for God to make Abraham a great nation.

Now Hagar probably had no say in the matter. She became the victim of Sarah and Abraham's scheming as they ran ahead of God. Their lack of faith in God's ability and plan would have far-reaching effects as the child born, Ishmael, would father the Arab nations that continue to strive with Israel to this very day.

Nevertheless, Hagar's pregnancy raised Sarah's maid to a place of a secondary wife, or concubine. As such, Hagar became insolent toward Sarah, who in turn complained to Abraham. Caught weakly in the middle, he told her to handle the situation as she saw fit. So Sarah treated Hagar harshly, and Hagar ran away...down the dusty road toward Shur and her homeland of Egypt.

But alone in the wilderness, Hagar became afraid. It must have been a great relief when a calm and gracious angel from the LORD (YHWH)<sup>2</sup> appeared to her by a spring on the way to Shur. There, as God spoke to her through the angel, He told Hagar to go back and submit to Sarah's authority. He promised Hagar that her son, who should be named Ishmael (meaning "God hears"), would have countless descendants. He would father a great tribe of wild, or hostile, people who would be at odds with everyone (Genesis 16:12; cf. 25:18).

Taking in good news and bad, Hagar rejoiced that the living God saw her and cared for her situation. She returned and must have told everyone the story, because Abraham indeed named their son Ishmael as the angel had instructed.

Thirteen years later, the LORD appeared to Abraham and told him Sarah would have the promised heir in one year. Abraham fell on his face and



laughed (Genesis 17:17). When Sarah found out, she laughed, too (Genesis 18:12-14). Sure enough, one year later, when Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham 100, Isaac was born. His name meant “laughter.” Sarah was even able to nurse him (Genesis 21:7)!

After the baby was weaned at age three, Hagar’s son, Ishmael, now 17, began to mock Isaac. Sarah implored Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac” (Genesis 21:10). The idea of sending his son, Ishmael, and his mother, Hagar, away distressed Abraham. But God told Abraham to do as Sarah wished, because as Abraham’s son, God was going to make Ishmael the father of a great nation, too.

With absolute trust in what God had told him, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away with only a container of water and some bread. Hagar again found herself in the wilderness, but this time watching her son die of thirst after their water ran out. As she and the boy both sat crying, God’s angel spoke from heaven to Hagar. He told her not to fear, that as God had promised, Ishmael would father a great nation. Then he opened her eyes to see a nearby well of water.

After this, Hagar raised Ishmael in the wilderness of Paran (Arabian desert; cf. Genesis 25:12-18). The last we hear of Hagar, she went to the idolatrous land of Egypt to get a wife for Ishmael (Genesis 21:21), which makes it doubtful she worshiped the LORD who had twice saved her and her son.

**Read Genesis 16:1-6.**

1. a. Who was Hagar, and what transpired around her life (16:1-2)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *child by a maid*, p. 16.

**Note:** God later changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning *father of many*, and Sarai's to Sarah, meaning *princess* (Genesis 17:15).

**Note:** Sarai probably bought Hagar when they were in Egypt (Gen 12:10).

b. How did Hagar respond to her situation (16:4-6)?

2. a. Who came to Hagar's rescue, and what was his approach (16:7-8)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Angels*, p. 16.

b. Upon her confession, what did the angel tell her to do (16:9)?

3. What promises did God give Hagar through the angel (16:10-12)?

4. What did Hagar declare about God in the name she gave Him, Beer Lahai Roi (16:13)?

5. As the angel predicted, what came about after Hagar's return (16:15)?

**Read Genesis 21:1-21.** Optional: Read Genesis 17:15-27.

6. a. What happened to Hagar when Ishmael mocked little Isaac (21:9-10)?

b. How did God reassure and direct Abraham (21:11-13)?

7. Both Abraham and Hagar had been promised by God that Ishmael would live to father a great nation. What circumstances made Hagar doubt this (21:15-16)?

8. What did God declare, promise, and provide (21:17b-19)?

9. a. Who helped Hagar raise Ishmael (21:20)?

b. What choice did Hagar make that showed she did not really worship God alone (21:21b)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **GOD'S WONDERFUL WAY OF UNDERSTANDING**

We are all at different places in our spiritual pilgrimage. We may have believed in God for a long time, short time or somewhere in between. Perhaps some are only now exploring the possibility of a personal relationship with God. But regardless of where we are in our spiritual journey, it is very easy to feel God is distant from the present issues we face. We may assume our problem is not big enough for God to bother with or that He is not capable of handling it. Or we may think we are not important enough or good enough for God to help.

However, the Scriptures do not support such thinking. On the contrary, the Bible clearly proclaims God's infinite capacity to know, understand, and personally lead us through every issue of life.

Hagar was surprised, as most of us would have been, when the LORD appeared in the midst of her crisis. Yet while He does not often visibly appear, the Bible declares that God is always near, as close as the air we breathe. His infinite understanding transcends our own, and He has a way for us that we could not imagine or bring about ourselves.

As we begin our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, we will briefly examine these very comforting truths about God's wonderful way of understanding.

1. Think about Hagar's situation. How are we affected when we feel no one sees or understands our situation? How was Hagar's reaction typical?

2. What does the Bible declare:  
about God's attention to you as an individual? Psalm 139:1-4

about God's knowledge of your particular make up? Psalm 139:13-14

about God's thoughts toward you? Psalm 139:17-18

3. What do the following teach about God's understanding?  
Jeremiah 10:12

I Chronicles 28:9a

4. a. What did Jesus promise about God's understanding of our needs in  
Matthew 6:31-32?

b. How are our needs met according to Matthew 6:33?

5. In His infinite understanding of all things, what is true of God's way?  
Isaiah 55:8-9

Revelation 15:3

Psalm 18:30

6. a. According to Hosea 14:9b, what is the difference between the one who seeks God's guidance and the one who does not?

b. Which did Hagar seem to be? What can be seen about God's goodness here?

7. Hagar's story exemplifies the abundant provision of God available to us when we trust in His understanding and way for our lives. What is true of God's provision as we seek Him in the challenges of life?  
Romans 8:28

Romans 8:32

Romans 8:38-39

## **SUMMARY**

8. a. What have you observed in this lesson about God's (a) awareness and (b) understanding of your life and circumstances?

b. Hagar could not see the answer to her situation, but God had a way. Are you in a situation where you do not see the answer(s)?

c. From Hagar's story, what have you learned about God's way in your situation?

9. Remembering that He is near, perhaps you would like to take a moment and tell the LORD that you trust His understanding and way for you.

## LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *child by a maid*. “In the legal custom of that day a barren woman could give her maid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife’s child. If the husband said to the slave-wife’s son, ‘you are my son,’ then he was the adopted son and heir. So Sarai’s suggestion was unobjectionable according to the customs of that time. But God often repudiates social customs.” Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 56.

2 Reference: Note 4, *YHWH*, p. 88.

3 *Angels* (Psalm 34:7). According to the Bible, angels surround us continually. They are created immortal beings who serve God and believers. An angel is physically powerful; for example, one angel effortlessly moved the huge stone from the tomb of Jesus, a stone three men would struggle to displace. An angel closed the mouth of the lions in Daniel 6:22. Angels are usually invisible to our eyes, but they can become visible (ex.: Gen 16:7; Num 22:23; Luke 1:28). When angels do appear, they are usually glorious and stunningly beautiful so as to cause amazement in those who witness their presence (Luke 1:11; Matt 28:2-3; Dan 10:6; Rev 10:1). 2 Cor 11:14 states that Satan can make himself appear as an angel of God. "Whether visible or invisible, however, God causes his angels to go before us, to be with us, and to follow after us. All of this can be fully understood only by believers who know that angelic presences are in control of the battlefield about us, so that we may stand (Isaiah 26:3) with complete confidence in the midst of the fight." Billy Graham, *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, p. 45. "Though we know only three [angels] by name—Michael, Gabriel and Satan—the Bible refers to numerous ranks and divisions. Satan is the leader of the company of evil angels while good angels are under the authority of God. Angels, like human beings, have been created to serve their Creator. They have many duties: (a) to praise and worship God; (b) to bring messages from God to mankind; (c) to protect God's people; (d) to carry out God's will; and (e) to punish God's enemies, including Satan." *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 1367. See also, Note 4, *Satan, demons*, p. 158.



## LESSON 2

### *LOT'S WIFE*

Abraham's nephew Lot and his wife had gathered their possessions and accompanied Abraham and Sarah as they heeded God's call to move to Canaan. But when both men became so wealthy that they had difficulty sharing the same area, Abraham gave Lot the choice of the land he wanted for his herds. Lot chose the rich land in the Jordan valley around Sodom, a notoriously wicked city (Genesis 13:5-13).

Originally Lot and his family were only sojourners in the area, but in time they became citizens of Sodom, taking in the way of life and values. Even so, the New Testament states that Lot was a "righteous man" whose soul was continually vexed by the lawless deeds of Sodom's people (2 Peter 2:7-8). But there is no indication that his wife or daughters felt the same.

Finally, the depravity in Sodom had become so evil that God sent two angels to judge the city and to help Lot's family escape the imminent doom. The evening the angels arrived in Sodom, Lot was at the city gate and insisted the angels stay at his home, probably fearing they would be raped if they stayed in the town square. But after dinner, all the men of the city surrounded Lot's home and demanded he send out the men to have sex with them. Lot begged the crowd to leave, then even offered his own daughters for sexual abuse instead!<sup>1</sup> The men outside became increasingly angry with Lot and finally moved to break the door down. With this, the angels pulled Lot inside and struck the men outside blind, telling Lot and his family they would have to leave the city immediately because God was about to completely destroy it.

No doubt this was a shocking and terrifying time for *Lot's wife*. It is hard to imagine the emotions she must have felt in this crisis. Lot had offered their daughters for abuse, and then the angels insisted they just walk away from their home and tremendous wealth. Finally, when Lot sent word to their daughters' fiancés about leaving, they thought he was joking.

As the dawn approached after a night of turmoil, the angels hurried the family out, even grabbing their hands to lead them to safety outside the city. Lot's wife had no choice but to follow. As they turned to go back, one of the angels commanded, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain!" Lot and his daughters obeyed, heading straight for the approved town. But Lot's wife followed behind her husband, who would not have seen her decision to disobey the angel. In the moment she looked back, Lot's wife became a part of the destruction of Sodom as she became a pillar of salt.

Jesus gives us a clearer understanding of the reason Lot's wife disobeyed God's command which the angel had communicated. In Luke 17, Jesus is recorded as warning against false security in worldly possessions, because such can keep people from following God's way of salvation from the judgment that will come. To emphasize this point, Jesus declared, "Remember Lot's wife!" (Luke 17:32).

She and Lot were wealthy (Genesis 13), and their possessions and possibly a certain status in Sodom seemed to have taken first place in her life. She looked back to see if they really had to leave it all. Her fate became a picture of what can happen when a person sets aside God and His way to embrace the values of the world. Her story is also a promise that God's protection and provision are found in trusting the LORD and His Word, especially as the culture around us moves further and further away from God.

In the end, we are told that Lot was saved because of the prayers of Abraham (Genesis 18:20-32; 19:29). Likewise, our prayers for others who are swept up in the world's ways may bring God's mercy on their lives as well.

**Read Genesis 18:1-2, 20-32.**

1. What was the purpose of the angels' visit to Sodom (18:20-21)?

**Reference:** Note 2, "*I will go down and see,*" p. 26.

2. a. Abraham immediately tried to save his nephew and family from the judgment coming to Sodom. What points did Abraham make in his plea to the LORD (18:23-25)?

b. What was the LORD's final promise to Abraham (18:32)?

**Read Genesis 19:1-17.**

3. How did Lot try to prevent the assault he knew would come to the angels (19:1-3)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Angels*, p. 16.

4. Who came with intentions of raping the angels, and how did Lot try to stop them (19:4-8)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Look, I have two daughters...*(19:8), p. 26.

5. What response to Lot did Lot's wife hear in this terrible crisis (19:9)?

6. The angels had seen enough. What events did Lot's wife experience in the hours that followed?

Genesis 19:10-11

Genesis 19:12-13

Genesis 19:14

Genesis 19:15-16

7. a. What did the angels do when Lot hesitated to leave (19:16)?

b. What was the angel's clear instruction before leaving them (19:17)?

8. What tragic mistake did Lot's wife make as she walked behind her husband (19:26)?

9. What saved Lot and his daughters (19:29)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY**

A little children's song goes:

"The B-I-B-L-E  
Now that's the book for me!  
I stand alone on the Word of God:  
The B-I-B-L-E!"

Some would think, "That's not a song I want my child to sing. Such a belief is so narrow." Or perhaps, "My child can sing that song, but as an adult, I have a broader perspective."

If the historical facts about Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife tell us anything, it is that God keeps His word.

In a world of constant change, it is difficult to discern truth about the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of our being. Many institutes of higher learning teach that any absolute standards are "closed-minded," yet the human quest from birth is to learn the rules that will assure our prosperity.

