

Women of the Bible

The Challenges of Womanhood - Part II

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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.

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The Challenges of Womanhood - Part II

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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 24 women we covered in *Challenges of Womanhood I* and the 25 additional 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.

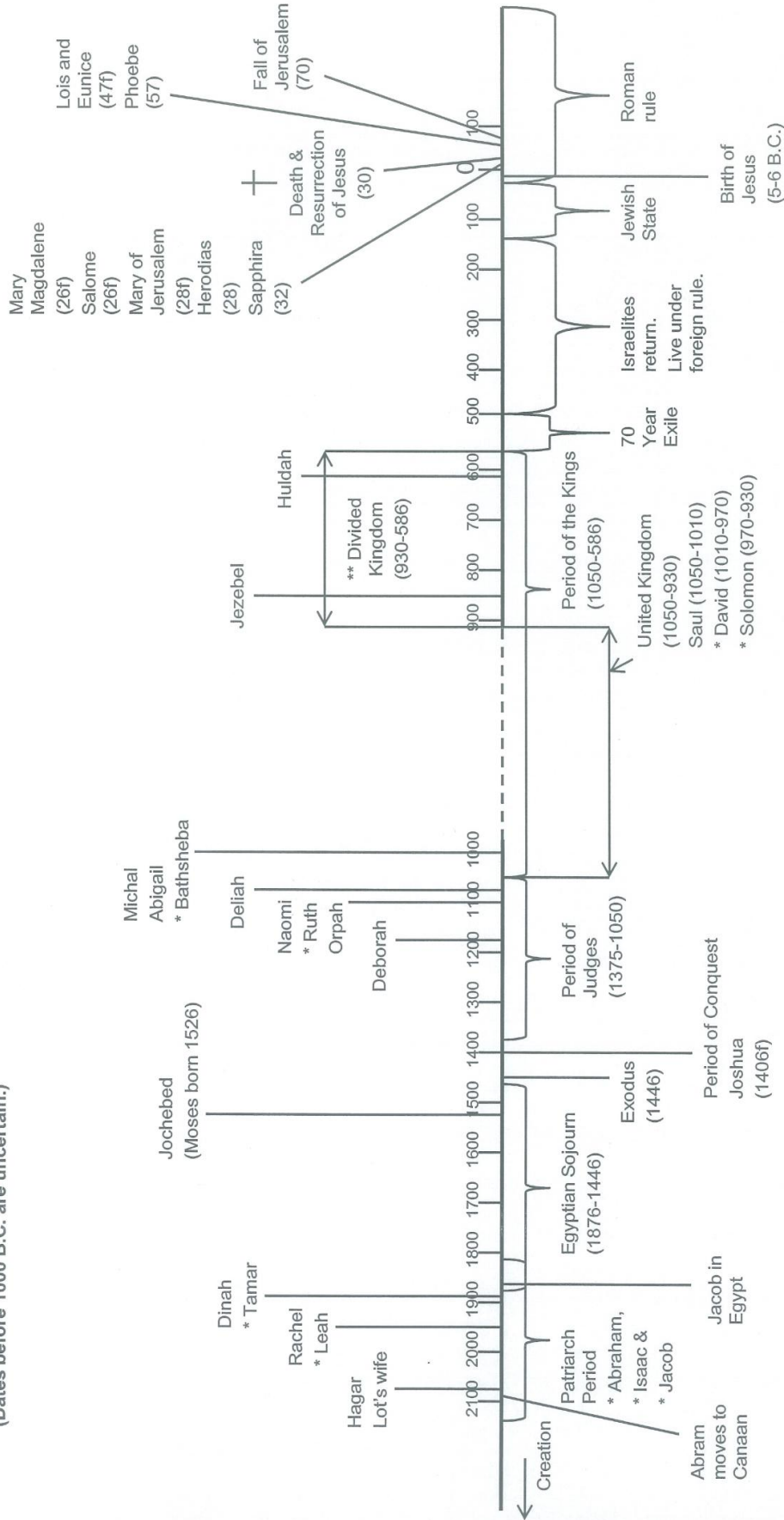
We will also study these women within the timeline of biblical history as it records the unfolding of God’s wonderful plan of redemption for mankind. This will enrich our understanding of the Bible as a whole with its amazing continuity and harmony.

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
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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 13

MICHAL

Michal was a princess, the youngest daughter of Saul, the first king of Israel. Her story took place during the transition from the dark period of the judges (~ 1425-1140 BC) to the age of the kings in Israel (~1140-586 BC).

Samuel, the last judge in Israel, had served God faithfully all his life. When it was time for him to retire, the people insisted they have a king like nations around them. God led Samuel to anoint Michal's father, Saul, as king. Then Samuel helped the king and the people transition to a monarchy that was also a theocracy.¹ For God's people, the king was to be under God's authority as He guided him through prophets like Samuel and by His Spirit.

Michal's father Saul was a strikingly tall and handsome man who in time demonstrated that he was unwilling to submit to God's leadership and the requirements of his theocratic office. So Samuel told Saul the kingdom would be given to another, then secretly anointed David, a young shepherd with a heart for God, to replace Saul. With this, God's Spirit no longer was with Saul. Instead, he had bouts of melancholy when he was oppressed by an evil spirit.² Ironically, because David played the harp and sang, he was called upon to calm King Saul with his music. This is probably when Michal met David. He was very handsome (1 Samuel 16:12, 17:42), and her crush on him may have begun then.

But certainly Michal's heart went wild for David when he became a national hero. David single handedly took down the giant, Goliath, with a sling and a stone "in the name of the God of Israel," and everyone sang his praises. (Remember, he was Ruth and Boaz' great grandson. Ruth may have still been alive.) David's humble personality caused him to be loved by Saul's entire household as well as the masses.

But as Michal was yearning for David to be her husband (1 Samuel 18:20), her father Saul became increasingly jealous and suspicious of David,

fearing David was the one Samuel spoke of who would replace him as king. He began to plot to kill David. First, he made David a commander, sending him to the battlefield again and again. When David wasn't killed, but rather amassed more victories and greater admiration from the people, Saul decided to exploit Michal's love for David (1 Samuel 18:20-27). He promised her in marriage if David brought him the foreskins of 100 dead Philistines. Saul thought David would surely die trying, but the LORD was with David, and he brought back 200 Philistine foreskins.

At her marriage celebration, Michal probably had no idea that her father wanted to kill the man she loved or that her marriage was a concession, not something Saul was truly celebrating. On her wedding day, her new husband's life was more in jeopardy than ever.

Finally, Saul flat out told his son Jonathan and his attendants to kill David. Jonathan loved David and tried to persuade Saul it would be wrong. But later, Saul was overcome by an evil spirit while David was singing and playing the harp for the king. He hurled a spear at David, who escaped home.

By now Michal knew of her father's evil intent toward David and told him he must flee before morning or be killed. She lowered him from the window and told the men sent by Saul that he was ill. Then Saul commanded David be brought to him on his bed to be killed, only to discover Michal had made the bed look as though someone was in it to allow David time to escape. When Saul asked her why she had saved David, "his enemy," Michal told her father that David threatened to kill her if she didn't help him escape.

This may have seemed clever, but it only fueled Saul's twisted thinking that David was planning to overthrow him as king. For the next ten years until the day he died, Saul pursued David as a fugitive. In that time, Michal did not see her husband, and Saul gave her in marriage to a man named Paltiel, even though she was still legally married to David!

Obviously, Michal lived in times when women were viewed as chattel. We have no idea what she thought of this second marriage arrangement, or if it was done in spite by Saul or to stop her complaints of loneliness to her father. We can only be sure it was wrong.

Finally, Saul was killed in battle with the Philistines, and David returned to Judah to be crowned king of southern Israel and later king of all Israel. He sent for Michal, and when she was taken from Paltiel, he followed her, weeping, until he was told to go home. But it doesn't say Michal wept at all. Perhaps she wanted to be queen; perhaps she had never loved anyone like David. In a time of polygamy, David now had several wives, but David was bringing Michal home to be his queen.

After this, David conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites and established it as the nation's capital. In his love for the LORD, he brought the ark of the covenant,³ which represented God's presence with his people, to Jerusalem. He had a great celebration as the ark entered the city. When Michal looked from her window, she saw David, stripped of his royal robes, "leaping and dancing before the LORD" (2 Samuel 6:16). He was the king, and although she had loved him at one time in her life, she despised him for this loss of dignity now. When David arrived home ready to bless his household, Michal went out to meet him and sneeringly cut down his behavior in the celebration.

David was mortified by Michal's pride, and made it clear that he was not ashamed of what he had done "before the LORD." But Michal didn't understand or share David's love for God and commitment, as king, to serving the LORD. His actions that exemplified his humility and praise to Israel's God were disgusting to her.

The last thing we are told about Michal is that she had no children, which was seen as a punishment of God on Michal and the house of Saul for their unfaithfulness.

Read 1 Samuel 18:17-30.

1. a. How did Saul try to use Michal's love for David to kill him (18:20, 25)?

b. How did Michal's dream to marry David come true (18:26-27)?

2. a. How did Michal's marriage to David affect her father Saul (18:28-29)?

b. How did Michal's husband grow in fame (18:30, 8)?

Read 1 Samuel 19:9-17.

3. a. What finally happened as Saul became more and more obsessed with fears of David (19:10)?

Reference: Note 2, *evil spirit from the LORD*, p. 17.

- b. What did Saul decide to do after David fled (19:11a)?

c. What tragic words did Michael have to speak to David to save his life (19:11b)?

4. a. How did Michal help David escape and cleverly buy time for him to flee (19:12-16)?

b. In his jealousy and suspicion, what lie had Saul begun to believe and try to convince others of (19:17a)?

c. How did Michal probably feed Saul's imaginations about David when Saul questioned her loyalty (19:17b)?

5. Michal was separated from David as he became a fugitive for ten years and refused to kill Saul when he had the chances. What happened in those years of separation (25:42-44)?

Read 2 Samuel selected verses.

6. a. After Saul's death in battle, what happened with David (2:4; 3:1; 5:3-5)?

b. What did Michal's husband, Paltiel, do when Michal was taken back to her husband David to be his queen (3:16)?

7. Out of love for the LORD, David brought the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolized God's presence among His people, to Jerusalem. What did Michal see David do during the celebration that repulsed her (6:14-16)?

Reference: Note 3, *Ark of the LORD's covenant*, p. 17.

Note: *linen ephod* was a priestly garment.

8. a. David returned home expecting to bless his household. What happened instead (6:20)?

b. What points did David make in response (6:21-22)?

9. What is the final fact given about Michal's life (6:23)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

FREEDOM FROM VANITY

A man by the name of Herbert Marcuse once said, "We do not content ourselves with the life we have in ourselves and in our own being; we desire to live an imaginary life in the mind of others, and for this purpose we endeavor to shine."