The airplane pilot blinded by the storm must rely solely on the instrument panels to tell him how to keep the plane on course. When he relies on his own inclination, the plane will surely crash to the ground. Similarly, many have tried to see their way through the storms of life relying only on their own inclinations or those guidelines cleverly put forth by other human beings. They freely disregard their God-given conscience (Romans 2:15)

and the principles put forth in the Bible as outdated or narrow. Others will not allow themselves to get "too close" to God's Word while they pick and choose from biblical principles depending on their convenience. Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife are a vivid picture of the "crash" that ultimately results from these dealings with God and His Word.

The wonderful news is that the Bible is reliable (see references at the end of this lesson). Its principles, warnings and promises were given to us by God as sure guidelines for successful living in a complex world. Regardless of how one feels about the "instrument panel," history has proven its trustworthiness. God, while very patient (cf. 2 Peter 3:9), will always, in the end, fulfill His word completely. Sodom and Gomorrah remind us of His promise to finally destroy immorality and godlessness (cf. Romans 12:19), satisfying our natural human desire for the overthrow of evil.

Before she decided to follow God's direction through the angel, Lot's wife wanted to see if God really would destroy Sodom as He said He would. She learned too late that God's word is sure, and a sure foundation on which to stand.

As we continue our study on *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's take a closer look at the wisdom behind taking God seriously.

1. a. What might Lot's wife have been trusting when she failed to implicitly trust God's direction through the angel?

b. What might her actions tell us about her beliefs about God?

c. What are some factors that may keep us from taking God's word seriously?

2. What are some results in the world around us of disregarding what God has said to us through His Word:  
socially?

emotionally?

physically?

in relationships?

3. Foolishness (scoffing at God and His word) and pride (self-exaltation) are the results of not taking God seriously. What does the Bible warn about foolishness and pride?  
Ecclesiastes 10:3

Proverbs 16:18

4. How does Romans 1:28-32 describe the society that ignores God and godly principles?

5. What does the Bible promise the person who seeks to follow godly principles?

Proverbs 2:7-8

**Note:** *Blameless* refers to spiritual and moral integrity, not sinlessness.

Proverbs 2:9-11

6. What does the Bible claim about God's principles for life?

Psalms 19:7-11

7. Of what can we be certain regarding God's character that helps us choose to follow His guidelines?

Numbers 23:19a

Psalms 25:10



8. According to the following verses, what choices allow us to experience the rewards of taking God's word seriously?

Psalm 1:1-3

Proverbs 3:5-6

## **SUMMARY**

9. What are the main truths you learned from the story of Lot's wife?

10. a. What are the rewards of taking God's word seriously?

b. What does the Bible promise about God that enables you to follow His wisdom instead of your own or that of the world?

11. Proverbs 3:6 says “In *all* your ways acknowledge Him...” which means no issue is too great or too small to pray about. Are there issues in your life today in which you want to commit to following God’s way?

12. We can see from Abraham’s intercession for Lot and his family that our prayers can be powerful in bringing God’s mercy to others (Genesis 19:29). Is there someone you want to intercede for before God right now?

## LESSON 2 NOTES

**1** *Look, I have two daughters (19:8).* “How could any father give his daughters to be ravished by a mob of perverts, just to protect two strangers? Possibly Lot was scheming to save both the girls and the visitors, hoping the girls’ fiancés would rescue them or that the homosexual men would be disinterested in the girls and simply go away. Although it was the custom of the day to protect guests at any cost, this terrible suggestion reveals how deeply sin had been absorbed into Lot’s life. He had become hardened to evil acts in an evil city. Whatever Lot’s motives were, we see here an illustration of Sodom’s terrible wickedness—a wickedness so great that God had to destroy the entire city.” *NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 38.

**2** *“I will go down and see” (Genesis 18:21).* This is “not a denial of God’s infinite knowledge but a figurative way of stating that He does not act out of ignorance or on the basis of mere complaints.” *The NIV Study Bible*, page 33.

## LESSON 3

### *RACHEL*

Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 years old when at last they had Isaac, the child of God's promise (Genesis 12:2; 17:2; 18:18). Isaac grew up and married Rebekah, and they had twins named Jacob and Esau. Although Esau was born only seconds before Jacob, he was considered the eldest and would receive a double inheritance as a birthright. But when they were grown, Jacob persuaded his brother to trade him the birthright for a pot of stew (Genesis 25:29-34). Then his mother and Jacob schemed to deceive Isaac into giving Esau's blessing to Jacob as well (Genesis 27).

When Esau found out Jacob had deceitfully stolen his father's blessing, he declared he would kill Jacob as soon as their father died. Fearing for Jacob's life, Rebekah told her husband that Esau's Canaanite wives drove her crazy, and that Jacob must find a wife among her relatives at Haran, 400 miles northeast of Canaan. So Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him on the long journey.

En route to Mesopotamia, Jacob was surprised and awed as God met with him through a dream. He told Jacob that His covenant promise to Abraham would be carried on through Jacob's offspring. From this point on, Jacob knew and revered the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham.

No sooner had Jacob arrived in Haran than he saw his beautiful cousin *Rachel* at a well where she had come to water her father's sheep. When Jacob learned that she was the daughter of his Uncle Laban, his mother's brother, he fell in love instantly. He single-handedly moved the heavy stone from the well, watered Laban's sheep, kissed Rachel's hand and wept. After staying a month in his uncle's home, Jacob promised Laban to work as a shepherd for seven years to have Rachel as His bride, "...but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." However, on the night of Jacob's agreed-upon wedding to Rachel, deceitful Laban substituted his older daughter, Leah, for the consummation. This was

possible because the bride was taken to the bedchamber of her husband in silence and darkness. When daylight came, and Jacob discovered he had married Leah instead of Rachel, he was furious. Laban's weak explanation was that it was not the custom to give the youngest daughter until the oldest was married. He agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, too, after the usual bridal week for Leah was over, and in return for another seven years of work.

What a tragic turn of events for Jacob, Rachel and Leah! Jacob ended up with two wives, and to make matters worse, they were sisters! Rachel was forced to share the husband who loved her, and Leah had to live with being the unloved wife who was forced on Jacob. Because she was unloved, the LORD had compassion on Leah and gave her four sons (Genesis 29:31-35), while Rachel remained childless.

How did Rachel respond as she went through years of hearing the sounds of Leah's children? She became jealous of Leah and attacked Jacob, saying, "Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob reminded her that God alone could give her children. Rather than trust God, however, Rachel turned to a custom of the day. She insisted that Jacob sleep with her maid Bilhah "so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family" (Genesis 30:3).<sup>1</sup>

The children born to Bilhah were considered to be Rachel's, and we learn more about Rachel's response to her situation from the names she gave them. She named the first Dan, saying "God has vindicated me; He has listened to my plea and given me a son." Did she really think this was God's way of giving her a son? She named the second Naphtali, saying "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." Rachel's jealousy had led her into open competition with her sister over children. But when Leah followed Rachel's example and gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob, Zilpah had two sons.

One day, Reuben, Leah's firstborn, had brought her some mandrakes, a rare fruit superstitiously thought to induce pregnancy. Rachel told Leah that she would let Leah sleep with Jacob that night in exchange for some

mandrakes. It appears Rachel had some control over Jacob and Leah's sexual relationship. Leah agreed, and, to her surprise, conceived another son. After that Leah had yet another son and daughter.

Finally, Rachel became pregnant and declared, "God has taken away my disgrace" (Genesis 30:23). Perhaps some faith in God had replaced envy in Rachel's life. We don't know, for she showed her continued discontent when she named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son" (Genesis 30:24).

By this time, Jacob had worked for Laban 20 years, and the LORD informed him through a dream that it was time to return to his homeland. Rachel and Leah gave their full support; they had no attachment to such a devious and selfish father as Laban. Jacob devised a plan to leave without Laban's knowledge while he was away. While packing, Rachel stole her father's household gods.

When Laban returned home and discovered they had left, he went after them. He quickly caught up with the great, slow-moving company of Jacob (four wives, 12 children, plus many servants and vast herds). But God had warned Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob. Even so, Laban claimed everything Jacob had was really his and insisted on searching for the stolen gods. When they entered Rachel's tent to search, she sat on her camel's saddle in which she had hid the gods, and claimed she was having her period so they wouldn't search under her. Perhaps Rachel had looked to these gods to help her in her quest for children.

All during the journey back to his homeland, Jacob continued to grow in his devotion to God, who appeared to him again, changing his name to Israel (Genesis 35:9-26). We don't know if Rachel drew close to God, too. We only know that on the way to Ephrath (Bethlehem), Rachel died giving birth to her second son, whom she named Ben-oni, meaning "son of my sorrow." Jacob renamed him Benjamin, "son of my right hand." Upon Rachel's death, Jacob (Israel) now had the twelve sons whose offspring would become the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

Perhaps God had been preserving Rachel's young life all along by keeping her from childbirth. Jacob, who had loved Rachel at first sight and to the end, set a large pillar over her grave. Many years later, when Jacob's family had settled in Egypt, Jacob recounted, "...to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan....And I buried her there in the way of Ephrath" (Gen 48:7).

Although Rachel only had two sons, the oldest, Joseph, was one of the most Christ-like heroes of the Old Testament. We can only wonder if Rachel at some point really began to trust God and encouraged Joseph in his pure devotion to the LORD.

**Read Genesis 29:1-14a.**

1. What amazing and unexpected events took place in young Rachel's life one day at the well near Haran?

**Read Genesis 29:14b-30.**

2. a. What terrible deception did Laban carry out?

b. What was Jacob's understandable response?

**Note:** Jacob, who had been deceptive himself in getting his brother's birthright and blessing (27:36), had now ironically become the son-in-law of a master deceiver and married to Laban's firstborn daughter.

**Read Genesis 29:31-30:13.**

3. How might God have been protecting Rachel through her infertility (35:16-17)?

4. a. What destructive emotion did Rachel succumb to in the situation, and how did this affect her relationship with Jacob (30:1-2)?

b. What ungodly custom did Rachel's jealousy cause her to insist upon (30:3)?

5. a. What did Rachel's names for the sons of Bilhah tell about her motives? Where was her focus in having children (30:6, 8)?

b. What also resulted from her actions (30:9-13)?

**Read Genesis 30:14-24.**

6. What control had Rachel obviously taken over Jacob in the situation (30:14-16)? What does this reveal about Rachel's character at this point?

7. a. How did Rachel respond to her pregnancy (30:23)?

b. Where was her focus even as she named Joseph (30:24)?

**Read Genesis 31:1-18.**

8. a. After 20 years with Laban, the LORD told Jacob it was time to go home. Because of their selfish father, how did Rachel and Leah respond to the idea of this huge move (31:14-16)?

b. The LORD had given Jacob tremendous wealth during the last six years of work for Laban; his caravan would be enormous. Plus he had a very large family. Even so, what step of faith did Jacob take (31:17-18)?

**Read Genesis 31:19-35.**



9. What did these events reveal about Rachel's spiritual state?

**Note:** *Household gods* were small portable idols which Rachel may have thought would protect and bless her and give her something tangible to worship on the journey. Jacob later destroyed all such things (35:2).

**Read Genesis 35:16-20.**

10. How did Rachel's young life end, and how did her last words reflect the sorrow her obsession had caused her (35:18)?

**Note:** *Ben-Oni* means *son of my trouble or sorrow*.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **UNFADING INNER BEAUTY**

Rachel was outwardly beautiful in face and figure, but her responses to life, which led her into greater and greater heartache, showed that in her heart she was unattractively self-absorbed. Scripture tells us that God does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Proverbs indicates why this is God's priority—it is the wellspring of life (Prov 4:23). Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

We live in a society that does not place much emphasis on inner beauty. Yet the happiest, most fulfilled people are not necessarily the most beautiful or materially successful or the ones who get their way, but rather those who possess inner characteristics such as love, patience and unselfishness.

Many of our studies on various challenges of womanhood highlight character qualities we need for rich relationships with others and deep satisfaction in life. In this lesson, we'll look at the overall key to having any of these qualities that give a woman unfading inner beauty.

1. a. How would you describe a person with inner beauty?

b. How can outward beauty or success be a detriment to the development of inner beauty? How might this have been true of Rachel?

2. a. In today's society, what factors work against the development of inner beauty?