Marcuse's words aptly describe the inner life of the person bound by vanity. Born a princess and later crowned a queen, it is likely Michal lived her life motivated by maintaining superiority to others. She probably fell in love with David because he was the handsome hero of Israel who would make her the envy of every Israeli girl when she married him. Whether it took a lie about David to her father, disregard for God or humiliating attacks on her husband, it didn't seem to matter to Michal. She and her image seemed to be the center of her universe, and the result was a shallow, or vain, existence.

David, on the other hand, was motivated by his respect and love for God, not the desire to appear a proper king. He experienced freedom inwardly; his relationship with God freed him from vanity.

Manners, courtesy and protocol are foundational to any society. The Bible promotes respect and consideration of others. But for our own sakes, we are encouraged to put away vanity as a motivation for our actions. Let's take a look at positive ways to find freedom from vanity.

1. How would you define vanity? What characterizes a "vain" person?

2. a. Vanity was probably very destructive in Michal's life. How does vanity affect our inner life?

b. How does vanity affect our relationships with others?

3. What took the place of vanity in David's life?

4. What does the Bible warn regarding vanity?

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 11:22

5. How is the life liberated from vanity contrasted in the following?

James 3:17-18

Proverbs 31:30

6. Psychologists say we have three basic needs: to love and be loved, to feel secure and to feel significant. The vain person is often subconsciously trying to meet these needs. How can vanity actually prevent a person from having these legitimate needs met?

7. When we open our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ, He meets our most basic needs. What do the following verses promise the one who invites Christ into his/her life regarding the need:

a. To love and be loved? Galatians 5:22, 23 (John 14:17)

I John 3:1a

b. For security? John 10:27-30 (Christ speaking)

Hebrews 13:5b-6

c. To feel significant? I Peter 1:18-19

Ephesians 2:10

8. a. Sadly, David's son Solomon would go after every kind of vain pursuit. What was his observation in the end?

Ecclesiastes 1:10a, 11

b. What pursuit can free us from the weariness and waste of vanity?

Matthew 11:28-30 (Jesus speaking.)

Romans 12:2

SUMMARY

9. Why is vanity a negative force to be reckoned with? How does it affect our lives?

10. What basic needs does Christ promise to fulfill as you stay close to Him?

11. a. In what areas do you struggle with vain thinking?

b. How can you be freed from vanity when you recognize this destructive force in your life?*

*If you have never made the decision to invite Jesus Christ into your life, perhaps you would want to do this now with a simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess I have been living a life of vain pursuit apart from you. Please come into my life and help me find fulfillment in your love. Thank you for the security I can know in your care. Show me the unique purposes you have for my life. 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 13:5

John 10:27-28

1 John 5:11-13

LESSON 13 NOTES

1 *Theocracy*. The king in Israel was different than the kings of other nations. He was not to be autonomous in his authority and power; rather, he was to be subject to the law of the LORD and the word of the LORD through the prophet (1 Samuel 10:25; 12:23). The king was to be an instrument of the LORD's rule over his people, and the people and king were to continue to recognize the LORD as their ultimate Sovereign (1 Samuel 12:14-15).

2 *evil spirit from the LORD* (1 Samuel 19:9). There are several possible explanations of this phrase.

Evil may be used in the sense of *troubling* here. The evil spirit was a spirit of gloomy, suspicious melancholy, bordering on madness, affecting the mind of Saul. To the Hebrew, every visitation, good or evil, came directly from God. *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 286. Matthew Henry writes: "Those that drive the good Spirit away from them do of course become a prey to the evil spirit. He (Saul) grew fretful, and peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, ever and anon starting and trembling." *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, p. 305. "This statement (*evil spirit from God*) and similar ones in Scripture indicate that evil spirits are subject to God's control and operate only within divinely determined boundaries." *NIV Study Bible*, p. 400.

See also Note 3, *Satan, demons*, p. 158.

3 *Ark of the LORD's covenant*. This was a chest that symbolized the throne of the LORD and held the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17; 31:18). The ark's elaborate gold cover symbolized God's throne in the midst of Israel. It also represented the atonement God offered to reconcile people to Himself. Golden cherubim on either side of the cover symbolized attendants to the LORD enthroned there. Thus, the ark symbolized God's presence and was present at many of Israel's notable victories.

LESSON 14

ABIGAIL

To learn about *Abigail*, we go back to the years David was running from Saul as a fugitive. Rejected by God, tormented by evil spirits, and frightened by the success of David, Saul slowly descended into madness as he repeatedly sought to kill David. David sought refuge in Nob, Gath, Adullam, Mizpah, and Keilah. Finally, he and the 600 men who had joined him moved to the wilderness area of Maon in southern Judah.

There, they guarded the enormous herds of a rich man named Nabal in hopes of receiving food in return. When shearing time came, David sent ten of his men to humbly ask for provisions from Nabal in repayment for their services. Nabal's herdsmen would have testified that David and his men had acted as shields against Amalekites, Philistines and wild animals that threatened Nabal's herds. Even so, Nabal responded to the claims of David's men with disinterest and doubt, and he refused to grant their request for food.

In the culture of the time, Nabal's response was insulting, unconventional and unacceptable. Hospitality was seen as an obligation in the Near East, especially at harvest time, which was the yearly time of generosity and giving. When David's men returned with Nabal's answer, David's reaction was also ill-advised. In anger, he impetuously gathered four hundred of his men and set out to kill Nabal and his entire household.

David's overreaction could have cost him the throne in years to come¹ had not Nabal's beautiful and intelligent wife Abigail taken steps to stop David. When she heard of the situation, she quickly assembled generous provisions for David and his men and made haste to meet them en route.

Upon meeting David, Abigail bowed humbly before him, then demonstrated brilliant tact as she led David to see God's perspective on the situation. She encouraged David to pay no attention to a foolish man like

Nabal. She reminded David that he was destined to be king of Israel,² and that as long as David fought God's battles,³ God would avenge David's enemies. She pleaded with David to accept the provisions she brought for his men and turn from the actions that would only lead to remorse for him later.

David immediately recognized the wisdom in Abigail's appeal. He praised her and thanked God for sending her to avert his foolish course of action. As a result, David and his men turned back, and Abigail went home in peace. Only days later, the LORD brought about Nabal's death of heart failure, and David sent for Abigail to be his wife.⁴

Read 1 Samuel 25:2-17.

1. How does the author describe Abigail and Nabal (25:2-3)?

2. David had 600 men to feed in the wilderness of Maon in southernmost Judah. He sought to do this by voluntarily protecting Nabal's huge flocks from marauders (Philistines, Amalekites and wild animals), then asking Nabal for food in return.

a. What characterized David's approach to Nabal (25:6-9)?

b. What was Nabal's response (25:10-11)?

Note: Hospitality to fellow countrymen was not optional in the Eastern culture. David had not been obligated to earn the provisions which he asked of Nabal.

3. How did Nabal's servants respond differently to David's request (25:14-17)?

Read 1 Samuel 25:18-44.

4. a. Why was David offended by Nabal's response (25:21)?

b. What was David's plan to seek revenge against Nabal (25:13, 22)?

5. a. What was Abigail's immediate response to the situation (25:18-19)? What impresses you about her response?

b. How did Abigail's words and actions change everything? What was her appeal (25:23-25, 27)?

6. While her husband had pretended not to even know David, Abigail had prophetic understanding of God's plans for his life. With what logic did she try to persuade David to change his course of action (25:28-31)?

References: Notes 1, Rumors about David, Note 2, destined for the throne, and Note 3, fights the LORD's battles, pp. 26-27.

7. How did David respond to Abigail's appeal, and what did it show about his character (25:32-35)?

8. What happened to Nabal when Abigail told him what had transpired with David (25:37-38)?

9. Abigail's beauty and wisdom were qualities that made her fit to be a queen. What did David quickly do (25:39b-42)?

Reference: Note 4, *David's marriages*, p. 27.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

THE ART OF PEACEMAKING (DAMAGE CONTROL)

When we are confronted with rage, the natural response is to wage war. However, Jesus Christ taught against responding in kind. Why? Because when we give in to anger, invariably the other person gains control—at least of our emotions and often of the entire situation.

While often counter-instinctive, the art of peacemaking requires first maintaining self-control over our attitudes and tempers, then following certain biblical principles related to resolving conflict. God's grace can give us the ability to seek the best interest of all involved instead of being consumed by a desire to win or retaliate. His Spirit can enable us to put into practice the valuable biblical principles that Abigail so aptly demonstrated.

Disagreements are delicate issues often set in explosive environments. Whether in the home, in the workplace or among national or world leaders, healthy conflict resolution comes only when someone involved has learned the art of peacemaking.

1. a. What are some common situations that call for damage control and peacemaking?

b. What responses can add fuel to the fire in these situations?

2. What are some biblical principles related to peacemaking which Abigail demonstrated?

Proverbs 11:2

Philippians 2:4

2 Timothy 2:24-26

3. What did Jesus teach about not responding in kind to hateful assaults—principles found in Abigail's counsel to David?

Luke 6:27-28

4. a. Our use of the tongue can make or break us in times of conflict. How does the Bible describe the "out-of-control" tongue?

James 1:26

James 3:6

b. What principles regarding constructive use of the tongue did Abigail demonstrate?

Proverbs 15:1

Ecclesiastes 10:12

Ephesians 4:29

5. A natural retaliation measure is to talk negatively to others about the party that hurt us. What does the Bible warn about slander?

Proverbs 11:12

Ephesians 4:31

6. a. While our initial heart attitudes may be negative, what constructive attitudes may we choose?

Colossians 3:12

b. Who empowers us to carry out these choices?
Ephesians 3:16 (Galatians 5:22-23)

c. What is it critical that we do in times of turmoil?
Galatians 5:25

Reference: Note 1, *Holy Spirit*, page 38.

7. What can be observed in Abigail that God gives when we call on Him to help us through a conflict?
2 Timothy 1:7

SUMMARY

8. a. What do you admire about Abigail?

b. What keys to peacemaking did she model for you?

9. What qualities that make for peace do you want the LORD to build into your life?

10. a. Are you or is someone you know presently facing a situation(s) that calls for peacemaking or damage control?

b. Briefly list the biblical principles related to peacemaking and damage control that promise to help in this situation.

LESSON 14 NOTES

1 *Rumors about David's alleged conspiracy* to the throne of Saul filled the nation. For this reason, David needed to keep a totally innocent record. One violent attack by David on a well-known Judaeen (Nabal) could have cost David the neutral position his fellow tribesmen in Judah had held toward David. After Saul's death, the people of Judah would be the ones to initially establish David as king of Israel. Their support was important if he was to inherit the throne.

2 *The idea that David might be destined to become king* in place of Saul probably had spread among the general populace. Abigail's assessment of

David, obviously different from her husband's (25:10-11), was that David was destined to be king (1 Samuel 25:28,30).

3 *fights the LORD's battles* (1 Samuel 25:28). Abigail knew about David's victories over the Philistines, battles in which David sought to glorify the LORD and protect God's people rather than exalt himself.