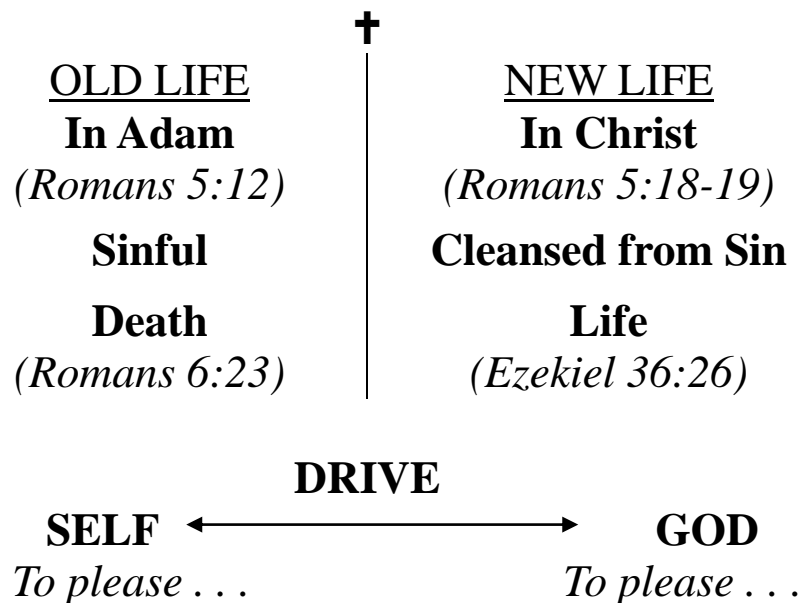
b. What are the results in our society?

3. What encourages the development of inner beauty? What have you seen in your own life?

4. God alone can transform our hearts. Love for God and giving Him our heart is the way to true inner beauty. What happens when we receive Christ (John 1:12) that changes us on the inside?  
Ezekiel 36:26-27

2 Corinthians 5:17

5. The following diagram may be helpful in explaining why we become a "new creation" when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that apart from Christ, we have inherited the fallen nature of Adam. This nature focuses on pleasing self. When we receive Christ,<sup>2</sup> the Bible says that spiritually we go through the death and resurrection of Christ and receive a new life spiritually. The old desire to please self is still with us, but the Spirit of Christ within gives us a powerful new desire and inner strength to please God. (See Romans 6:4-7 and II Corinthians 5:17)



a. According to this diagram, what becomes a driving force when we invite Christ to come into our lives?

b. How is the inner beauty that pleases God, and that God's Spirit develops in us, described in the following passages?

Galatians 5:22-23

I Peter 3:3-4

**Note:** A *quiet spirit* does not refer to a quiet personality, rather the inner quality of being at peace with oneself and God.

2 Timothy 1:7

6. a. How can the inner beauty that comes from loving God with all our heart and letting His Spirit<sup>3</sup> govern our lives affect the world around us? (Think again about how this focus in Rachel's life would have affected her life and her relationships.)

b. What do the following suggest will result from loving God and letting His Spirit develop unfading inner beauty in our lives?

Matthew 5:14-16

Daniel 12:3

## **SUMMARY**

7. Rachel's life illustrates the selfish nature that exists in all of us. What characteristics of Rachel do you want to avoid?

8. a. One of the most wonderful truths in the Bible is that the Spirit of Christ can dwell within us (Jn 14:16-17) and develop deep and lasting inner beauty.\* What qualities of inner beauty do you most desire in your life?

b. What effects can inner beauty in your life have on your family and close relationships?

on people in general?

c. No matter how hopeless you might feel about it, what is God's promise to you as you choose to allow His Spirit to create inner beauty in you (Ps 37:4)?

\*If you have never personally invited Jesus Christ to come into your life, take a moment to read Note 2, *Receive Christ*, on pg. 38. If this is the desire of your heart, the following is a suggested prayer: "*Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. I invite you to come into my life and make me the person you created me to be. Amen.*"

If you sincerely prayed this prayer, you can know on the basis of His promises that Christ is in your life and will never leave you:  
*Revelation 3:20, Hebrews 13:, John 10:27-28, 1 John 5:11-13*

## LESSON 3 NOTES

**1 Reference:** Note 1, *child by a maid*, p. 16.

**2 Receive Christ.** “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). This is the promise that “all who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents’ family (John 1:13). Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God’s family (1:12). Have you asked Christ to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in Christ.” *Life Application Bible, NIV*, p. 1869.

**3 Holy Spirit.** God has made Himself known in the Bible as a Trinity; three divine persons with the same essence as God. The Holy Spirit, known

as the Third Person of the Trinity, indwells every person who personally receives Christ (John 1:12; 14:16-17). The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit not as an "it," but rather as a "He," a distinct personality. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who brings about regeneration or spiritual birth in the believer. While the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, we can see the evidence of His work (John 3:8). The Scriptures further tell us that when we ask God (Luke 11:13) to "fill" us with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18b), He responds by super-naturally instructing and empowering us to live the Christian life (Ephesians 3:16-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "Christ in you," as in Colossians 1:27b. See also Note 4, *Works of the Holy Spirit*.

**4** *Works of the Holy Spirit*. Because the Holy Spirit is the source of power in the Christian's life, it is important to know who He is. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is revealed along with the Father and the Son as a full and distinct person of the Godhead. As a divine Person, the Holy Spirit is eternal, everywhere present, almighty, perfectly wise, perfectly just, and perfectly good (Hebrews 9:14, Psalm 139:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11). The Holy Spirit's distinct role is the Sanctifier who frees us to lead new lives in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17). It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to spiritual rebirth, brings Christ's presence to us, keeps us in touch with God, makes us realize God's love, gives us power to witness and to live the Christian life, and gives us spiritual gifts with which to serve the body of Christ (Titus 3:5, John 14:16-18, Romans 8:26, Romans 5:5, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:5-9, 1 Corinthians 2:4-12). He teaches, encourages, comforts, pleads for us and leads us into all truth (John 16:13, Acts 9:31, John 14:16, Romans 8:27). Romans 8 tells us that allowing our minds to be controlled by the Holy Spirit is the key to 'life and peace' (8:6) and experiencing victory over the sin that seeks to control us. See also Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 38.

## LESSON 4

### *LEAH*

As we saw last week, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had traveled over 400 miles northwest from his home in Canaan when he arrived at a well in Paddan Aram. He had gone to Mesopotamia to flee his brother Esau's wrath caused by Jacob's manipulation to take Esau's birthright and blessing. His parents, Isaac and Rebekah, also wanted Jacob to choose a wife from among his uncle Laban's family.

At the well, Jacob met his beautiful cousin, Rachel, and instantly fell in love with her. Laban (Jacob's mother's brother) also had an older daughter named *Leah*. She was homely in comparison to Rachel, because she had "weak eyes" (Genesis 29:17). We don't know what this meant, but somehow characteristics of her eyes made Leah unattractive.

Jacob's love for Rachel was clear to everyone, including Leah, when he offered seven years' work as a bride price to marry Rachel. Furthermore, these years "seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Genesis 29:20). We don't know if Rachel felt the same about Jacob, but certainly Leah had no doubt about his feelings for her younger sister and lack of any romantic feeling toward her.

We can only imagine how Leah felt when after the wedding feast for Rachel and Jacob, Laban sent Leah in for the consummation. We don't know if Leah had a part in the deception, but the deceit was possible because by custom the bride was taken to the bedchamber of her husband in silence and darkness.

How did Leah feel as she gave herself to Jacob, knowing he thought she was Rachel, whom he adored and had worked seven years to marry? How she must have dreaded the morning light when he would realize he had married her instead of Rachel.



Sure enough, Jacob stormed from the wedding tent to confront Laban, who offered a lame excuse about it being customary to marry off an older daughter before the younger. Perhaps Jacob saw the deception as God's repayment to him for deceiving his blind and dying father in order to get his brother's blessing (Genesis 27). Even so, Jacob loved Rachel so much that he agreed to work another seven years in order to marry her at the end of the wedding week with Leah. And what was that week like for Leah?

One thing for sure, when her wedding week with Jacob was up, Leah's honeymoon was truly over. In addition to being unloved by Jacob, Leah was also faced with Rachel becoming more and more bitter, jealous, quarrelsome and hateful toward her. But the LORD took pity on Leah and began giving her sons. Things only got worse with Rachel as Leah had one baby boy after another and her sister remained barren. We see the control Rachel had taken over Jacob when one day Leah's oldest son, Reuben, brought his mother mandrakes, thought to magically induce pregnancy. When Rachel asked for some, Leah lost her temper. "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" Rachel agreed to let Leah sleep with Jacob that night in exchange for some mandrakes. Leah conceived and had another son, later another, and finally a daughter.

Even though Jacob didn't love Leah, the LORD made it up to her in giving her six sons and one daughter. Certainly they loved their mother and made her life full and active. It has been said that a boy never loves any woman more than his mother, and Leah had six to love her. The names she gave her sons also testify to her growing faith in the LORD. After Judah was born, she simply said, "This time I will praise the LORD" (Genesis 29:35). It was from Judah's offspring that Jesus Christ would come nineteen hundred years later.

Polygamy—being married to more than one person—is not God's will for obvious reasons. But despite the polygamous marriage problems, Leah responded with faith, a sincere love for Jacob, and faithfulness to him until he buried her in the cave of Machpelah alongside Abraham, Sarah, Isaac

and Rebekah (Genesis 49:31). Leah was a good wife and mother to Jacob's children, and seemed more fitted for the job of being the patriarch's wife than beautiful Rachel.

**Read Genesis 29:14b-30.**

1. a. What are we told about Leah (29:16-17)?

**Note:** As mentioned in the commentary, it's uncertain what *weak eyes* indicated except that somehow her eyes made Leah unattractive.

b. Despite the fact Leah was older and closer to his age, what did Jacob make perfectly clear and how (29:18-20)?

2. a. Briefly describe Leah's wedding night and how her marriage to Jacob began (29:22-28).

b. What situation was Leah indefinitely locked into (29:30)?

**Read Genesis 29:31-30:13.**

3. How did the LORD help Leah (29:31)?

4. What do you see about Leah's growing faith and gratitude toward God in the naming of her first four children (29:32, 33, 34, 35)?

5. a. Jacob would have done well to refuse Rachel's order to sleep with her maid (30:3-5), even though this was an accepted pagan custom. What did this lead Leah to do (30:9-13)?

b. Optional Question: Even though Rachel was jealous and competitive, what would have been a better response for Leah to demonstrate to her children (Romans 12:17-18, 21)?

**Read Genesis 30:14-22.**

6. What does the story of the mandrakes reveal about Leah's relationship with Jacob and her love for him (30:14-16)?

7. What brought about Leah's fifth pregnancy that night (30:17)?

8. After many years of rejection, how was Leah's devotion to Jacob reflected in the naming of her sixth son (30:19-20)?

**Note:** Even though unloved, Leah became the mother of half of Jacob's 12 sons who were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. From Levi's line came the Aaronic priesthood, and from Judah's line came King David and his royal line, and ultimately Jesus Christ.

9. What final precious gift (probably really wanted by this time) did the LORD give Leah (30:21)?

**Note:** Thirty years later, when Jacob took his family to Egypt with 66 children and grandchildren, 33 were Leah's offspring, 16 were her maid, Zilpah's (Genesis 46:7-18). All 49 were considered Leah's.

To be sure Leah experienced heartaches. There was the rape of her daughter Dinah and the barbaric behavior of her sons at Shechem (Genesis 34). Later, Joseph disappeared and was thought dead (Genesis 37). Then the terrible famine came that caused their move to Egypt (Genesis 42f).

But in spite of the hardships, as age wore away the issue of beauty, Leah probably enjoyed the love and esteem of the large family God had given her and Jacob.

10. We don't know when Leah died, but she was buried in a place of honor. Where was Leah laid to rest (Genesis 49:29-31)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **RISING ABOVE REJECTION (AND OTHER PAINFUL SITUATIONS)**

Living with an unloving husband and another wife whom he adores who is your own jealous sister is a hard scenario to imagine. In this context, however, Leah's life reflects some very important and comforting truths about how God can redeem painful situations in our lives. The Bible never promises that we will have no heartache in this world, but it does assure that a relationship with God can make the experience altogether different.

1. What are the negative emotions that can result from rejection, particularly from someone you love?

2. If not dealt with in constructive ways, what damage can these negative emotions bring about inwardly?

in our relationships with others?

3. a. What are some successful and unsuccessful ways Leah dealt with the rejection she faced?

b. What ultimately brought fulfillment to her life in spite of the rejection she endured?

4. a. While human love can be disappointing, how is God's love described?  
I Corinthians 13:4-8a

b. How does I Samuel 16:7b contrast human perspective with God's?

5. Rejection usually involves criticism and withdrawal of attention. In contrast, what does the LORD give the believer in Christ?  
Romans 8:1, 31

Psalm 121:3-4, 8

John 10:28

6. How do the following verses describe God's friendship?  
Psalm 23:1-3a

Psalm 34:18

John 15:13-14 (10:14-15)

7. a. What was the manifestation of God's love and compassion for Leah?  
How did He redeem her situation?

b. What does this tell us about God's concern when we face rejection and other painful situations?

c. Why is the LORD able to fully relate to our feelings in times of rejection?

Isaiah 53:3

Matthew 27:30-31

8. a. Leah's weakness and her situation were not limitations for God. How does God view our limitations according to Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10?

b. As we walk with Him, how does God use heartaches for our best interest?