4 *David's marriages*. Saul had been cruel enough to give David's wife Michal to someone else in marriage after he forced David from the king's court. David then married Ahinoam, the mother of his first son, Amnon, and later Abigail, the widow of Nabal. One author writes: "It does not seem to have been expected that kings should content themselves with a single wife; even a relatively minor citizen like Samuel's father had had two wives (1 Samuel 1:2). Rather, it tends to show how God looked after David's interests. Abigail was a rich widow, we know, and we may surmise that Ahinoam was no less well-to-do. By such marriages David was probably able to afford to maintain his six hundred men with less difficulty than had been the case till now. Perhaps, too, these marriages helped David to forge closer links with the people of Judah. Till quite recent times 'diplomatic' marriages were an important method of establishing and strengthening bonds and alliances between families, clans, tribes and nations." Payne, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 134.

Scripture is clear on the godly principle of monogamy (Genesis 2:24), however, and while the biblical writer in no way condemns David's polygamous action, some commentators charge David with allowing himself to be corrupted by the customs of the times. (Example: Henry in *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, p. 319.)

LESSON 15

BATHSHEBA

After the death of Saul, David returned to Hebron where he was crowned king of Judah and eventually of the entire nation of Israel. After this, he moved the capital to Jerusalem as he established Israel as a strong and predominant nation, winning victories over Ammonite, Moabite, Philistine and Amalekite lands. He also established Israel from within, “doing what was just and right for all the people” (2 Samuel 8:15).

Indeed, the Scriptures tell us David was the shepherd king who loved his God and his people. “For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD’s commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:5). This blight on David’s reign may have been prevented had the woman involved, ***Bathsheba***, been like Abigail, whose counsel saved David from foolish impulsive action.

It all came about one spring when rather than being on the battlefield with his troops, David remained in Jerusalem at the palace. One evening as he walked about on the roof, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. Giving in to his lust, David inquired about her and found that she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah, one of David’s choicest soldiers (cf. 2 Samuel 23:8, 39). Uriah was a Hittite who had a Hebrew name and had married a Hebrew woman, so was most likely a worshiper of the LORD (YHWH).

We don’t know if Bathsheba knew she was in view of David to tempt him. It seems that a modest woman would have been aware of her surroundings as she bathed. When David sent for her and indicated he wanted to have sex with her, she could have humbly apologized for her indiscretion during her bath and sought to dissuade him. David was known for his devotion to God and for listening to the counsel of his subjects, even women, as with

Abigail. But instead, Bathsheba conceded to have sex with David, then washed and returned home.

Later she sent word to David that she was pregnant, and he decided to try to cover up their adultery. He had Uriah come home from the battlefield under the pretense of getting information about the status of the war. In reality, David wanted Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba so that all would think her baby was conceived with her husband. But the plan failed because Uriah refused to “have pleasure” with his wife while his comrades were still in battle. Instead he slept outside David’s house with David’s servants.

The next night, David got Uriah drunk, but he still slept outside David’s palace. So David sent him back to the battlefield with a note for Joab, David’s commander. He instructed Joab to put Uriah at the fiercest front-line position and withdraw the troops so that he would be killed. How a “man after God’s own heart” could rationalize killing Uriah, we can’t imagine, unless perhaps we look to our own cover-ups for sin. At any rate, David assumed that after Uriah’s death, all would believe Bathsheba’s baby had been conceived when Uriah was home. When Joab obeyed David’s order, Uriah and several other Israelite soldiers were killed. After Bathsheba’s time of mourning, David took her as his wife.

Although pagan kings of the day could practice adultery and murder for selfish ends without confrontation, God’s anointed king of Israel could not. God would not bend His laws for anyone, and *especially* not for the king He had placed in power. David was guilty of breaking the sixth, seventh, ninth and tenth commandments (Exodus 20:13-17), and had led Bathsheba to sin, too. The penalty for adultery in Israel was death for both parties (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22).

It is hard to imagine the feelings Bathsheba must have gone through in the months that followed with the secret of her pregnancy by David and death of her loyal and innocent husband Uriah. Perhaps it was a relief to her when a year later God had the prophet Nathan confront David and force him to come out with the truth.

To do this, Nathan told the king a parable about a rich man who had stolen the prized possession of a poor man. Not knowing it was a parable, David became furious at the injustice of the story. In the heat of the moment, Nathan used the parable to expose David's own wicked actions toward Uriah, a loyal and innocent man.

Nathan went on to tell David about the havoc that would result from his choices. There would be bloodshed in David's family from that point on, one of his sons would lie with one of David's wives in broad daylight (cf. 2 Samuel 16:22), and the child Bathsheba bore David would die.

David was genuinely remorseful over his sin. But even though God forgave David, and Bathsheba if she also repented, their child died. The story reveals the incredible redemption of the LORD, however, as Bathsheba went on to bare David another son named Solomon, a child that God's favor rested on from birth. Solomon would build the exquisite temple in Jerusalem, and, after asking God for wisdom to reign well (1 Kings 3:5-15), would become widely known the world over for his proverbs. He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,000 songs (1 Kings 4:32). The Book of Proverbs is comprised mostly of Solomon's sayings, many of which warn to stay away from the adulteress woman. Because of her lack of propriety with David, might Bathsheba have emphasized this caution with her son Solomon?

Although David had been very considerate of the people up to this point, even this "man after God's own heart" fell when he trifled with God's laws. At the height of success and prosperity in his reign, David committed both adultery and murder to satisfy his own appetites. The result was the beginnings of rebellion and turmoil throughout the nation. For whatever reason, Bathsheba, the one woman who could have stopped it all from happening, did not.

Read 2 Samuel 11.

1. a. Who was Bathsheba, and what mistake did she make (11:2-3)?

b. What was her second mistake (11:4)?

c. David was not a pagan king who could not be resisted without penalty of death. What could Bathsheba have done differently?

2. What happened that Bathsheba could not conceal forever, and what did she have to do (11:5)?

3. How did David first try to hide what had happened? What was the result (11:6-13)?

4. a. What did David resort to next to conceal his sin (11:14-15)?

b. What was the result (11:16-17)?

c. What was David's calloused response to Uriah's and the other men's deaths on his account (11:25)?

5. How was Bathsheba affected by these events (11:26-27)?

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-25.

6. a. After a year of certain regret and guilt, God used Nathan, the prophet, to bring out the truth for all to see. How did the rich man's attitude in Nathan's story correspond to David's (12:1-6)?

b. What did the LORD declare to David through Nathan (12:7-9)?

c. What would be the results of David and Bathsheba's actions (12:10-12, 14)?

7. a. What was David's response that well may have been Bathsheba's, too (12:13a)?

b. What grace did God extend to them (12:13b)?

8. What happened after the loss of Bathsheba's baby (12:24-25)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

KNOWING YOUR WEAKNESSES

Many have naively believed that because they are a Christian, love God and desire to please Him, victory over temptation will come easily or automatically. Inevitably failure, discouragement and disappointment follow this misconception.

The Bible reveals that in the heart of every believer a fleshly nature (or old sinful nature) wars against the indwelling Holy Spirit; and we must continually draw on God's power to keep this rebel nature in check.

Furthermore, this battle does not cease this side of eternity. There is not a time when we become so mature as believers that we no longer have to watch out for the fleshly nature within. David, who was known as "a man after God's own heart," fell hard after years of faithfulness to God.

David and Bathsheba's painful experience warns us to know our vulnerable areas so that we can set healthy boundaries and keep up defenses. As we proceed in our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's take a look at the critical topic of knowing our weaknesses.

1. In what areas might Bathsheba have been weak? What are some common areas where believers fall into temptation?

2. What are some results that can come from a Christian falling to temptation?

3. a. How is the process of falling into temptation described in James 1:13-15?

b. From these verses, what do we need to remember about the attractiveness of the sin that tempts us?

c. What does Proverbs 9:17-18 say about sin's appeal?

4. The areas in which believers fall to temptation are the same as non-believers. How does the Bible describe the *fleshly* or *sinful* nature in every human being?

Romans 8:7

Galatians 5:19-21a

5. a. How do the following passages describe the relationship between our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit?

Romans 7:21-23 (18-20)

Galatians 5:17

b. When we invite Jesus Christ into our lives, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us (John 14:16-17). How do the following verses describe the work of the Holy Spirit?

Ezekiel 36:27

Philippians 2:13

References: Note 1, *Holy Spirit*, and Note 2, *Works of the Holy Spirit*, p.38.

6. While the consequences of wrong choices may not go away, what can we do to know peace with God and experience His redemption of the situation?

Isaiah 55:7

I John 1:7, 9

Reference: Note 3, *blood of Jesus...purifies us* (1 John 1:7) p. 39.

7. No matter how deeply rooted the area of weakness, what does God promise as we continue to side with His Spirit in the battle?

Romans 8:33-34

I Corinthians 10:13

I Corinthians 15:58

8. How did Moses overcome his selfish desires according to Hebrews 11:24-27? What does this suggest we must maintain in order to overcome our weaknesses?

SUMMARY

9. a. What does Bathsheba's story teach you about the importance of being on guard against your weaknesses?

b. What does Bathsheba's story reveal about the ripple effects of sin?

10. a. Are there areas in which you are especially vulnerable to temptation?

b. How can you as a believer keep your guard up in these areas of vulnerability?

c. What principles and promises stand out to you as you seek to experience victory over weaknesses?

Note: Some areas of weakness are deeply rooted and require professional counseling to overcome. If you have unsuccessfully struggled for years with an area in your life, ask the Lord to lead you to a godly trained counselor.

LESSON 15 NOTES

1 *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 2, *Works of the Holy Spirit*.

2 *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 Cor 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 1, *Holy Spirit*, p. 38.

3 *blood of Jesus...purifies us (1:7)*. "How does Jesus' blood purify us from every sin? In Old Testament times, believers symbolically transferred their sins to an animal which they then sacrificed. The animal died in their place to pay for their sin and to allow them to continue living in God's favor. God graciously forgave them because of their faith in Him, and anticipated the day when Christ would completely remove sin. Real cleansing from sin came with Jesus, the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Sin by its very nature brings death—that is a fact as certain as the law of gravity. Jesus did not die for His own sins; He had none. Instead by a transaction that we may never fully understand, He died for the sins of the world. When we commit our lives to Christ and thus identify ourselves with Him, His death becomes ours. He has paid the penalty for our sins, and His blood has purified us. Just as Christ rose from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with Him (Romans 6:4)." *The Life Application Bible, NIV*.

LESSON 16

JEZEBEL

David's son, Solomon, was blessed by God with wisdom and wealth and power. However, he made the mistake in the polygamous mindset of the time of marrying foreign women—hundreds of them. These women worshiped foreign idols, so Solomon built places for them to worship their false gods. After awhile, he himself began to believe in those gods and worship them (1 Kings 11:3-8). For this reason, God told Solomon that after his death, all but the tribe of Judah would rebel against Solomon's son (1 Kings 11:9-13).

Sure enough, after he died, Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials, led a rebellion against Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and the northern Kingdom of Israel was formed. From this point on, *the nation of Israel was a divided kingdom: Israel in the north and Judah in the south*, each ruled by its own king.

After the split, Jeroboam formed two golden calves to be worshiped in the northern kingdom of Israel, one in Dan and one in Bethel. The first six kings over Israel turned from the LORD and worshiped the golden calves. Then, while godly people may have hoped for a good king, they got the worst ever, Ahab. His wife, *Jezebel*, worshiped the Canaanite god, Baal,¹ and determined to make Baal the national god of Israel. Ahab began to worship Baal, too.

God sent the prophet Elijah to tell Ahab that because of his evil behavior, there would be no rain for several years. Ahab was furious with Elijah, so God told Elijah to escape to a place near Cherith Brook, where he drank the water from the brook and ravens brought him bread and meat to eat each day (1 Kings 16-17). After the brook dried up from the drought, God led Elijah to stay with a widow in Zarephath and her son where they were all supernaturally fed by God (1 Kings 17:15-16).

After three years, God told Elijah to tell King Ahab he would end the drought. During this time, Jezebel had sought to kill all the prophets of the LORD in Israel (I Kings 18:4), and make the people embrace Baalism. God sent Elijah to reveal to the people that He alone was God in Israel.

Elijah challenged King Ahab to bring all the people to Mount Carmel along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who ate their meals at Queen Jezebel's table. There, Elijah challenged Jezebel's prophets to take a bull cut up for sacrifice and put it on their altar, but not light the fire. They were to pray to Baal to burn up the sacrifice supernaturally.

The hundreds of Baal prophets spent all day and into the evening doing everything they could to get their gods to act—dancing, leaping, cutting themselves with knives—but nothing happened. When it was finally Elijah's turn, he built his altar of twelve stones for the tribes of Israel and poured water all over it, built a wide trench around the altar and filled it with water. Then, as Elijah prayed to YHWH, fire came down from heaven and burned the sacrifice, the wood and the stones, and completely dried up the trench. The people instantly fell down to worship God, shouting, "The LORD—He is God!" Elijah told them to capture the false prophets of Baal. Elijah killed all of them so they could not lead the people in worship anymore.

When this was finished, Elijah told Ahab rain was coming. Sure enough, King Ahab did not reach home before getting soaked from the downpour.

When Ahab told all the events of the day to Jezebel, she was furious. She sent a messenger to Elijah telling him that he would be dead in 24 hours.

Exhausted, Elijah was overcome with fear and ran to the wilderness to hide. There, God ministered to him through an angel² who then sent Elijah on the 40 day and night journey to Mt. Horeb. There God encouraged the prophet and told him that he was not alone; there were 7,000 faithful people in Israel who had never worshiped Baal.

Elijah's whereabouts remained unknown to Jezebel for a number of years, even though they searched diligently for him. That is, until King Ahab decided he wanted to own the vineyard of a man named Naboth (1 Kings 21). Ahab offered to buy the vineyard, but Naboth wanted to keep the vineyard that had been in his family for generations. When Jezebel saw Ahab was downcast about this, she arranged for a mock trial where she hired two men to falsely accuse Naboth of speaking against God and the king. Naboth was taken outside the city and stoned to death.

When Ahab went down to take the vineyard, to his surprise Elijah showed up. God had sent Elijah to tell Ahab that Jezebel's actions would lead to Ahab's death. He said that the dogs who licked up the blood of Naboth at his stoning would also lick up his blood. With this, the Scriptures adds: "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife" (1 Kings 21:25). Elijah also told Ahab that his bloodline would be entirely cut off because of how he had led Israel into sin (21:21-22).

Three years later, Ahab was killed in battle with Syria. When his chariot was washed, dogs came and licked up the blood as Elijah had predicted. Jezebel lived another eight years. Then Jehu, commander of Joram's army, killed Jezebel's son, Joram, and seized the throne of the Northern Kingdom. When Jezebel heard Jehu was coming, she put on eye make-up, fixed her hair and called him a murderer from her high palace window. He had her eunuch servants throw her down, horses trampled her underfoot, then dogs ate her body (2 Kings 9:32f). So ended the life of Israel's most evil queen.

Read 1 Kings selected verses.

1. Read 1 Kings 16:29-33. Who was Jezebel (16:31)?

2. a. Because of his evils, what did the LORD tell Ahab through the prophet Elijah (17:1)?

b. What did Jezebel try to do during this time (18:4, 13)?

c. When and what did the LORD tell Elijah to speak to Ahab (18:1-2a)?

Read 1 Kings 18:16-46.

3. Whom did Elijah have Ahab gather on Mount Carmel (18:19)?

Reference: Note 1, *Baals and Ashtoreths*, p. 50.

4. What contest did Elijah set up to prove the LORD (YHWH) the only true God in Israel (18:21-24)?

5. a. What did the 450 prophets of Baal do all morning (18:26)?

b. What did Elijah suggest (18:27)?

c. How did the prophets carry on until evening (18:28-29)?

6. a. As the people watched, how did Elijah build his altar with the twelve stones representing the tribes of Israel (18:32-35)?

b. What was Elijah's simple, earnest prayer to the LORD (YHWH), God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (18:37)?

7. What happened after Elijah prayer (18:38-40)?

8. How did Elijah's prophecy also prove YHWH that day (18:45)?

Read 1 King 19:1-3, 8.

9. a. What did Ahab tell Jezebel, and what was her undaunted response (19:1-3)?

Reference: Note 3, *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life*, p. 50.

b. After an angel ministered to Elijah, where did he end up and what did the LORD reassure him of (19:8, 18)?

Read 1 Kings 21:5-26.

10. a. What did Jezebel do to secure the vineyard Ahab wanted (21:8-10)?

b. What did the LORD announce to Ahab when he went to take Naboth's vineyard (21:19, 21, 23)?

11. a. What part did Jezebel have in the harsh judgment of her husband (21:25)?

b. Ahab was killed in battle, and dogs licked his blood as they washed the chariot he died in. How was Jezebel's death eight years later described (2 Kings 9:30-37)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

THE REALITY OF EVIL

Jezebel almost seems like a wicked witch in a children's story, but in fact, she was a real person. Her life exemplifies the hardened state and terrible end of one completely given to selfishness and denial of God. Jezebel's life also brings us face to face with the reality of evil in the world.

In our last lesson, we looked at the sinful nature present in the human heart that must be overcome by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will look at what happens when the selfish nature is given free reign. The Bible reveals that we cannot truly be god of our own lives. If we choose to reject God and our God-given conscience, there is one, the Scriptures declare, who is already the god of self-centeredness. He is called Satan,⁴ or the devil, and as lord of all who oppose God, he is exposed as the father of all evil.

Jezebel's life stands as an example of one who, whether knowingly or not, sold herself out to do Satan's bidding. In her zealous support of the anti-God worship of Baals and Ashtoreths, she dared to curse her own Creator and became a pawn in the hands of Satan. He used her for evil, then brutally destroyed her.

In his classic publication, *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis states: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to

feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors."⁵

It is important to have a balanced understanding of the enemy of God and our soul, to be aware that turning on God gives Satan control, and to know our means to complete victory over him. Unlike Jezebel, to be a part of the solution rather than the problem of evil in the world, we must know how to stand solidly on God's side in the battle for good. As we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's make some observations about the reality of evil in our world.

1. a. What choices did Jezebel make that perpetrated evil?

b. What were some of the results of Jezebel's evil actions?

2. a. How is Satan described in the following verses?

John 8:44b (Jesus speaking)

John 10:10 (Jesus using analogy to compare His mission with that of Satan)
(Example: Luke 9:42)

2 Corinthians 11:14

I Thessalonians 3:5

I John 5:19 (Revelation 12:9)

2 Corinthians 4:4

b. Which of the above traits were exhibited in Jezebel's character?

c. According to the Bible, the destructive world system, based upon force, greed, selfish ambition and sinful pleasure, originates with Satan (Ephesians 2:1-2). Which of these did Jezebel practice?

3. The Bible describes the world as a battlefield where Satan and his unseen forces of evil fight for control and/or destruction of God's beloved creation, mankind. What does Ephesians 6:11-12 declare about our battle with evil?

Reference: Note 4, *Satan, demons*, page 51.

4. a. As a created being, Satan is not all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present or in any way equal with his Creator, God. However, as angels, he and his forces are immortal, calculated, cruel, and very strong (cf. Acts 19:13-16). According to the Bible, who has authority over Satan?
1 Peter 3:21c-22

b. What is the basis for Satan's ultimate defeat, according to Col 2:15?

5. Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel was a demonstration of the power of God over Satan's evil. What choices can we make to assure God's victory in the battle with evil we face?
Ephesians 6:10-11

Ephesians 6:14-18 (list the pieces of divine armor)

James 4:7

6. What is God's promise when we trust Him in the battle against evil?
Psalm 44:5

SUMMARY

7. While Jezebel lived to please herself, who was really controlling her life? What warning is here for you?

8. a. What can you do to side with good and against evil in the world today?

b. Is there a decision you are making now that these truths should affect?

LESSON 16 NOTES

1 *Baals and Ashtoreths, 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 2, *Angels*, p. 112.

3 *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life* (19:3). “In spite of Elijah’s great triumph in the trial on Mount Carmel and the dramatic demonstration that Elijah’s God is the LORD of heaven and earth and the source of Israel’s blessings, Jezebel is undaunted. Hers is no empty threat, and Ahab has shown that he is either unwilling or unable to restrain her. So Elijah knows that one of the main sources of Israel’s present apostasy is still spewing out its poison and that his own life is in danger.” *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 513.

4 *Satan, demons.* The Bible refers to Satan as an angelic being who led a heavenly revolt against God and consequently was cast out of heaven with his rebelling host of angels (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). Under his leadership, these angelic beings became known as demons, and are very organized in their schemes and attacks on human beings (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his forces work to get people to worship Satan (Luke 4:7) and to prevent individuals from turning to God (Luke 4:8). Satan's defeat is promised in Genesis 3:15 and completed at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). He is still a force to be reckoned with until Christ returns to judge the earth (Matthew 16:27). James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil (or demonic forces) by continually willing God's leadership in their lives. The authority Jesus exercised over demonic power in New Testament accounts proved that He was the Messiah (Christ) and Son of God as He claimed. See also Note 2, *Angels*, p. 112.

5 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, page 1.

LESSON 17

HULDAH

The northern kingdom, called Israel, had 19 kings, and all of them led the people away from God and into greater and greater idolatry. God had promised that if they were faithful to Him, they would be blessed in every way. But if they were unfaithful and worshiped the Canaanite idols with their repulsive practices, he would judge them as he had judged the people in the land before them.