Romans 5:3-5

## **SUMMARY**

9. What, if any, rejection have you experienced in the past or present that has been painful to you?



10. What are some unhealthy ways of dealing with the pain of rejection which you want to avoid?

11. In light of Leah's story, how can your relationship with God affect the experience of rejection in your life?

## LESSON 5

### *DINAH*

Having left Haran, Jacob's slow-moving caravan, consisting of his huge family, flocks, herds and numbers of servants, had traveled almost 400 miles from Mesopotamia back to Canaan where Jacob was born. They had stayed several years in Succoth, then finally crossed the Jordan River to camp near the city of Shechem in Canaan. There Jacob bought a piece of land and set up an altar he called El Bethel. Jacob's worship focused on the LORD's faithfulness to bring him back to his homeland as He had promised Jacob at that very place many years ago (Genesis 28:15).

Jacob had left home with nothing, but during his time in Haran, God had blessed Jacob with great wealth and a large family. He not only had the one wife he wanted, but four wives—Leah and Rachel and their maids, Bilhah and Zilpah—and twelve children.

In this great family, *Dinah* was Leah's seventh and last child and the only girl among, at this time, eleven brothers. She and Rachel's son, Joseph, were the youngest. It seems Dinah was beautiful, maybe resembling her Aunt Rachel more than her less attractive mother, Leah. Needless to say, this girl could easily have been pampered and spoiled and maybe a little conceited.

Dinah was thirteen to fifteen years old, the marriageable age for that culture, when she decided to slip away by herself to Shechem. Probably bored in the camp with no girls her age, Dinah made the naïve mistake of going unaccompanied to the city. If she had heard the stories of the danger her grandmother Rebekah and great-grandmother Sarah had faced in Egypt, she was disregarding their warnings as she went.

It so happened that Hamor, the area's ruler, had a son named Shechem (after the city), who took Dinah home and forced her to have sex with him. We don't know Dinah's part in this, but we are told Shechem loved her. He

“spoke tenderly to her” and insisted that his father Hamor get her for his wife. Hamor immediately went to Jacob to tell of his son’s love for Dinah. Then Shechem himself went to Jacob and Dinah’s brothers offering to pay any bride price for Dinah.

Jacob seemed willing enough, but her brothers were “filled with grief and fury” (Genesis 34:7, 31). They led Hamor and Shechem to believe that Dinah would marry Shechem if all the men of the city of Shechem were circumcised<sup>1</sup> as Israelites were (Gen 34:14-15, cf. 17:12). Hamor and his son Shechem, described as “the most honored of all his father’s household,” agreed to this. They persuaded the men of the city from a mercenary standpoint by saying, “Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us” (Genesis 34:23). All agreed and were circumcised.

But while the men of Shechem were in the third day of recovery after circumcision, Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi attacked the defenseless city. They killed Hamor and Shechem, took Dinah from Shechem’s home, killed all the other men, and plundered the city. Flocks, herds, children and wives were taken captive.

Jacob was so angry about the treachery and godless actions of Simeon and Levi that he didn’t even forgive them on his deathbed (Genesis 49:5-7). “You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to...the people living in this land,” he told them. And they responded, “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?”

It is hard to imagine the scars these events left on Dinah’s young life. After a woman was raped, she had no expectancy of having a valid marriage.<sup>2</sup> After these shocking events in Dinah’s life, God told Jacob to go back to Bethel to settle and build an altar to the LORD. Before leaving, Jacob purged his family of anything connected with pagan idolatry and prepared them to worship God at Bethel. Perhaps through this, Dinah, whose life had

been forever altered by her careless actions, was drawn close to God and healed through her father's faith.

**Read Genesis 33:18-34:12.**

1. What was Jacob's first meeting with Shechem's family and the first thing Jacob did in Canaan (33:18-20)?

**Note:** As mentioned in the commentary, El Elohe Israel means *God is the God of Israel* or *mighty is the God of Israel*.

2. a. What did Dinah decide to do (34:1)?

b. What disaster resulted from her appearance in the city without an escort (34:2-4)?

3. While Jacob was composed about the situation, how did Dinah's brothers respond (34:5-7)?

**Note:** *disgraceful thing* or *folly* meaning shameful, vile, senseless deed that displays utter insensibility in moral behavior.

4. a. What was Hamor's appeal to Jacob and his sons (34:8-10)?

b. What did Hamor really seem to have in mind (34:23)?

5. What was Shechem's plea to Dinah's father and brothers (34:11-12)?

**Read Genesis 34:13-31.**

6. What did Dinah's brothers lead Hamor and Shechem to believe (34:13-18)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Circumcision*, p. 59.

7. What action did Shechem and Hamor take (34:19-24)?

8. a. How did God's people act like cruel pagans (34:25-29)?

b. What was their expressed reason (34:31)?

9. What was Jacob's concern (34:30)?

10. In the midst of this concern, what next step did God give Jacob? What cleansing took place as a result of the disastrous events surrounding Dinah's poor choice (35:1-5)?

**Note:** Bethel was about 20 miles south of Shechem.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **TAKING GODLY PRINCIPLES SERIOUSLY**

It is easy to imagine that if you can get away with breaking the rules, it must be okay to break them. To the contrary, the principles God gives in the Bible must always be taken seriously. The reason is that God's laws are designed to protect and reward us. As the Creator of the universe, God knows how He made His creation to work. He has given the Bible as a guidebook for healthy living. It also gives examples, like Dinah's story, of the disastrous consequences that come from disregarding godly principles for life.

Why should we heed the laws of Scripture? What warnings does the Bible give about disregarding godly principles? From Dinah's story, we can learn the answers to these and other questions related to taking godly principles seriously.

1. a. In spite of the frightening stories Dinah had most probably heard about her great grandmother Sarah and grandmother Rebekah in the hands of foreign kings, she went alone to Shechem. Where do you think Dinah went wrong?

b. What do the following verses suggest?  
Proverbs 1:8

Proverbs 2:11

Proverbs 22:3

2.a. What godly principles did Shechem violate? What do these verses suggest?  
Philippians 2:4

Titus 2:6

I Corinthians 6:18

b. How would he have known these principles?

Romans 2:15

3. What principles did Simeon and Levi violate?

Exodus 20:13

Leviticus 19:11

Romans 12:19

4. a. What were the results of these violations of godly principles?



b. Which of these violations and results do we see in our society today?

5. What warnings does the Bible give about disregarding godly principles?  
Romans 2:8-9

Romans 3:16-17

6. What does God promise the one who takes godly principles seriously?  
Romans 2:10

Deuteronomy 5:29

Matthew 7:24-25

7. While the natural consequences of our sin may continue, what does God promise when we forsake wrong ways to follow Him?

Isaiah 55:7

## **SUMMARY**

8. What convictions about trusting biblical principles has this lesson stimulated for you?

9. What impact does living by biblical principles have on relationships?

10. What have you seen about imparting godly principles to children?

11. Why are godly principles so important to our society?

## LESSON 5 NOTES

1 *Circumcision* was the cutting off of the foreskin, a practice which originated in various western Semitic cultures as a religious act. The Hebrew rite was instituted by God as a sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham. God commanded Abraham and all his household to be circumcised (Genesis 17). The rite was required of every male Jew (descendant of Abraham) and any foreigner joining themselves to the Hebrew nation. This act assured the recipient of admittance to the fellowship of the covenant people and of a share in the promises of God to Israel. Circumcision metaphorically symbolized cutting away pride and sinfulness of the heart (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Acts 7:51). Because circumcision predated the Laws of Moses, the heart attitude behind this act was first and foremost true faith in God.

2 Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 83.

## LESSON 6

### *TAMAR*

As we continue the story of the patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—we recall that Rachel, the wife Jacob had loved, died giving birth to Benjamin. After her death, it became clear that her first son, Joseph, was Jacob’s favorite child. Jacob did not hide his special love for Joseph, who consequently became the object of great jealousy and disdain from his ten older brothers.

One day when he was just 17, Joseph’s brothers conspired to kill him. Reuben, who was the oldest and in charge, suggested they put him in a cistern (Reuben planned to come back later and save Joseph). Then Judah, Leah’s fourth son, suggested they sell Joseph to passing merchants who would vend him in the slave markets of Egypt. This would prevent them from shedding the innocent blood of their own brother. The brothers agreed and sold Joseph. When they got home, they led their father Jacob to believe wild animals had killed Joseph. The entire atmosphere of their home must have changed as Jacob fell into inconsolable grief over Joseph’s presumed death (Genesis 37).

After this, Judah left home to live in the Canaanite city of Adullam, about 15 miles northwest of Hebron. There, he married a Canaanite woman, and they had three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah. Judah gave his first son in marriage to a Canaanite woman named *Tamar*. But the LORD put Er to death because he was wicked (38:7), leaving Tamar a widow and childless.

Now at that time a practice known as levirate marriage<sup>1</sup> had been established to preserve the line of the firstborn. This law required that Judah’s second son Onan marry Tamar to give her a child to carry on the name of Er. Onan took advantage of relations with Tamar, but “he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother” (38:9). This did not please God, and He put Onan to death for his wickedness, too.

With this, Judah told Tamar to go home to her father and promised he would send for her to marry their third son, Shelah, when he was old enough. But Judah was afraid if this son married Tamar, he would die, too, and determined he would never send for her.

After a long time, Judah's wife died, and when Tamar realized Shelah was of age and she was never going to be his wife, Tamar thought through a plan to force Judah to accept his responsibility by the levirate law. When he was away from home at Timnah for sheep-shearing, Tamar removed her garments of widowhood, put on a veil to hide her face, probably wrapped herself in a colorful and becoming robe, and posed as a religious prostitute.

Not recognizing her, Judah made advances. When Tamar asked what he would pay her, Judah promised a goat from home and agreed to leave his seal, its cord and his staff to assure he would return with the promised payment. Judah slept with Tamar, she conceived, then returned to her father's home. Later, when Judah took the goat to Timnah, people told him there had never been a religious prostitute there.

Three months later, Judah learned that Tamar was pregnant by prostitution. Tamar was still considered a part of his family, so Judah judged her as worthy of death. But when Tamar came before Judah holding his seal and cord and staff, Judah realized he was the father of the child. He confessed his wrong, saying, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah" (Genesis 38:26).

Tamar had twins! The firstborn, Perez, carried on the bloodline of Judah, from which would come the royal line of David and later the Lord Jesus Christ. Tamar is mentioned honorably in Ruth 4:12, in 1 Chronicles 2:3-4, and finally in Matthew 1:3 in the line of the Savior.

**Read Genesis 38.**

1. What unsettling events had taken place in Judah's family just prior to his leaving home (37:31-36; see also paragraph 2 of the lesson commentary)?

2. How did Judah build his own family among the Canaanites of Adullam (38:1-5)?

3. What hardship did Tamar experience after entering this family (38:6-10)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Levirate marriage*, p. 68.

**Note:** *spilled his semen on the ground* is a method of birth control sometimes called "onanism" after Onan.

4. What was Judah thinking as he sent Tamar home to live with her parents (38:11)?

5. a. In time, Tamar realized Shelah was being withheld from her. How did she take action (38:12-14)?

b. How did Tamar succeed in preserving the bloodline of Judah (38:15-19)?

6. What was Judah told and what did he finally decide when he could not find the woman or get his things back (38:20-23)?

7. a. What did Judah's response to Tamar's pregnancy show about his character (38:24)?

b. How did Judah rectify his response when he saw the evidence (38:25-26)?

8. Tamar's actions preserved Judah's lineage as a tribe. She had twins, and the firstborn, Perez, became the head of the leading clan in Judah (later the southern kingdom in Israel) and the ancestor of King David and the great kings of Israel, and ultimately of Jesus Christ. Tamar is mentioned honorably in Ruth 4:12 and 1 Chronicles 2:3-4.

Where is she also mentioned? Matthew 1:1-3

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **ABOUT JUDGING OTHERS**

One of the most common characteristics of hypocrisy is harsh judgment of others. While conveniently overlooking our own shortcomings and God's mercy in our lives, we proceed to pass harsh judgments on others.

The story of Tamar exposes Judah's hypocrisy, as with incredible harshness he judged Tamar for a crime he himself had committed. Indeed, she was not even guilty of lustful action, and, in a sense, his breaking a promise and lack of integrity had compelled her conduct.

While it is easy to be appalled at Judah's actions, we must realize our own capacity for this type of hypocrisy. The duplicity and lack of mercy in Judah's initial judgment of Tamar magnify the ugliness of a critical and judgmental spirit. While critical thinking and careful scrutiny have their place in this world and can be constructive, the Bible encourages us to avoid judging others as much as possible. In this lesson, we will observe some biblical principles related to this very important topic.

1. a. Judah was born in the family privileged to know the LORD. Yet he had buried many crimes of his own so deeply that he thought nothing of passing a harsh judgment against Tamar, a woman from a pagan culture. What often happens when we are critical and judgmental of others?

b. What did Jesus humorously teach about this?