In 722 B.C., after more than 200 years of idolatry in Israel, God allowed Assyria to take over the northern kingdom, seizing the capital in Samaria. Those who had not fled to the southern kingdom of Judah were either massacred or taken into captivity and dispersed throughout Assyrian lands.

During those same 200 years, the southern kingdom of Judah had 165 years of good kings. They were all in the line of David and lead the people toward worship of God. In the remaining years, however, evil kings had injected idolatry and its horrid practices in the bloodstream of the nation of Judah, causing irreparable damage.

Josiah was the last great king of Judah. He became king at age eight, and at sixteen began to live to please the LORD. He destroyed every idol in the land he could get his hands on and then set up a system to rebuild the Temple. While they were in the process of doing this, a copy of the Book of the Law of Moses was found and read to the king. Shocked as he heard the promise of judgment for the sins Judah had committed, Josiah had the high priest and his palace administrator seek the mind of God through a prophet.

The young king was close to Jeremiah, but for whatever reason, probably accessibility, they went instead to the prophetess *Huldah*. She lived with her family in Jerusalem. Her husband was Shallum, the keeper of the wardrobe (probably the king's) and possibly the uncle of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32:7).

God would clearly impress on a true prophet what He Himself would say. Huldah told them the message God gave her plainly. “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to others gods” (2 Kings 22:16-17). But the LORD also had Huldah tell Josiah that because his heart was responsive and humble before Him in hearing the LORD’s words, Josiah would not see the disaster of the fall of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom.

As a result of Huldah’s courage to bear the true word of God, even though unpleasant, Josiah continued to do everything he could to purify Judah and the people from idolatry. He held the largest Passover celebration since Samuel’s day for the people at Jerusalem. He also renewed his personal covenant to love and serve the LORD according to His law, and led the people to do the same.

Even though Jerusalem would soon fall to Babylon and its people taken into exile, we can be sure that the years of Josiah’s reign brought many people out of the darkness of idolatry and into the light of God’s presence, affecting their children after them for centuries to come.

Josiah died in battle against Egypt at age 39, after ruling Judah 31 years. Of all the kings, he had the most perfect record of faithfulness and purity before God. Jerusalem fell 25 years later in 586 B.C.

1. How were the kings just prior to Josiah’s reign described (his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon)?

Manasseh (55 year reign) 2 Kings 21:1-6, 9, 16

Amon (2 year reign) 2 Kings 21:21-23

2. What are we told about Josiah? 2 Kings 22:1-2

3. In the eighteenth year of his reign, what happened as Josiah was having the temple restored for worship of the LORD? 2 Kings 22:8, 10

Note: The Book of the Law could have been the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) or all or part of Deuteronomy.

4. Summarize what the Book of the Law promised:

a. If Israel worshiped the LORD, obeyed His laws and did not serve idols (Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 10-11)

b. If Israel disregarded God's laws and followed other gods (Deuteronomy 28:15-20, 49-52, 64-65).

5. Josiah had seen these things happen to the northern kingdom when they abandoned God and fell into repulsive idolatry. But Judah had done the same under Josiah's father and grandfather.

Josiah ordered Hilkiyah the priest and several others to immediately ask God, through a prophet, about where Judah stood (2 Kings 22:11-13).

Huldah was known as a prophetess, gifted to receive God's word to them. What do we learn about her in 2 Kings 22:14?

6. a. What answer regarding Judah's future did God give through Huldah (22:15-17)?

b. What did God have to say to Josiah (22:18-20)?

7. After hearing from Huldah, how did Josiah seek to lead the people back to God and please God himself?

2 Kings 23:1-2

2 Kings 23:3

2 Kings 23:4, 10, 12, 15

2 Kings 23:21

Note: The Passover was an annual celebration commanded by God to remind the people of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

8. How was Josiah described in 2 Kings 23:25?

9. Josiah died in battle at age 39 after reigning in Judah 31 years. What happened 25 years later, in fulfillment of Huldah's prophecy?

2 Kings 25:8-11, 21b

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

THE POWER OF TRUTH

Huldah was willing to state the hard truth, even to King Josiah. As a result of Huldah's action of courage and faithfulness, she is placed alongside Deborah and Hannah as a woman whose wisdom redirected the course of Israel. King Josiah accepted truth and took humble, courageous steps as the leader of his nation. The southern kingdom embraced the truth and turned their land temporarily from the judgment of God. The power of the truth is vividly illustrated in Huldah's story.

Sometimes the truth is hard, and it can be far easier to misconstrue or simply lie about the facts. Yet the Bible reveals that telling the truth, no matter how difficult, ultimately leads to the highest good. In Lesson 5 (cf. page 24), we learned that God has created the universe to be governed by certain spiritual as well as physical principles. One of these principles is that truth is constructive and, in the end, powerful. As we reflect on

Huldah's story, let's consider what the Bible has to say about the power of truth.

1. Why is it hard to tell the truth at times? Why might it have been difficult for Huldah to present the full message of God to King Josiah?

2. a. How is honesty viewed in our society today?

b. What are the results?

3. Not telling the whole truth can easily become a habit in an individual or a society. What problems eventually result from the practice of dishonesty by an individual or society?

Psalm 36:3

Isaiah 59:4

2 Thessalonians 2:10

4. In the Scriptures, the truth is synonymous with God's Word and wisdom.
What do the following verses say about the truth of God's Word?

Psalm 119:105

Psalm 119:45

John 8:32

Psalm 33:4

5. According to the Scriptures, where do we meet God's truth?

John 1:14

John 18:37b

6. What do the following reveal about practicing honesty with each other, as reflected in Huldah's story? Ephesians 4:15, 25

7. What are some areas in which people can deceive themselves?
Galatians 6:3

James 1:22

Revelation 3:17

8. Josiah was honest with himself and Israel after hearing the message of God through Huldah. As with Huldah, Josiah and Israel, what are the benefits of honesty with ourselves and God?

Psalm 32:5-8

SUMMARY

9. What did Huldah's story teach about the power of truth that is helpful to you?

10. a. What have you reviewed in this lesson about the truth and God's Word?

b. What did you see about the truth and Jesus Christ?

11. Are there situations where you are tempted to lie or shy away from the truth? Why is honesty the best policy in this situation?

12. While God's promises were specifically to Israel in the Book of the Law, what warnings are there for our times?

LESSON 18

HERODIAS

The people of southern kingdom were in exile about 70 years when Artaxerxes, the king of Babylon, allowed Ezra and later Nehemiah to return to Israel with as many Jews as wanted to go back. They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Though the people were back, they were not free. Over the next 400 years, they were ruled by the Persians, then Greeks, Egyptians, and Syrians. Then for about a hundred years they became free while a family of Jewish leaders called the Maccabees kept invaders out of Judah. But the Jews neglected worship of God again and the Roman army invaded, bringing occupation by one of the strongest governments in all of history.

The Roman emperor sent a soldier later known as Herod the Great, a non-Jew, to be king of Judah. He was a ruthless man the people hated. Herod rebuilt the Temple in an attempt to make friends with the Jewish people. But they longed for the coming of the Messiah whom God had promised through the prophets. He would free the Jewish people and set up Israel as *the* world power. It was during this time of political unrest that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea.

After Herod the Great's death, Rome split leadership in Palestine between three of Herod's sons. These were called tetrarchs, and Herod Antipas was one of these. The historian Josephus records that while Antipas was in Rome, he visited his half-brother, Phillip, who was married to *Herodias*, his niece and the granddaughter of Herod the Great. Most likely this young woman did not see much prestige in Phillip's future. During that visit, Herodias decided to marry Phillip's half-brother and her uncle Herod Antipas. She divorced Phillip, Herod divorced his wife, the daughter of the king of Arabia, and they married. Herod and Herodias moved back to Palestine where Herod held the prestigious position of tetrarch. Their marriage was clearly against the laws of Israel (Leviticus 18:16) and

disgusting to the people. But the Herod's were non-Jews (actually descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother), and did not follow laws of Moses. Instead, they followed the fashions of the day in Rome, which were becoming increasingly amoral.

During this time, a man called John the Baptist had become tremendously popular and influential in Palestine. Called by God from birth to prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1), John lived and preached in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. His prophecy from God was that the people should turn from sin and be baptized in preparation for the soon-coming Messiah.

When Jesus of Nazareth came to be baptized by John, both to identify with John's ministry and to begin His own public ministry, John saw the heavens open and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descend upon Jesus. At the same time, a voice from heaven said, "This is my dear Son, whom I love. I am greatly pleased with Him" (Matthew 3:17). Thus recognizing Jesus as the promised Messiah, John urged his disciples to follow Him.

John was so popular, however, that he still had a following until Herod Antipas arrested him. This happened because John had the nerve to rebuke Herod for marrying his brother's wife while his brother was still living. This enraged Herodias, who wanted John killed. But Herod was afraid to kill the Baptist, who was considered to be a prophet by many and was tremendously popular with the people. Also, Herod liked to listen to John, though puzzled by his words (Mark 6:20).

Herodias, a true descendant of Herod the Great, had his ruthless spirit and did not give up on her intent to kill John the Baptist. Her opportunity for revenge came during Herod's birthday celebration with a large selection of high level people in attendance. Some say Herodias planned to trap her husband into killing John that day. Regardless, after everyone had been eating and drinking freely, Herodias' teen-aged daughter by Phillip, performed a lascivious dance for Herod and his guests. It was so erotically pleasing that Herod told her he would give her anything she asked for. The girl went straight to her mother to ask what she should request, then

returned to say, “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

This was not amusing to Herod, who had protected John, knowing him “to be a righteous and holy man.” In fact, it “greatly distressed him.” But Herodias did not care if she ruined Herod’s birthday; she wanted John dead, and this was her chance. The executioner was sent to the jail, beheaded John, the prophet of God, and brought his head on a platter to Salome who took it straight to her mother. Herodias had caused her daughter and husband to murder an innocent man without even a trial. John was probably about 32 years old.

The Scriptures say no more about Herodias, but the historian Josephus tells us that Herodias was jealous of her brother Agrippa’s status as king instead of tetrarch. She encouraged Herod to appeal to Caesar Caligula to give him the title of king, too. But her brother Agrippa was close to Caligula and told him that Herod had conspired against him. Caligula questioned Herod and Herodias, but unsatisfied with their answers, stripped Herod of his position and banished him to Gaul. Caligula offered Herodias her freedom, but she went with her husband. From what we have seen, it must have been to her best advantage.

Born into the family of the Herod’s, perhaps Herodias never had a chance to be anything but self-centered, immoral and cruel. But John the Baptist had offered Herod and Herodias the way of repentance and to a right relationship with God. Tragically, Herodias instead chose a path of revenge and murder of a godly man.

Read Mark 6:17-29.

1. a. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and heard about Jesus and His miracles. What were people saying about Jesus (6:14-15)?

b. Who did Herod suspect Jesus to be (6:16)?

2. a. Why had Herod previously arrested and imprisoned John the Baptist?
What had John had courage to tell Herod (6:17-18)?

Reference: Note 1, *Herodias*, p. 72.

b. What was Herodias' response to John the Baptist's message (6:19a)?

3. a. Why did Herod prevent Herodias from having John killed (6:20)?

b. What does Matthew 14:5 add to this?

4. What did Herodias find in Herod's birthday celebration, and who was in attendance that day (6:21)?

5. a. How did Herodias obligate Herod to kill John (6:22-24)?

b. What did Herodias' daughter immediately request of her step-father (6:25)?

6. How did Herod respond, and what tragically happened (6:26-28)?

7. How did Herodias' evil affect her daughter and husband?

8. a. What did John's disciples do when they heard the sad news?
Matthew 14:12

b. What was Jesus' response?
Matthew 14:13

9. Jesus interacted with Pilate during the mock trial before His crucifixion. But when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to decide his sentence, what did Jesus do? Luke 23:8-9

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

RESPONDING TO SIN AND GUILT

Herodias, like Jezebel, is a sad picture of what a woman can become when she completely stifles her conscience and yields to her selfish nature. Because she refused the opportunity to hear, receive and respond correctly to the directions God gave her through a godly man, she has gone down in history as one of its most evil women.

The warning for us regards the importance of embracing God's truth about our sin whenever we hear it. If we turn our backs and harden our hearts, that same hardened heart may surprise us with how low it can cause us to go.

In the 1970s, a well-known psychiatrist by the name of Karl Menninger grappled with the fact that our society was moving toward the popular view that sin is an outdated idea. In his book *Whatever Became of Sin?* he wrote:

The very word "sin," which seems to have disappeared, was a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word. It described a central point in every civilized human being's life plan and life style. But the word went away. It has almost disappeared—the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin?²

Menninger went on to warn that sin and the guilt it produces are realities we cannot pretend away without paying a terrible price.

In Herodias' society, people also sought to "outdate" the concept of sin. When confronted with her immorality, Herodias responded by attacking the one who reminded her of her guilt. Her actions involved ruthlessly murdering a prophet of God, snuffing out her husband's spark of faith and creating a monster like herself in her daughter. Indeed, Herodias' life is a great testimony of how not to respond when confronted with our sin and guilt. It is also an example of what happens when a person or society tries to simply rationalize the concept of sin as outdated.

In the midst of this dreary account, however, the Bible reveals liberating truths about responding to sin and guilt. It is to these wonderful principles for hope and prosperity that we will now turn as we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*.

1. Herodias' life could have changed dramatically had she embraced the teachings of the prophet John the Baptist. According to Acts 3:19, what did God want to happen in her life?

2. a. What do you think kept Herodias from acknowledging her sin and repenting of her lifestyle?

b. What does Ephesians 4:17-19 suggest?

3. On what basis are all people accountable for their sin?
Romans 1:18-20

Romans 2:14-15

4. The Bible reveals that God hates sin because of its destructive nature. What do the following verses warn about the aggressive and corruptive nature of sin?

Romans 1:28-32 (summarize)

Romans 2:5-6 (also 7-10)

5. What are some factors that can persuade us to face guilt?

Psalm 51:3

John 16:7-8

Hebrews 4:12-13

6. What does the Bible reveal about God's character that encourages us to approach Him with a repentant heart?

Psalms 103:8-10

Romans 2:4

Hebrews 4:15-16 (speaking of Jesus Christ)

2 Peter 3:9

7. We can find freedom from guilt by confessing specific sin to God. What is God's promise when we come to Him genuinely repentant?

1 John 1:9

Note: According to Old and New Testament terminology, confession means to agree with God about our sin, to acknowledge violation of His principles. But it also involves repentance, a genuine regret and determination to change wrong attitudes and behavior. In summary, confession with repentance involves making changes that will prevent repeating the sinful action.

8. What price did God pay to justly forgive the sins of our lives?

Isaiah 53:5-6

Hebrews 9:22, 14

9. a. What is characteristic of God's forgiveness?

Ephesians 2:8-9

b. What are the results of responding to our sin and guilt as God's word directs?

Romans 5:1

Romans 6:22

SUMMARY

10. What did you learn from Herodias about wrong responses to sin / guilt?

11. What can keep you from honestly facing your sin?

Reference: See also Notes 4-5, *False guilt, true guilt*, pp.72-73.

12. What have you seen in this lesson about constructive responses to sin and guilt?

13. What benefits come with dealing with sin and guilt in this way?

Forgiveness is the miracle of a fresh start, a new beginning, a second chance. Already on Mount Sinai God revealed himself as a God who delights in forgiving sins. Because of his compassion, love, grace and mercy, God offers pardon for our sins by putting them out of sight, out of reach, out of mind and out of existence. Christ's shedding of his blood on the cross, foreshadowed by the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, was the final and ultimate sacrifice, where Jesus took all our sins--all the selfishness, the hatred, the deceit, the pride--and nailed them to the cross so that those who believe might be declared innocent and free from sin's controlling power.

The Bible clearly tells us that if we confess our sins, acknowledging our guilt and our responsibility, God can be counted on to forgive. The Bible goes on to remind us that those whose lives have been changed by the power of forgiveness must respond by holding out the hand of a new beginning to any who have sinned against them. We must be people who have learned to freely forgive.

The NIV Topical Study Bible, p. 1001.

LESSON 18 NOTES

1 *Herodias* was a granddaughter of Herod the Great, who was king over Palestine when Jesus and John the Baptist were born. Her father was Aristobulus. She married her uncle, Herod Philip, who lived in Rome. While a guest in their home, Herod Antipas and Herodias decided to leave their spouses (Herod Antipas was married to the daughter of a king in Arabia) to marry each other. As noted in the commentary, this was clearly against the laws of Israel (Leviticus 18:16) and disgusting to the people. The Herod's were non-Jews (actually descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother), and did not follow laws of Moses. Instead, they followed the fashions of the day in Rome, which was becoming increasingly amoral. John the Baptist alone had the courage to confront Herod and Herodias with the truth that they might repent and turn to God.

2 Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* pp. 1-2.

3 The Old Testament Hebrew word for *sin* means “missing the mark” or falling short of God's standards. The New Testament Greek word for *sin* means “wrongdoing,” “unrighteousness,” or “injustice.”

4 *False guilt* “stems from people foisting their sin (greed, self-pity, selfishness, etc.) or expectations on us. It also grows from unrealistic expectations from ourselves. True guilt originates from sin and leads us to confession & restitution.” Judith Couchman, *Getting a Grip on Guilt* p. 34.

5 *False guilt*. In her book, *Falling Apart or Coming Together*, Lois Walfrid Johnson contrasts differences between true and false guilt (next page).

	TRUE GUILT	FALSE GUILT
GUILT PRODUCER	The Holy Spirit convicts, based on truth.	Satan condemns, based on lies.
OBJECTIVE	Improvement.	Defeat.
SPOTLIGHT	Specific, unforgiven sin.	Past failures and forgiven sin; general in nature.
YOUR REACTION	Remorse and repentance; asking for forgiveness.	Helplessness; a no-win situation; not knowing how to make a change; no peace if you ask for forgiveness.
GUILT PRODUCER'S ACTION	Grace; forgiveness.	Accusation.
RESULT	Peace; feeling set free, cleansed and loved.	No peace; defeat; hopelessness; despair; worthlessness. Feeling emotionally, spiritually and physically tired.

LESSON 19

SALOME, MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOHN

Jesus of Nazareth was born a few months after his cousin, John, who later became known as the Baptist. Jesus was a carpenter, after His father Joseph's trade, until he began His ministry around the age of thirty. The first year of Jesus' three-year ministry was one of inauguration, the second of popularity, and the third of opposition which led to His crucifixion.

It was during the second year of ministry that Jesus began to call His disciples. Of the Twelve, the three closest disciples to Jesus were Peter, James and John, all three fishermen. James and John were brothers and the sons of Zebedee and his wife *Salome*. The two brothers had been disciples of John the Baptist, who recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah at His baptism. The Baptist then pointed Jesus out to his disciples (John 1:29, 35). When Jesus told James and John to follow Him, they immediately left their nets by the Sea of Galilee and traveled with Jesus in His itinerant ministry.

But from this point on, Salome was also very involved with the ministry of Jesus. Not only were her sons Jesus' closest disciples, she herself spent time among the women who traveled with Jesus in Galilee, meeting the needs of Him and His disciples (Mark 15:40-41). No doubt she watched Jesus perform miracles of healing and deliverance, saw Him feed thousands with five loaves and three fish, and heard her sons talk of His raising people from the dead, walking on water and calming storms. More than this, she was moved by His profound teachings on love, forgiveness, and the Kingdom of God. As throngs of people followed Jesus and thousands gathered to hear Him teach, she observed Jesus' completely selfless life focused on glorifying God and serving the poor and outcasts.

Then, in Jesus' third year of ministry, she felt the strain as the religious leaders began to plot to kill Jesus. He finally withdrew with His disciples to a region near the desert and a village called Ephraim (John 11:53-57). There, He prepared them for His departure.

Finally, as they journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover, Salome could feel the heaviness over the group. Jesus had already told his disciples He would be betrayed, killed, and be raised to life on the third day (Matthew 17:22-23). But the disciples never knew how to process this. They thought Messiah, whom the prophets foretold, would be a victorious King in Israel to free her from Roman oppression.¹

As they traveled, Jesus again prophesied specifics of what was about to happen. “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!” (Matthew 20:18-19).

It was after these disturbing words that Salome came to Jesus with her sons, James and John, and knelt before Him. When Jesus asked what Salome wanted Him to do, she answered, with her sons in full agreement, that she wanted James and John to be Jesus’ top men when He set up His kingdom, sitting at Jesus’ right and left hand.

Jesus’ response to Salome was gracious. He gently tried to help her see that for James and John to stay close to Him would require persecution and hardship for His name. “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

James and John answered, “Yes, we can.” Jesus responded with sobering words, “Indeed, you will, but only my Father can determine who has these positions” (Matthew 20:22-23).

The other disciples must have had their eye on these positions, too, because Salome’s bold request made them angry at James and John. Jesus used the moment to teach his disciples the true definition of greatness: “whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be

served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

After this awkward situation, Salome remained faithful to Jesus through the difficult days that followed. She stood at the cross with Jesus’ mother Mary during the long hours of Jesus’ grief and pain (Matthew 27:55-56), and listened as Jesus charged her son, John, to care for His mother (Jn 19:26-27).

Two days later, Salome left before sunrise with the women who had prepared spices for Jesus’ tomb (Mark 16:1f). To their shock, they discovered the stone rolled away and an angel² inside announcing Jesus had risen just as He had promised! Over the next 40 days, no doubt Salome was among those privileged to see Jesus in His resurrection body and hear His teaching from the Scriptures that proved Him the long-awaited Christ.

We can imagine Salome served in the early church for the rest of her life alongside her sons James and John. James became the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2), but John lived well into his nineties as the longest living apostle. He wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation.