Matthew 7:3-5



2. a. What might have been Judah's real reasons for judging Tamar so harshly?

b. What does the Bible warn us about in Jeremiah 17:9 that can affect our judgments of others?

3. a. Why is God able to judge perfectly?  
Jeremiah 17:10

b. In light of this, what are we encouraged to do?  
Romans 14:10

I Corinthians 4:5

c. How did David do this with his enemies?  
I Samuel 24:12

4. While we are not to set ourselves up to judge others, it is necessary to make judgments at times (example Matthew 7:6 and 15-20). What do these biblical truths have to say regarding judgment of others?  
Leviticus 19:15

2 Chronicles 19:7

5. What do these verses suggest about charitableness and the judgment of others?  
Proverbs 17:9

Romans 15:1-2

Galatians 6:1

I Peter 4:8

6. a. Jesus warned against the habit of negative judgment and criticism of others. What principles did He teach?

Matthew 7:1-2

**Note:** "The present imperative suggests that it is the habit of judging others that is condemned. Though the word judge is itself neutral as to the verdict, the sense here indicates an unfavorable judgment." *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, pp. 940-941.

Luke 6:37-38

b. What does James 2:13 add to this?

## **SUMMARY**

7. While it is easy to stand amazed at the hypocrisy of Judah, what can be learned from him about ourselves and judging others?

8. While critical thinking and judgment can be constructive, what is required for this to be so?

9. a. Is there a person, group or situation about which you tend to be habitually critical and judgmental?

b. What principles about judging others stand out regarding this case?

## **LESSON 6 NOTES**

**1** *Levirate marriage* was an Israelite law (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) which was given to protect the widow and guarantee continuance of the family line. The brother of the deceased husband or nearest of kin would marry the widow in order to carry on the line of the deceased. The children born were considered to be the children of the deceased husband, and the first-born child would carry on his name.

## LESSON 7

### *JOCHEBED*

Our next woman is *Jochebed*, the mother of Moses, who lived 300 years after Tamar, whom we just studied. But to understand Jochebed's story, we must begin where we left off in Genesis.

The drama at the end of Genesis around Joseph's life is one of the most gripping stories of the Bible. Jacob had shown open favoritism to Joseph, and this caused jealousy and hatred to mount against him among the other brothers. One day when they were away from home with the flocks, they overpowered Joseph and sold him to passing merchants going to Egypt. Afterwards, they led their father to believe Joseph had been eaten by wild animals.

But God was with Joseph, and he gained tremendous favor with the king of Egypt, Pharaoh, who eventually made Joseph his prime minister in charge of the whole land. Later, when famine threatened to wipe out Jacob's entire family in Canaan, God had placed Joseph in a position to rescue them from extinction. He brought his father Jacob and family, seventy persons in all, out of Canaan and to the land of Goshen where he provided for them from the storehouses of Egypt. The book of Genesis closes with Abraham's offspring firmly planted in the land of Egypt.

After Joseph died, new kings who did not know Joseph, and therefore had no sympathy toward his people, ruled the nation of Egypt. They enslaved the Israelites and forced them to do hard labor to further build the Egyptian kingdom. Yet God blessed Abraham's descendants, multiplying their numbers until they were all over the land. They had come to Egypt with 70 people, and now were in the millions. One translation of Exodus 1:7 reads, "Yet the Children of Israel bore fruit, they swarmed, they became many, they grew mighty in number—exceedingly, yes, exceedingly; the land filled up with them."

Amazingly, God had foretold all of this two hundred years earlier when He said to Abraham, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions” (Genesis 15:13,14). The deliverance foretold in this prophecy was the hope of faithful Israelites some 300 years later when Jochebed, Moses’ mother, was born into the tribe of Levi in Egypt.

Pharaoh feared the Israelites because of their massive multiplying population and decided to try to cut their numbers. At first, he instructed Hebrew midwives to kill male babies. When this didn’t work, he decreed that all male babies be drowned in the Nile.

Jochebed and her husband, Amram, had a son age ten and a younger daughter when this shocking decree went out. She was pregnant again, and must have felt great tension as the day of delivery approached. Then, as Jochebed finally held Moses in her arms, there was an aura about him. She and Amram saw he was “no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict” (Hebrews 11:23). Instead of giving him up, Jochebed hid the baby for three months while she came up with a plan to save him.

Jochebed made Moses a little boat out of a papyrus basket coated with tar and pitch. She placed him in it and put it in the reeds out of the current of the Nile and in a place near where Pharaoh’s daughter came with her maids to bathe. Then Jochebed had Moses’ sister Miriam watch nearby. Sure enough, Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses and immediately decided to save this beautiful little boy. Miriam stepped up and offered to find an Israelite wet nurse, and Pharaoh’s daughter agreed.

Jochebed was no doubt nearby and came right away. Perhaps Pharaoh’s daughter could see through the whole scheme, but decidedly went along with it, hiring Jochebed to care for Moses until he was weaned, and perhaps beyond. In that time of caring for Moses, Jochebed was able to pray for him and teach him about the God of Israel and His promises to His people. No

doubt, Jochebed was chosen by God to be Moses' mother because of her courage and faithfulness.

The irony of this story is that even though Pharaoh had used violence and cruelty to weaken the Hebrew people, God simply used several women—the midwives, Jochebed and Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter—to raise up a deliverer for His people in Pharaoh's own household.

In spite of being an adopted prince in Pharaoh's palace, Moses maintained his bond to the Hebrew people. Eighty years after his birth, God used Jochebed's son to deliver His people from bondage, pass judgment on Egypt and its false gods, establish Israel as a nation and prepare them to enter the land He promised Abraham.

**Read Exodus 1:1-14.**

1. a. What had happened to the Hebrew people in the 300 years since Joseph and his generation had died (1:7)?

b. What kind of task masters and what kind of labor did Pharaoh inflict on the multitude of Hebrew people out of fear they might turn on him (1:13-14)?

2. a. When the Israelites multiplied even more, how did Pharaoh resort to violence in his attempt to weaken them (1:15-17)?

b. As the Israelites became even more numerous, what decree went out from Pharaoh (1:22)?

3. a. How are we introduced to Jochebed (2:1-2)?

b. What does Hebrews 11:23 reveal about Moses' parents?

4. a. What plan did Jochebed devise to save Moses (2:3-4)?

b. Where did God lead Jochebed to place Moses (2:5)?

5. a. What was Pharaoh's daughter's response to this beautiful baby (2:6)?

b. What was Jochebed's daughter's courageous action (2:7)?



c. How was Jochebed's faithfulness rewarded (2:8-9)?

6. a. How completely did Jochabed have to put her son in God's hands (2:10)?

b. Eighty years later, God used Moses to deliver His people from Egypt and establish them as a nation ready to take the promised land of Canaan. Jochebed's son Aaron and daughter Miriam were godly leaders alongside Moses. Although this poor slave woman may not have seen much of this happen, what does her life teach about faithfulness?

c. What qualities in Jochebed's life made her a capable mother for Moses, Israel's greatest leader?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **GETTING THROUGH HARD TIMES**

The story of Jochebed and Moses is a picture of God's ability to redeem any situation. He used Pharaoh's evil decision to kill all Hebrew male babies to bring about the grooming of Israel's deliverer, Moses, under Pharaoh's own roof.

While we may at times doubt God's control in the world, the life of Moses reminds us that God is sovereign. While He allows man freedom of choice, in His omniscience He is able to work His plan of redemption around and through man's decisions. The Bible states that God is always working for the good of those who love Him.

Jochebed's life speaks loudly of the importance of remaining faithful and sensitive toward God in the midst of the most difficult moments of life. While it is easy to question God, worry or become bitter, we can see from Jochebed's experience that faithfulness channels energies in the right direction and, in the end, yields great benefits. Let's take a look at some biblical truths that give hope for the hard times we all experience.

1. What might Jochebed have been worried about during her pregnancy, in the first days of Moses' life, and through the years to come?

2. a. If Jochebed had let herself become consumed by worry, how might it have affected her and her family? What negative results come from worry?

b. What positive results came when Jochebed put aside her worries and trusted God?

3. What do the following suggest can help us overcome worry?  
Psalm 62:8

Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 4:8

4. a. Jochebed clung to God's promises. What had God promised her ancestor Abraham almost six hundred years earlier (Genesis 15:13-14)?

b. What did the fulfillment of these promises show about God's sovereign work throughout history, both then and today?

5. The Bible illustrates again and again that while God has sovereignly given man freedom of choice, God uses man's decisions, good and bad, to work out a redeeming plan for mankind. What can we know about God's sovereign work in history and in our lives as we trust Him?

2 Chronicles 16:9a

Job 42:2

6. What happens when we call on the LORD for help in difficult times?  
Psalm 18:3, 31-36

Psalm 32:8

7. What does the LORD promise, regardless of how difficult the situation appears?  
Zephaniah 3:17

Isaiah 43:2

Isaiah 43:18-19

Isaiah 45:2-3

8. Jochebed did her best in the situation, acknowledged God's sovereignty and remained faithful. After we have done our best, what brings us rest in difficult times?  
Isaiah 40:31

## SUMMARY

9. a. Do you struggle with habitual worry, or is there a circumstance in your life at this time that pulls you toward incessant worry?

b. What has this study around Jochebed's experience shown you about overcoming worry?

c. What positive action can you take in your situation?

10. As you make the choice to continually trust the LORD, what has He promised you regarding your situation?

11. What can you know about God's sovereign work in our world?

## LESSON 8

### *DEBORAH*

*Deborah* was perhaps the strongest woman leader recorded in the Bible, living some 200 years after the time of Moses and Joshua.

To understand her role in Israel's history, we need to trace Israel's steps after Moses and Joshua into the three hundred year period of the judges.

Moses was used by God to deliver as many as five million Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and establish them as a nation ready to enter the land God promised Abraham almost 700 years earlier (Genesis 15:13-14). After Moses died, Joshua led God's people in the miraculous conquest of Canaan documented in the Book of Joshua.

But the Israelites did not finish the job of taking the land. Disregarding God's warnings through Moses and Joshua, they intermingled and lived among Canaanites and Philistines who worshiped idols like Baal and Asherah and Ashtoreth.<sup>1</sup> Religious prostitution and horrible child sacrifice were involved in appeasing these gods that God had strictly forbidden them to worship. Finally, at Bokim, the angel of the LORD told Israel that God would no longer give them the power to drive out these people; from now on, "they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you" (Judges 2:3).

Joshua and his generation died, and the people quickly forgot the acts of God that had made them a nation. They became more and more dedicated to Canaanite peoples, morals, gods, and religious beliefs and practices. With this, the repetitive cycle we see throughout the Book of Judges began. As they lapsed into idol worship, God would chasten them by withdrawing His supernatural protection and allowing a foreign enemy to invade and occupy the land. In those barbaric times with its ruthless rulers, this would mean terrible oppression. The people of Israel would then repent and cry out to God, who graciously raised up leaders, called judges, to help them throw off the foreign oppressor and restore peace in the land.

The twelve judges<sup>3</sup> recorded in the Book of Judges were not courtroom judges as we know today. They were mostly charismatic leaders endowed by the Holy Spirit with supernatural wisdom or strength to be Israel's "saviors." They were principally military deliverers, raised up to save the people of Israel from an oppressing nation during the 300 year period of the judges.

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was the fourth judge and leader in Israel. She was loved and respected by men and women alike for her wise counsel and mediation dispensed under a tree known as the Palm of Deborah in the hill country of Ephraim. Deborah was also a prophetess whom God used to speak to Israel. In all these tasks, she gave herself completely to being "a mother" to her people (Judges 5:7).

In Deborah's time, Israel's unfaithfulness and evil idolatrous practices had led to twenty years of severely oppressive rule by Jabin, a Canaanite king, and his commander, Sisera. His army had 900 iron chariots, making Sisera impossible to defeat.

Deborah had yearned for Israel's freedom for years when the LORD finally spoke to her and told her He had heard the people's cries and was going to free them from Jabin's cruel dominance.

Deborah sent for Barak to give him the LORD's order that he assemble 10,000 Israelite men from Zebulun and Naphtali in the hill country and go to Mount Tabor. From there, they would advance against the feared chariots and vast army of Sisera. Barak told Deborah he would only go if she went with him, so Deborah accompanied Barak with his men to Mount Tabor.

Seeing this move on Israel's part, Sisera immediately assembled his army to wipe out the small Israeli uprising. Things had to have been tense as Barak's troops were poised to advance by faith against a massive force that would run them down apart from God's help.

Then, Deborah declared God's word to them: "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" As Barak proceeded down the mountain with his army, a cloudburst upstream caused the Kishon River in the valley to overflow onto the plains where it immobilized the Canaanite chariots (Judges 4:15; 5:20-22). Sisera and his army fled on foot as Barak's army pursued them. Not a man in Jabin's army survived as "the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword." Finally, as Deborah had prophesied, a Kenite woman named Jael killed General Sisera who had sought refuge in her tent (Judges 4:11, 17-22).