In the final analysis, the spiritual legacy of Salome was beyond her imagination, and she herself stands as an example of persevering faithfulness to the LORD.

Read Selected Verses.

1. How were Salome’s sons, James and John, called by Jesus to be His disciples? Mark 1:19-20

2. How do these verses exemplify why the other disciples called Salome's boys "sons of thunder?" Luke 9:54 (51-56)

3. a. The Pharisees had been plotting for some time to kill Jesus (Matthew 12:14). What had Jesus been explaining for some time?
Matthew 16:21

Read Matthew 20:17-28.

b. What did Jesus tell them again during this journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (20:18-19)?

4. a. What did Salome do after this distressing prophecy (20:20-21)?

b. What was Jesus' twofold response (20:22-23)?

5. Most likely the other disciples were also ambitious for these places of honor. What was their response to Salome's request (which her sons no doubt agreed to) (20:24)?

6. How did Jesus use this situation to define true greatness?
Matthew 20:26-27

Matthew 20:28

Read Selected Verses.

7. Salome and her sons experienced a gentle rebuke here, but she was a faithful disciple to the end. Where was Salome when Jesus was crucified?
Matthew 27:55-56

8. What amazing experience did she have on the third day?
Mark 16:1-8

9. What did Salome most likely also experience?
Luke 24:36, 50-52

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

A LOOK AT FAVORITISM

Favoritism is prevalent in society--in the political world, the church, the workplace, the family. Individuals or a culture may favor pretty over plain, young over aged, rich over poor, powerful over subservient, educated over uneducated, outgoing over introverted, one race over another. While human nature leans toward partiality, the Bible presents God as impartial. His holy character is devoid of selfishly motivated favoritism.

This was evident in the Lord's response to Salome. Rather than grant Salome's request that He show partiality to her sons, Jesus directed her and the others toward a greater pursuit than power or status—the high calling of serving Him and others. He pointed them to love, the character quality that overcomes status seeking. In short, the one close to the heart of the Lord would be, like Him, a suffering servant, focused on loving God and others at any cost.

Jesus' response to Salome was a picture of God's total resistance to partiality and favoritism. Even though James and John were closer to Jesus than others, He would treat no one as superior. In this the Son of God was reflecting God's character (Hebrews 1:3) and the character He wants to build into us.

How does partiality affect us, and how should we view prejudices in our own lives? In this lesson, we will study biblical truth regarding partiality and favoritism.

1. What are some results of partialities in families and social groups?

2. a. Had Jesus granted Salome's request, what would have been the result?
- b. Why does favoritism cause tension and discourage harmonious relationships?
3. a. Salome was ambitious for her sons. In His response to Salome, what did Jesus say we should ambitiously pursue in order to be great in His Kingdom (20:26-28)?
- b. How does such a focus help overcome partialities?
4. a. How did Jesus' enemies describe Him in Mark 12:14a?
- b. What do the following reveal about God regarding favoritism?
2 Chronicles 19:7

Mark 12:41-44

Acts 10:34-35

Romans 10:12

5. What principles of fairness and impartiality are found in the following passages?

Deuteronomy 16:19-20a

Psalms 82:3

Leviticus 19:15

Ephesians 6:9

6. a. How was Salome insensitive to the other disciples in what she asked of Jesus?

b. What did Jesus teach in Matthew 22:36-40 that can keep us from being insensitive others because of personal ambition?

7. Favoritism and partiality are often connected to our old selfish nature and impossible to overcome without God's help. How can we experience His power over self-centeredness?

Romans 12:2

Ephesians 4:22-24

Galatians 5:25 (16)

SUMMARY

8. What have you observed in Salome's life that you admire?

9. What focuses does God want you to have that overcome selfish ambition and partialities?

10. a. Is there a relationship in your life with a person or group where you struggle to be impartial? How do you think Jesus would be in this situation?

b. What do you want God, through His Spirit, to produce in you as you daily give your life to Him? Make this your prayer.

LESSON 19 NOTES

1 *earthly kingdom*. When we think of Christ's kingdom today, we imagine a heavenly kingdom. But Salome did not. She expected, as did the others, that Jesus would soon exercise His power to establish an earthly kingdom.

Politically speaking, Salome wanted her sons to be the new king's right-hand men. She did not realize that those closest to the Lord would be suffering servants as He was. James and John did in fact serve and suffer as Christ's disciples, as He set up His kingdom in men's hearts.

Prophecy did describe the Messiah (Christ) to be a reigning king, and, indeed, he will return as that one day (cf. Matthew 24-25). But they had overlooked the prophecy saying Christ would be a suffering redeemer of His people first (cf. Isaiah 53).

2 Reference: Note 2, *angels*, p. 112.

LESSON 20

MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalene was from the town of Magdala on the northwestern shore of the Lake of Galilee, near Capernaum. She had met Jesus there, and He cast seven demonic spirits out of her. Demonic possession was prevalent at the time of Christ, and we don't know how these spirits made themselves manifest in Mary's life. But we can be sure everyone saw the profound change in her when she was set free from the dark world of Satan to walk in the light of God's own Son.

And Mary did walk with Jesus as He traveled from one town and village to another in Galilee "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1). In her gratitude and love for the One who had set her free, Mary devoted herself to following Jesus no matter what the cost. She and several other women who had been cured of diseases or evil spirits traveled with Jesus and the disciples during the last year or more, providing for their needs out of their own means.

Mary witnessed many wonderful miracles of Jesus—healing the blind, the lame, lepers, and all manner of disease. He fed thousands from five loaves and two fish and even brought people back to life! Over and over she heard His teachings emphasizing faith and love as He declared truth about God's kingdom. She was awed by the Master's selfless and sinless life, feeling it a great privilege to know and be around a truly perfect Person who, in a fully right mind, claimed to be the Son of God.

Finally, Mary Magdalene made the difficult journey with Jesus and His disciples as they traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover where Jesus had told them He would be arrested, killed and rise on the third day! He was so certain, but Mary could not comprehend these words.

Then, sure enough, the nightmare unfolded. Was Mary in the crowd before Pilate that demanded Jesus' death, perhaps seeing the bloody scourging that

left Him half-dead and unrecognizable? In overwhelming sorrow, she probably followed Jesus, as He attempted to carry His cross over the road to Calvary. We know for a fact Mary stood at the cross with Jesus' mother and John, staying beside Jesus through the torturous six hours until He died.

She must have yearned for Jesus to use His divine power to save Himself, only to recall His words of prophecy. He would die, but nothing ever seemed more wrong. He said He would come to life again; surely that was impossible if He did not save Himself now. Mary watched as they drove the spear in her Master's side. Then she followed as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus from the cross to the garden, prepared His body, and placed Him in the tomb (Luke 23:55).

We can only imagine what Mary did after this. But 36 hours later, early in the morning on the third day, Mary led a group of women taking spices to the tomb. As they walked, they wondered how they would roll away the huge stone that was guarded by fierce Roman soldiers. But they arrived to find, to their shock and amazement, the stone had been rolled away, and Jesus' body was gone!

Several different accounts are given of the discovery, but Mary is in all of them as the first to see the empty tomb. She ran to tell Peter and John, who came and saw the same thing. They went back puzzled and stunned, remembering Jesus' words that He would rise on the third day. Could it be?

But Mary Magdalene lingered, weeping because the Lord's body had been taken away. When she peered inside the tomb one more time, two angels asked her why she was crying. So overcome by grief that she was unaffected even by angels, she simply answered, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

Then Mary turned to face Jesus, whom she at first thought to be the gardener. That is, until He said her name, "Mary!" It was His voice; only Jesus said her name like that. It was Him! He was alive! With what must

have been overwhelming joy, she cried, “Rabboni!” (This is Aramaic for master or teacher). Jesus told her not to cling to Him, but to go and tell the disciples He would come to them. Mary went immediately to declare, “I have seen the Lord!”

Most likely, Mary was in the room with other disciples when Jesus appeared in their midst to say, “Peace be with you!” and to show them the scars in His hands, side and feet. Most likely, Mary was there forty days later on the hill near Bethany when Jesus blessed the disciples and ascended into heaven. Then, she listened as an angel declared He would return one day in the same way He had left.

Most likely, she was there almost 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to indwell the believers’ hearts. Most likely that very day Mary heard Peter stand boldly before the crowds in Jerusalem to declare the gospel boldly, leading 3,000 to believe and be baptized (Acts 2:41).

We are told no more about Mary Magdalene’s life, but it was a privileged one to be sure. She is an everlasting picture of the power of Christ to take a seemingly hopeless and broken life and make it whole and meaningful. She demonstrated courage and fortitude, unfailing love, humility and unselfish devotion to Christ. Mary served Jesus in life and remained faithful when the crowd turned against Him and left Him in the grave. But God didn’t overlook her amazing love, and she was the first to say, “I have seen the Lord!”

Read Selected Verses.

1. What are we told about Mary Magdalene’s experience with Jesus? Luke 8:2-3

2. What were the results of demon possession in other people Jesus delivered?

Mark 5:2-5

Mark 9:17-18a

Reference: Note 4, *Satan, demons*, p.51.

3. a. Mary had traveled with Jesus and the disciples during the last year and a half of His ministry, as popularity faded into grave opposition. In her absolute commitment to Christ, where was she during Jesus death on the cross?

John 19:25

b. Where did her devotion to Jesus lead her next?

Mark 15:46-47

4. What was Mary the first to discover?

Mark 16:1-9

Read John 20:1-18.

5. a. John tells us more of the story. After Peter and John came to the tomb and left puzzled, Mary stayed behind. Through her tears of deep grief and confusion, what amazing experience was Mary unmoved by?

John 20:12-13

b. Then what did she also miss?

John 20:14-15

6. a. What incredible surprise lifted her spirit to pure elation?

John 20:16-17

b. What did Mary immediately do?

John 20:18

7. What did Mary Magdalene no doubt also experience?

Luke 24:36

Luke 24:45-46

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

THE BEAUTY OF A THANKFUL HEART

The people of Jesus' day had various responses to Him. Some used Him, while others hoped He would become an earthly king who would provide riches, healing and freedom from human tyranny. Still others, including many religious leaders of the day, saw Jesus as a political threat, finally crucifying Him out of insecurity and jealousy.

Mary Magdalene simply responded to Jesus with a thankful heart. No doubt her response was a welcomed balm to the Savior's aching heart. Perhaps this is why she experienced the privilege of leading the other women believers and being the first to witness Jesus' glorious resurrection.

Today, there are still the same responses to God. Some pour out their hearts to Him in thanks, while others take daily blessings for granted and are quick to blame God for the difficulties or disappointments of a selfish and sinful world.

Like Mary Magdalene, those who cultivate a thankful heart toward God experience deep joy, regardless of circumstances. Truly, God rewards the thankful heart with the richest blessings a heavenly Father can bestow.

As we continue our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, we will look at the beauty of a thankful heart.