After this God-given victory that Deborah orchestrated, Israel grew stronger and stronger until they destroyed Jabin. Her dream of restored freedom and peace came as Israel experienced a 40-year rest from oppression (Judges 5:31).

**Read Judges 2:11-19.**

1. a. What continually led the people of Israel into oppressive captivity by foreign kings during the period of the judges (Judges 2:11-13)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Baal and Ashtoreth*, p. 87.

b. How did God respond to evil practices of His people (2:14-15)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Judges*, p. 88.



2. a. In His compassion, what did the LORD (YHWH) do to help Israel (2:16, 18)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *YHWH*, p. 88.

b. What was the sad response of the people (2:17, 19)?

**Read Judges 4:1-24.**

3. What was the condition of Israel at the time of Deborah (4:1-3)?

**Note:** Deborah lived around 1209-1169 B.C., some 200 years into the 300 year time period of the judges.

4. How did Deborah serve her people (4:4-5)?

5. a. What instruction did the LORD give to Deborah that she gave to Barak when he came (4:6 -7)?

b. Barak's need for Deborah at his side showed a lack of faith in God. What did Deborah prophecy that he would forfeit (4:8-9)?

c. What act of courage on the part of a Kenite woman named Jael fulfilled this prophecy (4:21-22)?

6. Summarize how Deborah's prophecy regarding the battle was fulfilled. Judges 4:9c-10, 12-13

Judges 4:14-16

7. a. What happened as a result (4:23; 5:31c)?

b. What was Deborah's prayer as she ended her victory song (5:31a-b)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE**

There is no more noble occupation a woman can be involved in than helping others succeed; and to help others succeed, she must be a positive motivator. Whether it be with family, friends, neighbors or business associates, the woman who is a positive motivator of the people around her will experience tremendous fulfillment.

Deborah knew how to bring out the best in people. Her influence was so strong that God was able to use her to draw all of Israel back to faith in God and reestablish them as a nation. The qualities that enabled Deborah to be a positive motivator of people are qualities we can possess as well.

As we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, we will look at some of the keys to bringing out the best in people.

1. From what you have read about Deborah, what do you think made her a positive motivator of Barak and the Israelites?

2. Think of the people who have brought out the best in you or motivated you to reach your potential. What characteristics or actions influenced you positively?

3. What inner qualities described in these verses are essential to being a positive motivator?

I Timothy 1:5

Matthew 20:25-28 (23:11-12)

4. a. What does the positive motivator have to be able to do?

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Acts 20:35

b. What is God's promise when we are others-centered?

Proverbs 11:25

Luke 6:38

5. a. Deborah possessed certain mindsets that made people trust her. What trust-producing qualities mentioned in the following passages were exhibited in Deborah's character?

Joshua 1:7, 9

Mark 12:30-31

I Peter 5:2-3

b. Why do these qualities generate trust in a leader?

6. Where was Deborah's source of direction and strength as she sought to help Israel succeed?

Psalm 25:9

Jeremiah 33:3

7. Communication is integral to positive motivation. What do the following suggest about speaking and listening?

Ephesians 4:29

James 1:19

8. Deborah set high standards of excellence for those she sought to motivate. From where did she get her standards for excellence?

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

9. As we seek to bring out the best in people, what is the ultimate positive influence we should seek to have, according to the following?

Colossians 1:9-10

## **SUMMARY**

10. What do you admire about Deborah that you want most in your life?

11. What do you consider to be the most important qualities you can develop and maintain in order to bring out the best in people around you?

12. a. What would you like to see happen in the lives of the people closest to you as a result of your influence?

b. Perhaps you would like to take a moment to talk to the LORD about these desires.

## LESSON 8 NOTES

**1** *Baal and Ashtoreth, Asherah.* *Baal* means “lord.” He was “the god worshiped by the Canaanites and Phoenicians, was variously known to them as the son of Dagon and the son of El. In Aram (Syria) he was called Hadad and in Babylonia Adad. Believed to give fertility to the womb and life-giving rain to the soil, he is pictured as standing on a bull, a popular symbol of fertility and strength. The storm cloud was his chariot, thunder his voice, and lightning his spear and arrows. The worship of Baal involved sacred prostitution and sometimes even child sacrifice (Ex.: Jeremiah 19:5).

*Ashtoreths* are female deities such as Ashtoreth (consort of Baal) and Asherah (consort of El, the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon). Ashtoreth was associated with the evening star and was the beautiful goddess of war and fertility. She was worshiped as Ishtar in Babylonia and as Athtart in Aram. To the Greeks she was Astarte or Aphrodite, and to the Romans,

Venus. Worship of the Ashtoreths involved extremely lascivious practices (Ex: 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7).” *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 332.

**2 Reference:** Note 3, *Angels*, p. 16.

**3 Judges** “describes the leaders in Israel from the time of the elders who outlived Joshua until the time of the monarchy. Their principal purpose is best expressed in 2:16: ‘Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of . . . raiders.’ Since it was God who permitted the oppressions and raised up deliverers, He himself was Israel’s ultimate Judge and Deliverer (11:27; see 8:23, where Gideon, a judge, insists that the LORD is Israel’s true ruler).” *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 325.

There were six major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson) and six minor ones (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon).

**4 YHWH** pronounced “Yahweh.” In this Bible study, LORD translates God’s personal name, YHWH. Surrounding nations knew this name for Israel’s God. *I AM WHO I AM* or *I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE* is the name by which God wished to be known and worshipped in Israel--the name that expressed his character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of his people (see Exodus 3:12, where "I will be" is completed by "with you"; see also Exodus 34:5-7).

In Ex 3:15 God told Moses to say to the sons of Israel that "YHWH, the God of your fathers... sent you." YHWH is the 3rd person form of the same verb, *to be*, and means *He is* or *He will be* which is the form of the verb used when *we* speak of God. (i.e. God says, "I AM," and we say, "He is.")

While correct pronunciation of the Hebrew word YHWH has been lost, "Jehovah" is an incorrect spelling that developed from combining the consonants of the name with the vowels of a word for "Lord" (Adonai). "Yahweh" is probably the original pronunciation. The name eventually ceased to be pronounced because later Jews thought it too holy to be uttered and feared violating Exodus 20:7 and Leviticus 24:16. It is translated LORD in the NIV translation. *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 91, 279.



## LESSON 9

### *DELILAH*

The moral deterioration in Israel that resulted from years of intermarrying and idolatry with the foreigners in their midst is apparent in the story of Samson. Because of the Nazirite<sup>1</sup> vow his parents had taken for him before he was born, and because of the incredible strength God gave Samson, he was considered a leader, or judge, in Israel.

Samson was strong enough to kill a lion barehanded, break new rope “like threads,” or kill 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. With this strength, he had single-handedly attacked and viciously slaughtered many Philistines, and they hated him.

While Samson was able to control the outcome of a battle, he was unable to control his passion for the wrong women. Over the years, he had first married a Philistine who was killed by her people to get back at Samson (Judg 15:1-6). Then Samson spent the night with a prostitute in the Philistine seaport of Gaza (Judg 16:1-3). Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman named *Delilah*. She is assumed to have been Philistine and perhaps a prostitute. Samson either moved in with her or spent a lot of time at her home.

Delilah is a beautiful name that means “delicate” or “dainty one.” But this Delilah was anything but dainty. The Philistine rulers bribed her with an enormous amount of money to find the source of Samson’s strength so they could capture him, and she heartlessly set out to bring Samson down. Her shrewd actions set Delilah apart as one of the lowest and meanest women in Scripture.

With sweetness and feminine charm, Delilah pretended to love Samson. Blinded by his weakness for a seductive woman, he was totally oblivious to her deceitful efforts to betray him. She spoke in jest to find the secret of his strength, flattering him to believe no man could bind him. “Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued,” she

pleaded. Going along with what he saw to be a little game, he first answered that fresh bowstrings could bind him. With Philistine men hiding in the room, she thus bound Samson, who jokingly and effortlessly snapped the strings.

This game continued with Delilah begging him to tell her how he could possibly be weakened, Samson making up something, the Philistine leaders hiding in the room, and the technique failing. Finally the deal was off, the Philistines left, and Delilah was probably angry and even more determined to succeed.

She decided to use nagging about his lack of love and trust in her. “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me?” With this pleading day after day, Samson gave in. Whether his heart was melted or he just couldn’t stand the nagging any longer, he told her about the Nazirite vow and how if his hair were cut off, his strength would depart.

Confident she had the truth this time, Delilah immediately called the Philistine leaders back, and as Samson slept in her lap, his hair was cut. Then she called out one last time, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” Samson awoke to find the “LORD had left him” (Judges 16:20). The Philistine men seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him to Gaza where they bound him with fetters and made him grind corn in the prison. Possibly during this time, Samson repented and cried out to the LORD to forgive him. All the while, no one noticed that his hair was growing. The leaders decided to hold a huge celebration in honor of their god Dagon, whom they praised for delivering Samson into their hands. Thousands attended, including all the Philistine leaders and most likely Delilah as an honored guest.

When they brought Samson out for entertainment, three thousand watched from the building’s upper level alone. Samson had the servant guiding him place him between the pillars that supported the temple and prayed for God to strengthen him one last time. The LORD answered, and to everyone’s

shock, Samson pushed the enormous pillars apart, bringing the temple down on the rulers and all the people and himself.

Samson led Israel twenty years before his death, and we will never know what different story could have been told had he married an Israelite as God commanded. He was a giant in physical strength, but small and weak when it came to willpower and moral resistance. Sadly, stepping out of God's will hurt both Samson and his people and destroyed his effectiveness as God's man.

Delilah stands as an ugly picture of our potential as women to be greedy, self-centered, heartless and deceitful, stooping to bring down someone else for revenge or money. She played the classic part of a woman pretending to be in love with a man, using him, then dropping him. Perhaps she was the person the writer of Proverbs spoke of when he said, "for the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword" (Proverbs 5:3-4).

Delilah's life was a sad waste of the beauty and intelligence God had given her. But her evil and Samson's weakness did not stop the glory of God from being revealed. Their actions actually led to YHWH's exposure of Dagon at the celebration where that false god was to be exalted. Through the strength the LORD gave Samson, Dagon's people were destroyed, Dagon proved powerless, and Israel's God true.

### **Read Selected Passages in the Book of Judges.**

Optional: Read Judges 13-15.

1. How was Samson unique from birth (Judges 13:2-5)?

**References:** Note 1, *Nazirite*, p.100, and Note 3, *Angels*, p. 16.

2. a. What had God commanded Israel not to do so that they would not be pulled into the horrors of pagan idolatry?

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 (1-6)

**Reference:** Note 1, *Baal and Ashtoreth*, p. 87.

b. Although God had enabled Samson to kill many Philistines, earning their fear and disdain, how was he unfaithful to God?

Judges 14:1-3

Optional: Read the narrative of Judges 14 and 15.

c. What did the Philistines finally do because of their anger toward Samson (Judges 15:6b)?

3. What did Samson do that made the Philistines fear and hate him even more (Judges 15:13-15, 20)?

**Read Judges 16:1-22.**

4. God had given Samson supernatural strength to protect Israel from the Philistines. How was Samson again unfaithful (16:1, 4)?

**Reference:** Note 2, *Samson typifies the nation of Israel*, p. 100.

5. How did the Philistine leaders exploit this weakness? What did they propose to Delilah (16:5)?

**Note:** They each were offering 28 pounds of silver, altogether a huge amount of money. Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.

6. Delilah set out to learn the secret of Samson's strength through a seemingly insignificant teasing game. You may underline her questions and Samson's answers in your Bible to see this. The following is a basic chart of her appeals, his answers, and the result as Samson played along (16:6-14).

<u><i>Delilah's Questions</i></u>	<u><i>Samson's Answer</i></u>	<u><i>Result</i></u>
Tell me the secret of your strength and how you can be tied and subdued?	Fresh bowstrings	Snapped them
Come now, tell me how you can be tied.	New ropes	Snapped them
Tell me how you can be tied.	Braids of my hair woven into fabric	Pulled apart everything

a. What final manipulation did Delilah use to try to get Samson to tell her how she could break his strength (16:15-16)?

b. What secret information did he entrust to Delilah (16:17)?

7. What did Delilah's deceit bring about for Samson (16:21)?

**Read Judges 16:23-31.**

8. What did the thousands of Philistines gather to celebrate (16:23-24)?

9. How was the LORD's name exalted in the outcome of the party (16:26-30)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **DECIDING AGAINST DECEIT**

For whatever reason, Delilah practiced gross deceit, making things appear differently than they really were. While pretending to desperately love Samson and want security in his love, Delilah doggedly pursued Samson's ruin. While in the short run she achieved her objectives, her deceitful actions led to disaster.

We live in a society where even legal documents can be purposefully deceptive and where dishonesty oftentimes seems the only means to success in the workplace. In such an environment, it is increasingly difficult to practice honesty.

But the Bible warns that God has created His world to reward honesty and be intolerant of dishonesty. History proves that honesty is the best policy and that truth endures. As with Delilah, deceit leads only to destructive outcomes; deceit never ultimately benefits the deceitful person.

As we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's look at some biblical principles that encourage us to decide firmly and consistently against deceit.

1. a. What did the final outcome of Delilah's deceitfulness demonstrate about the results of dishonesty?

b. What destructive results of deceptive practices do you see around you in the world today?

2. What are motives for dishonesty?

3. What do the following say regarding the outcome of deceitfulness?  
Proverbs 20:17

Proverbs 21:6

Isaiah 59:8

4. a. Summarize the LORD's commands regarding honesty.  
Leviticus 19:11-13a

Leviticus 19:15, 35-36



Zechariah 8:16

b. What does the LORD reveal about His nature regarding honesty in the following?

Psalm 5:6

Psalm 101:7 (cf. Psalm 15)

5. What motivations for practicing honesty are found in the following?

Proverbs 11:3

Proverbs 12:22

Proverbs 20:7

**Note:** *blameless* refers to spiritual and moral integrity, not sinlessness.

6. a. What can we do to rectify dishonest actions?

Matthew 5:23-24

Leviticus 6:1-5

b. In the Old Testament times, an offering was made to God in order to rectify an action of dishonesty (Leviticus 6:5-6). Today, how are we made right with God because of the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Romans 3:22-25a

I John 1:9

7. What strength is available to us as we seek to decide against deceit?

Ephesians 3:16, 20

Ephesians 6:10,14

**Reference:** Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 38.

## **SUMMARY**

8. a. Are there any areas in which you are tempted to be deceitful with yourself and others?

b. Why is it helpful for you to know biblical perspectives on honesty? What biblical truths motivate you to decide against dishonesty?

9. a. Are there any situations in which you feel a need to make restitution to someone for dishonesty and ask forgiveness of the LORD?

b. What would be the greatest outcome of such decisions?

## LESSON 9 NOTES

1 *Nazirite* refers to a Jew who took the ascetic vow described in Numbers 6:1-21. The term "nazirite" comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning "consecrated" or "separated." This vow required the man or woman to: 1) Abstain from wine, vinegar, grapes, raisins, and according to some—alcohol and alcohol vinegar. 2) Refrain from cutting the hair on one's head. 3) Avoid corpses and graves, even of family members, and any structure which contains such. Nazirite vows were usually temporary, but the Bible tells of three who were perpetual Nazirites from birth: Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist. The angel of the LORD instructed Samson's mother that he should be a Nazirite before he was born that he might deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines (13:5).

2 *Samson* "*typifies the nation of Israel*—born by special divine provision, consecrated to the LORD from birth and endowed with unique power among his fellowmen. The likeness is even more remarkable in light of his foolish chasing of foreign women, some of ill repute, until he was cleverly subdued by one of them. In this he exemplified Israel, who during the period of the judges constantly prostituted herself to Canaanite gods to her own destruction." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 350.

## LESSON 10

### *NAOMI*

The three hundred year period of the judges was the dark ages of Israel's history. The conquest of the Promised Land had been followed by periods of spiritual decline with brief periods of revival. The spiritual apostasy increased with time until the end of the Book of Judges records corruption and bloody civil strife.

The Book of Ruth, like a diamond on black velvet, is a story of romance and redemption set against the dark backdrop of the time of the judges in Israel. Ruth, a young Moabite widow, journeyed to Bethlehem with her widowed mother-in-law, *Naomi*. She left her homeland of Moab with its idols, and gave herself completely to helping Naomi and worshiping the God of Israel. Because of her faithfulness and kindness, God rewarded Ruth by giving her a new husband, a son and a privileged position in the ancestral line of David and Christ.

The story begins describing the tremendous grief Naomi experienced after her husband Elimelech took the family to the foreign land of Moab to escape famine in Bethlehem. In Moab, her husband died, her two sons married Moabite women, then both sons died. She and the two widows were left destitute.

Either because the daughters-in-law were still considered part of their husbands' family or because Naomi was so loved by Orpah and Ruth, they both started out with Naomi to go back to Bethlehem where there was food again. En route, however, Naomi realized marriage for Ruth and Orpah as Moabites in Judah would be near impossible. She insisted the girls return to their homeland where they could marry again. Orpah finally followed Naomi's plea that they return to their families. However, Ruth refused. So committed was she to Naomi that she insisted, "Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be

buried” (Ruth 1:16-17). Naomi could not resist Ruth’s determination, so they traveled on together.

The arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem caused quite a stir as everyone observed how Naomi’s great hardship and sorrow had aged her. Naomi was also in a state of depression, and told them God had left her empty and made her life bitter.

Naomi probably watched in amazement as Ruth refused to be defeated by their impoverished situation. In her love and devotion to Naomi and her trust in God, Ruth worked hard gleaning the fields of the barley harvest of a relative named Boaz. This gracious man did all he could to help Ruth, and Naomi began to see God’s hand at work.

At the end of the harvest, Naomi instructed Ruth to lay at the feet of Boaz, thus proposing levirate marriage<sup>1</sup> to him. Boaz was astounded by the inner beauty of a woman who would serve her mother-in-law so humbly and be willing to marry an older man to redeem Naomi’s family. He took steps that day to marry Ruth and redeem the family, as the elders of the city rejoiced and blessed their union.

God’s faithfulness and the work of His providence was further emphasized at the end of the book as Naomi held her grandson on her lap. Ruth and Boaz’s son Obed would continue Naomi’s husband’s bloodline, which would lead to King David and ultimately the Redeemer of all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Read Ruth 1:1-18.**

1. What caused Naomi’s circumstances to change dramatically (1:1-2)?

2. What happened in Naomi's life over the next ten years in Moab (1:3-5)?
3. a. When Naomi heard there was food in Bethlehem again, she and Ruth and Orpah left their home in Moab and set out on the road to Judah. What did Naomi decide on the way (1:8-9a)?
- b. How did Ruth and Orpah respond (1:9b-10)?
4. a. What was Naomi's basic argument (1:11-13)?
- b. Why was it more bitter for Naomi than for Ruth and Orpah?
5. How did the women respond (1:14, 18)? (Lesson 12 on Ruth will address her response more specifically.)

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

6. What did the women's response to Naomi's return tell you about the physical toll the ten years in Moab had taken on her (1:19)?

7. Naomi's name means "my joy," "my bliss," or "pleasantness of Jehovah." If Naomi had once been joyful and agreeable as her name suggests, how had the tragic losses in Moab left her feeling (1:20-21)?

**Read Ruth 1:22-2:12 and selected passages.**

8. How did God begin to rebuild Naomi's life in her time of grief?

9. a. What happened with Ruth and Boaz' relationship that saved Naomi from poverty and preserved the bloodline of her husband (4:9-10, 13)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *Levirate marriage*, p. 109.

b. For what did the women praise the LORD (4:14-15)?



10. a. What was Naomi's great joy (4:16)?

b. Why was Naomi's grandson Obed an especially important and privileged child (4:17 and Matthew 1:1, 5-6)?

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **NEW STARTS**

Naomi left behind the homeland she loved, then lost the husband she loved. Ten years later, she lost her beloved sons, and with them, she lost her livelihood. Forced but probably glad to move back to her ancestral Israel, Naomi felt she had to also say good-bye to her beloved daughters-in-law with whom she had shared so much heartache. She knew she could not support them and encouraged them to return to their families.

In reading her dilemma, one can easily understand and feel the fatigue Naomi faced physically, emotionally and spiritually. But if we were to meet her today and ask what she learned about starting over, no doubt Naomi would offer words of great encouragement and hope. While Naomi would certainly not deny the emotional pain and spiritual confusion that can come at such times, she would declare God's ability and faithfulness to get one to higher ground.

We all face new starts in life—exhausting ones like Naomi's, along with many little transitions through the years. From Naomi's story and related biblical truths, we can glean some encouraging insights to help us through the losses, changes and new beginnings in life.

1. What difficulties might Naomi have experienced as she faced a new start in life?

2. Why is it hard to start over when we have given time and energy to things past? What feelings are involved?

3. According to Psalm 139:7-12, where is the LORD at these times?

4. What do the following suggest that the LORD desires to do for us when we face new starts in life?

Isaiah 30:18, 21

Isaiah 40:11

Isaiah 41:10

5. What are we encouraged to do in times of uncertainty and change?  
Philippians 4:6

James 1:5

I Peter 5:7

Isaiah 43:18-19

6. What can we be sure about when we are overwhelmed with the tasks or situation at hand?  
Isaiah 42:16

Isaiah 45:2-3

7. If Naomi were here, she would probably tell us not to fear the future.  
What did the end of Naomi's story prove?

Psalm 40:1-3

Isaiah 46:4

Jeremiah 29:11

8. What is a good choice, regardless of the emotional ups and downs of new starts?

Psalm 27:14

## **SUMMARY**

9. What new starts, if any, are you facing in your life today?

10. How is Naomi's experience encouraging? What can you know about God amidst a new start or transition time?

11. What constructive choices can be made as we face the challenge of a new start?

## **LESSON 10 NOTES**

**1** *Levirate marriage*, was an Israelite law (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) which was given to protect the widow and guarantee continuance of the family line. The brother of the deceased husband or nearest of kin would marry the widow in order to carry on the line of the deceased. The children born were considered to be the children of the deceased husband, and the first-born child would carry on his name.

Boaz' selflessness would be demonstrated in his willingness to marry Ruth in order to carry on Naomi and Elimelech's line as well as redeem their property. He was not even a brother of Mahlon, but a distant kin. This bloodline was of the tribe of Judah and led to David and finally to Jesus Christ.

## LESSON 11

### *ORPAH*

Home for *Orpah* was the grain-filled plateau and pasturelands of Moab east of the Dead Sea. When she came of age, her father gave her in marriage to an Israelite man named Kilion whose family had moved to Moab to escape the famine in Israel. Sadly, Kilion's father, Elimelech, died, leaving his widow Naomi in Moab, away from their homeland in Judah, with two sons.

The people of Moab were not friendly with Israel, who had invaded many of the towns of Moab as they conquered the land of Canaan. However, everyone knew they were distant relatives through their forefather, Lot. The laws of Israel did not forbid intermarriage, but the orthodox in Israel would frown on it because of Moab's idols.

Moab was born to Lot (Abraham's nephew) and his oldest daughter after Lot and Lot's daughters escaped the LORD's destruction of Sodom. The girls saw no chance to marry and have children, so one night they got their father so drunk that he was unaware when they had sex with him. Both daughters became pregnant and gave birth to the Moabite and Ammonite nations respectively (Genesis 19:30-38).

Orpah's sister-in-law Ruth, also a Moabite, had married Kilion's older brother, Mahlon. Their mother-in-law, Naomi, believed in Israel's God and talked freely about Him. Orpah loved this mother-in-law, whose name meant "my joy," "my bliss," or "pleasantness of Jehovah."

But the names of Mahlon and Kilion pointed to physical weakness. Mahlon means "sickly" and Kilion, "wasting." These brothers only lived in Moab ten years before they died. Orpah found herself, along with Ruth, a widow and childless.

Certainly grief and confusion about the future filled her young heart, but we know from Naomi's words that she had responded with kindness toward

her husband and her grieving mother-in-law (Ruth 1:8). When they heard there was food again in Naomi's homeland, Orpah set out with Naomi and Ruth on the road to Bethlehem.

But as they traveled, Naomi reasoned that the girls would have little chance to remarry and start a family unless they stayed with their people in Moab. "Go back..." Naomi said. "May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Orpah, along with Ruth, wept aloud and said, "We will go back with you to your people" (Ruth 1:10). But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me?" She insisted there was no future with her in her homeland and impoverished situation.

Orpah wept again as she accepted Naomi's argument. Clearly she was attached and truly loved Naomi. But with Naomi's insistence, Orpah did as she was told. She kissed Naomi good-bye and went back "to her people and her gods" (Ruth 1:15).

Naomi meant well, but her counsel took Orpah away from the most important relationship of all, a relationship with the LORD. Therefore, this story offers sobering lessons for us as believers to always have an eternal perspective when giving counsel to those we love.

### **Read Ruth 1:1-15.**

1. How did Orpah, who was probably in her mid-teens, come to marry Kilion, a foreigner and Israelite (1:1-4a)?

2. What do we know about Orpah's marriage (1:4-5)?

3. a. How did Orpah respond to Naomi's decision to go home to Bethlehem (1:6-7)?

b. With her change of heart, what blessing did Naomi extend to Orpah and Ruth, and why (1:8-9a)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *YHWH*, p. 88.

c. How did both Orpah and Ruth respond (1:9b-10)?

4. What convincing arguments did Naomi give for her insistence that they leave her (1:11-13)?

5. What was Orpah's response (1:14)?

6. How did Naomi describe Orpah's action (1:15)?



## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS**

We do not know the outcome of Orpah's decision to go home to her people and her gods, but we do know that Ruth's decision to go with Naomi and make the God of Israel her own reaped tremendous blessing.

There are a number of truths about making difficult decisions that can be observed in the story of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth. One is that the seemingly easiest way may not really be the best. Also, advice from a person we respect spiritually may not always be right. While godly counsel is important, the peace of the LORD in our heart must correspond to that advice.

Most importantly, we can see how easy it is to make the mistake of tackling difficult decisions with a temporal and worldly perspective. While using common sense is encouraged in the Bible, making decisions apart from the LORD is not. He alone is omniscient and knows the very best direction to take. And the LORD's leading is always in our best interest.

So how can we bring the LORD into our decision-making to ensure the best choices? Let's look at the answer to this and other questions regarding making difficult decisions.

1. a. What is the promise to those who seek the LORD's help (James 1:5)?

b. What does the Bible say about relying on our own reasoning apart from the wisdom of God and His Word?

Proverbs 3:5

Proverbs 14:12

**Note:** *death* biblically can mean separation, especially from God, and wrong existence resulting from being out of God's perfect will.

2. How might we pray in times of difficult decision-making (Ps 25:4-5)?

3. We may feel we don't deserve God's help because of our spiritual failures. What do you observe about this in Psalm 25:6-8?

4. What kind of spirit is needed to receive the LORD's guidance?  
Psalm 25:9

Psalm 62:7-8

5. How is God's will for us described in the following?  
Psalm 25:10a

Romans 12:2b

6. What components of decision-making with the LORD are referred to in the following verses?

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (Psalm 27:14)

Proverbs 15:22

Psalm 143:10 (Galatians 5:25)

**Reference:** Note 3, *Holy Spirit*, p. 38.

7. God's leading never goes against biblical principles (God's Word). What do the following suggest about this truth?

Mark 12:24

Psalm 119:9

8. What does Psalm 23 reveal about the benefits of letting the LORD be our "shepherd" in the decisions of life?

## **SUMMARY**

9. a. What did you learn about counseling others from the story of Naomi and Orpah?

b. What is important to do as you are counseling others?

10. a. Are there difficult decisions you (or someone you know) are currently facing?

b. What godly principles of decision-making from this lesson stand out to you?

c. What is your prayer regarding the decisions you're now making?

## LESSON 12

### *RUTH*

Nowhere else in the Bible is a woman's kindness and selfless service displayed and honored as *Ruth's* is in the book bearing her name. This young Moabite woman, left widowed and without child after her Israelite husband's death, chose to leave all that was familiar to her and abide with her mother-in-law Naomi, whatever the cost. And Naomi, when she begged Ruth to return to Moab, had made the probable consequences clear to Ruth—she would likely never marry in Israel.

But Ruth clung to Naomi, saying, “Don't urge me to leave you.... Where you go I will go... Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16-16). More than this, Ruth committed herself to Naomi until death: “Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:17). She promised that only death would separate them.

Ruth's purpose in life was now to help Naomi through her grief and care for her, even if it meant living in a foreign land where people disrespected her race. They also faced extreme poverty in Bethlehem, but Ruth tackled the situation, doing what she had to for them to survive. She went to glean in the fields during barley and wheat harvests, working long hours in the sun and risking mistreatment as an attractive young woman.

But the LORD was with Ruth, leading her to glean in the field of Boaz, a kind and godly man of wealth who just happened to be a relative of Elimelech. Boaz was especially kind to Ruth because he had heard of the sacrifices she had made for Naomi. “May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge,” he said. Then he proceeded to do all he could to help her, telling her to stay in *his* fields where she would be protected, and telling his workers to drop stalks for her to glean and give her water.

Ruth was also blessed by Naomi's keen eye on what the LORD might be doing. Naomi gained hope when she learned Ruth just "happened" to pick Boaz' field. As a relative, Boaz was a potential kinsman-redeemer.<sup>1</sup> This meant that Boaz was a relative who by law could buy the property of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech, marry Ruth by levirate marriage,<sup>2</sup> and produce a son to carry on the line of Elimelech.

Boaz's kindness continued, and Naomi decided to move forward in her matchmaking plan for Ruth and Boaz. Knowing he would be spending the night with the other men at the threshing floor during the harvest festivities, she told Ruth to wash, perfume and dress nicely. In the evening, she should go to the threshing floor and remain unseen until she placed herself under the cover at Boaz' feet after he went to sleep.<sup>3</sup>

Now Ruth had shown courage in moving to Bethlehem to help Naomi, but what courage this action required! She had to creep into the threshing floor at night, lay at Boaz's feet (where he would awake startled by her) and then propose marriage to him with the levirate stipulation! The humility and trust in God's leading through Naomi that Ruth demonstrated here is amazing.

When Boaz awoke around midnight to find Ruth and hear her proposal,<sup>4</sup> he could not have been more gracious. He praised Ruth for her noble character and assured her he wanted to marry her. However, another closer kinsman-redeemer would have to be given the opportunity to marry Ruth first. Boaz promised to go to the other man in the morning, and if he refused to marry Ruth, Boaz promised to make her his wife.

No doubt Ruth was very anxious about what would come next when she got home and reported all that had happened to Naomi. But her mother-in-law calmly told her to relax, "...the man will not rest until the matter is settled today" (Ruth 3:18).

Naomi was right. Boaz went straight to the city gate that served as “city hall” for business transactions in Bethlehem. There before ten elders he met with the closer kinsman, and established that the man wanted the property but not the Moabite as a wife. With this, Boaz accepted his kinsman’s offer, publicly stating that he was both redeeming the land and marrying Ruth. The elders and all those at the gate joyfully pronounced blessings on Boaz’ marriage.

The happy ending was a new beginning for Ruth and Boaz, two very kind and loving people, and Naomi, in whose arms Ruth placed their first son, Obed, considered to be her grandson. The women of the community, who had no doubt been following all of this carefully, praised Ruth, declaring to Naomi, “your daughter-in-law, who loves you...is better to you than seven sons” (Ruth 4:5).

Through the beautiful unfolding of Ruth’s love story, the Scriptures shout the amazing providence of God in everyday affairs. He delights to work behind the scenes for His children, especially the faithful who practice humility and kindness as Ruth did. God rewarded her with Obed and probably other children, but her faith and godly character would also be reflected in the life of her great-grandson, David, the “shepherd king” of Israel. He brought healing to the nation like no other king, and the Psalms he wrote have touched the lives of countless millions through the ages. The line of David would produce many good kings in Judah, and eventually, the King of Kings Himself, the LORD Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6,16).

The story also shows the impartiality of God in using people regardless of their background in His eternal plan. Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, the Jericho harlot who helped the Hebrew spies. Boaz’s father was a descendant of Judah, whose line was continued because of the shrewd actions of Tamar, a Canaanite woman (Lesson 6). Ruth was a Moabite, a descendant of Lot and his daughter (Genesis 19:30-38).

Regardless of the background, God looks at the heart. Ruth, a young woman with a huge capacity to love, and a man named Boaz with the same,

in the course of life were carrying on the line of the greatest kings of Israel and of Jesus Christ the Lord. They were two humble people who lived lives that God could use to encourage His people through the ages.

### **Read Ruth 1.**

1. What are the first experiences Ruth went through as a young woman (1:1-4)?

2. What was Ruth's famous response when Naomi insisted she return home (1:16-17)?

3. What happened when Ruth arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem? Where was the focus (1:19-21)?

### **Read Ruth 2.**

4.a. What did Ruth ask Naomi to let her do, and what was the result (2:2-3)?



b. What did Boaz' greeting to his workers and response to Ruth tell us about him (2:4-5)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *YHWH*, p. 88.

c. What did the foreman's report about Ruth tell Boaz about her character (2:6-7)?

5. a. How did Boaz treat Ruth?  
2:8-9

2:11 (10)

2:12

2:14-16, 21

b. What humility did Ruth demonstrate toward Boaz (2:10, 13)?

6. When Ruth returned with all the news of the day, Naomi was filled with new hope. “The LORD ...has not stopped showing His kindness” (2:20), she said. Why was Naomi excited about Ruth’s news (2:20b)?

**Reference:** Note 1, *kinsman-redeemer*, p. 128.

**Read Ruth 3.**

7. At the end of the harvest, Naomi decided it was time to approach Boaz. How did Naomi preface her instructions to Ruth, and what did she tell Ruth to do (3:1-4)?

**Reference:** Note 3, *Naomi’s advice*, p. 128.

8. Boaz woke at midnight surprised to find Ruth at his feet. What proposition did Ruth make that also amazed him (3:9)?

**Reference:** Note 4, *Ruth’s proposition*, p. 128.

9. a. What response did Ruth receive from Boaz after taking such a step of faith (3:10-11)?

**Note:** *a woman of noble character* (3:11) is a Hebrew expression similar to the one used for Boaz in 2:1. Ruth and Boaz both were known for their impeccable integrity.

b. What matter did Boaz have to settle that put Ruth in another place of trusting God (3:12-13)?

**Note:** Boaz' answer shows he had already been thinking about marrying Ruth.

#### **Read Ruth 4.**

10. a. What did Boaz finalize that day that brought blessings from the elders who respected both Boaz and Ruth (4:9-10)?

b. Optional: What blessings did the elders pronounce over Boaz that mention three other women we have studied (4:11-12)?

11. a. How did God further reward Ruth's heart of kindness (4:13, 16b)?

b. What important place did Ruth's choices have in the future?

Matthew 1:5-6, 16

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **DEALING WITH CHANGE**

Ruth moved beautifully through the enormous changes in her life. As she trusted God, He was at work on her behalf. She also chose some healthy attitudes that allowed her to progress graciously through the time of upheaval and transition. Natural negative responses to times of change can, without our knowing it, throw us into patterns of thinking and relating that add to our problems rather than help us get on with life. During times of adjustment, it is critical to choose attitudes that, while perhaps unnatural in feeling, will bear constructive results. Change is something we all have to face. As we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's observe the productive attitudes which Ruth chose that allowed her to successfully deal with change.

1. To what negative attitudes might Ruth have succumbed as she faced the pressures of her new life in Israel? What attitudes can make change more difficult to endure?

2. a. How can unhealthy attitudes affect relationships with those around us when we are experiencing change?

b. How did Ruth's healthy attitudes affect those around her?

3. Perhaps humility was the most outstanding attitude in Ruth as she worked through a time of change in her life. What does the Bible promise regarding humility?

Proverbs 22:4

Isaiah 57:15

I Peter 5:6-7

4. Ruth was also willing to work diligently to meet her and Naomi's needs. What does the Bible say regarding this attitude?

Proverbs 13:4

Proverbs 14:23

5. a. Ruth was teachable. What do the following say about this?

Proverbs 18:15

Proverbs 19:20

b. Why is a teachable attitude beneficial in times of change?

6. a. It is easy to become completely self-focused in times of change. But Ruth's focus on helping Naomi was what directed her steps and brought enormous blessing to her life. What blessings does the Bible promise the kind person that we see in Ruth's story?

Psalm 41:1

Luke 6:38

Matthew 5:7

Isaiah 58:10-11

b. How can serving others help us through a time of change?

## **SUMMARY**

7. What truths about God stand out to you from Ruth's story?

8. What qualities do you see in her life that you want in your own?

9. a. What changes are you are working through in your life right now?

b. What keys to dealing with change from the life of Ruth and the passages of this lesson are helpful to you at this time?

## LESSON 12 NOTES

**1** *kinsman-redeemer* (2:20). “The kinsman-redeemer was responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family—e.g., to provide an heir for a brother who had died (Dt. 25:5-10), to redeem land that a poor relative had sold outside the family (Lev. 25:25-28), to redeem a relative who had been sold into slavery (Lev. 25:47-49) and to avenge the killing of a relative (Nu. 35:19-21). Naomi is encouraged when she hears that the LORD has led Ruth to the fields of a relative who might serve as their kinsman-redeemer. This moment of Naomi’s awakened hope is the crucial turning point of the story.” *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 364.

**2 Reference:** Note 1, *Levirate marriage*, p. 68.

**3** *Naomi’s advice* (3:1-4) “seems strange, but she was not suggesting a seductive act. In reality, Naomi was telling Ruth to act in accordance with Israelite custom and law. It was common for a servant to lie at the feet of his master and even share a part of his covering. By observing this custom, Ruth would inform Boaz that he could be her kinsman-redeemer—that he could find someone to marry her or marry her himself. It was family business, nothing romantic. But the story later became beautifully romantic as Ruth and Boaz developed an unselfish love and deep respect for each other.” *NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 427.

**4** *Ruth’s proposition* (3:9). In the customs of the time, Boaz understood Ruth was asking him to marry her because he was a relative who could fulfill the levirate marriage law. Boaz would be assuming the responsibilities of Ruth’s husband, and the first-born child would be Mahlon’s heir.



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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-932395-70-9

# NOTES

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