1. a. Why does it affect people positively when we thank them for services, thoughtfulness or gifts? Why is it right to thank them?

b. What feelings are evoked when appreciation is withheld or overlooked? What are the unspoken messages?

c. Why should we maintain a thankful heart toward God? What is the unspoken message conveyed when we are not thankful?

2. a. Why was Mary Magdalene thankful to Jesus?

b. What could have been her response?

c. Compare the responses of the men in Luke 17:12-19?

3. a. What are some daily blessings of God we can easily take for granted?

b. According to the Bible, what are the costliest gifts God has given us?
John 3:16

Ephesians 1:7-8

2 Corinthians 5:17

4. Praise can show our thankfulness to God. Choose 10 reasons to thank the Lord from Psalm 145.

“Thank you, Lord, that you are...”

5. What did Mary's gratitude toward the Lord produce in her life? What are some of the things that a grateful heart toward God produces in our daily living?

6. What do these verses command us to do and why?
Psalm 100:2-5

7. a. When Jesus died and Mary did not understand, she might have felt betrayed by Jesus and become bitter. What did her thankful heart produce in her during this time of darkness?

b. What was Habakkuk's determination, and what were the results?
Habakkuk 3:17-19

8. What does a thankful heart during hard times reveal?
Hebrews 11:1, 6

9. If we could meet Mary today, of what would she surely testify?
1 Corinthians 15:57-58

10. What is the danger of an ungrateful heart toward God?
Romans 1:21 (also 22-32)

11. For this reason, what are we told to maintain in the midst of all circumstances?
1 Thessalonians 5:18

Philippians 4:6-7

Colossians 3:15-17

SUMMARY

12. What can prevent you from having a thankful heart toward God, and what are the dangers that may result?

13. What resulted from Mary's thankful heart toward the Lord?

14. What does Mary's experience during the time of Jesus' death show you about trusting the Lord in times of confusion and heartache? Why can you still be thankful in these times? How will your faith be rewarded?

15. What is your desire with regard to having a grateful heart? Perhaps you would like to make a moment to make this your prayer.

LESSON 21

SAPPHIRA

After Jesus ascended into heaven before their eyes, His followers obeyed His instructions to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came to indwell them. He would give them divine power to be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and the message of salvation in Christ.

This miracle happened about seven weeks after Jesus' ascension, during the Jewish celebration of Pentecost when many thousands of Jews from around the Roman Empire had gathered in Jerusalem. The disciples were in an upper room praying when they heard a sound like the roaring of a big storm and saw tongues of fire over each head. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to praise God in languages unknown to them. When they went outside and began to tell people in the streets about Christ, people heard their words in their own languages. Peter stood up with the other apostles, and the Holy Spirit enabled him to preach fearlessly to the enormous crowd, telling them about the risen Lord Jesus Christ and their need to repent and believe in Him. As a result, 3,000 new believers were baptized that day (Acts 2:14f).

With this, the church was born and began joyfully meeting at the Temple on the first day of the week. They shared a mutual love and fellowship and gave freely to meet each other's needs. Peter and John and the other apostles were empowered to work miracles of healing and preach the gospel in spite of grave threats from Jewish authorities.

Some believers voluntarily sold things they owned to meet the needs of the poor among them. After a godly man named Barnabas sold some property and gave all the proceeds to the church, a couple named Ananias and *Sapphira* decided to do the same. Only they decided to lie and say they were giving all the money, when in fact they kept some of the proceeds for themselves. Peter somehow found out they were lying and one at a time brought Ananias and Sapphira before him to give them a chance to tell the

truth to him and to God. When Ananias chose to lie again, Peter in essence said, “Why do you lie to us and to God? The money was yours. You could have kept some or all of it.” Immediately Ananias fell dead and was taken away to be buried.

When Sapphira came about three hours later, not knowing what had happened to her husband; Peter gave her the same chance to tell the truth. Instead, Sapphira, who had agreed with her husband to lie, said, “Yes, we gave you all the money for the sale of the property.” Then Peter asked Sapphira why she would lie to God, and she fell dead. They buried her next to Ananias.

As news spread about this, a sense of God’s awesome presence in the fledgling church and the seriousness of sin seized everyone. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders, and more and more people believed in the Lord and were added to their numbers (Acts 5:14).

Read Acts 2:38-47.

1. a. What was Peter’s message to the thousands of people gathered to hear his words (2:38)?

b. What was the result of that gathering on the day of Pentecost (2:41-47)?

Read Acts 4:36-5:11.

2. a. What did Barnabas do that inspired Ananias and Sapphira to do the same (4:36-51)?

b. What did Ananias do that Sapphira agreed with (5:2)?

3. a. Who did Peter say motivated Ananias and Sapphira to lie about their giving, and to whom did he say they lied (5:3)?

References: Note 1, *Satan has so filled your heart*, and Note 2, *Ananias and Sapphira*, p. 103.

b. What did Peter say this couple was free to honestly do (5:4)?

4. What gripping event took place as a result of Ananias' lie (5:5-6)?

5. Even though she had been deceptive along with her husband, what opportunity did Peter give Sapphira (5:7-8a)?

6. Peter himself had experienced failure before the Lord. Certainly he grieved for this couple. What did Peter have to tell Sapphira (5:8b-10)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

DEFEATING HYPOCRISY

Sapphira, like most of us, wanted to be praised by other people. It was important to her and her husband to be seen as concerned and sacrificially giving people. But their own welfare and reputation was clearly the center of their lives. While they pretended to give God and others their all, their fraudulent gift became a sacrilege.

It is dangerous to make what other people think of us the center of our lives. In fact, when it comes to our relationship to God, any focus that puts Him in second place gives Satan opportunity to trap us in religious hypocrisy. Hypocrisy in the spiritual realm amounts to trying to make ourselves appear godly while actually practicing ungodliness.

The sad fact is, the hypocrite is often blinded to his own desperate state and unaware that his game is obvious to others. People instinctively pick up on hypocrisy in others. A profound law of the universe is that the lie seeks to reveal itself.

Because of this, many of us have heard someone say, "I don't believe in God because of all the hypocrites in the church." Many people are turned away from the Christian faith because there is a lack of integrity and Christ-centeredness in the lives of the believers they know. The duplicity in the lives of professed Christians becomes poison to the cause of Christ. Not only this, but hypocrisy can make God appear uninvolved, unjust or non-existent because He does nothing to deal with it.

God knows the destructive power of hypocrisy, and throughout history has often publicly exposed the person, especially a church leader, who pretends to be holy while practicing ungodliness. God could not allow hypocrisy to exist in the fledgling early church.

Hypocrisy develops subtly, but we can detect and defeat it in our lives. In this lesson, we will look at some roots of hypocrisy and how to face the challenge of living an authentic Christian life.

1. What motivations might have caused Sapphira to become hypocritical?

2. a. What are some examples of hypocritical behavior in professed Christians today?

b. What are the motivations behind these behaviors?

c. What can become more important to us than God (think about your own life)? How can putting these people or things before God lead us to become hypocritical in our spiritual lives?

3. How does Jesus define hypocrisy in these passages?
Matthew 23:3c

Luke 6:46 (James 1:22-24)

4. What causes for hypocrisy are referred to in the following?
Psalm 36:2

Matthew 6:24

1 John 2:9-11

5. Hypocrisy often comes from seeking honor and attention for ourselves.
What does the Bible warn about self-exaltation in Proverbs 16:18?

6. The reason hypocrisy is so serious is because it mocks God and hurts the cause of truth (cf. 2 Peter 2:2; Nehemiah 5:9). Ananias and Sapphira's lie not only mocked the holiness of God but also jeopardized the life of the Christian church in its infancy. God's action with this couple was protective of the greater body of faithful believers. What do the following verses reveal about God's character that were proven in His dealings with Ananias and Sapphira?

Psalm 101:7

Daniel 2:22

7. What must we realize about God that will motivate us to avoid hypocrisy in our lives?

Psalm 69:5

Proverbs 16:2

Galatians 6:7

8. What does God do when we are honest about our hypocrisy?

Psalm 32:5

9. How can we avoid hypocrisy in our lives?

Proverbs 11:3

Matthew 22:37-40

James 1:25 (cf. 23-24)

Galatians 5:16, 25

10. What must be our continual prayer?
Psalm 139:23-24

SUMMARY

11. Anyone can fall into hypocritical practices as a Christian. What truths about God's holy character motivate you to maintain an honest relationship with Him?

12. While none of us will achieve perfection as Christians, what can ensure your integrity as a believer?

13. As you reflect on the roots and results of hypocrisy, what is your desire regarding Christian integrity? Make this a prayer.

LESSON 21 NOTES

1 *Satan has so filled your heart* (Acts 5:3). Jesus described Satan as “the father of lies” (John 8:44), and his activity in the situation was clear and noted. See also Note 3, *Satan, demons*, p. 51.

2 *Ananias and Sapphira* were given as bad examples of sharing. Love of praise for pretended generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. It is a warning to the readers that “God cannot be mocked” (Galatians 6:7). They had a right to keep back whatever they chose, but to make it appear that they had given all when they had not was sinful. “They had lied to the Holy Spirit, regarded as God Himself present with His people. If no dire consequences had followed this act of sin, the results among the believers would have been serious when the deceit became known. Not only would dishonesty appear profitable, but the conclusion that the Spirit could be deceived would follow. It was important to set the course properly at the outset in order to leave no doubt that God will not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit.” *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1651-1652.

LESSON 22

MARY OF JERUSALEM

At the beginning of Acts, we are told of a large room in a certain home in Jerusalem that followers of Christ met in, awaiting His promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell their lives and give them power to be His witnesses. This home, perhaps also used for the last supper of Jesus and His twelve disciples, is thought to have belonged to a woman named *Mary*. She is the mother of John Mark, who traveled with the apostle Paul and Barnabas on missionary journeys and wrote the Gospel of Mark. Mary is mentioned by name only once in Acts 12:12; "... he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying."

This was the story of Peter's deliverance by an angel out of prison. As the chief leader of the early Christians, Herod Agrippa locked Peter in prison, chained between two guards. Herod had recently killed the apostle James, and when he saw it pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter. The apostle was awaiting trial the next day before Jewish authorities who yearned to execute the leader of the Christian movement. Humanly speaking, nothing could save Peter. Believers gathered to pray all night, asking God to supernaturally save Peter's life.

The Lord heard their prayers and was also not ready for Peter's death. During the night, He sent an angel, who put the guards in a deep sleep, released Peter's chains, opened the prison door and led Peter to the street. When Peter realized he wasn't just dreaming, he made his way to the home of Mary (of Jerusalem) where the believers were praying, let them know of the miracle, and left for a safe place. The next day Herod and all were baffled when Peter was simply gone.

Mary of Jerusalem was a courageous servant who continually opened her home as a meeting place for believers in the early church. Her sacrificial work of hospitality no doubt kept her close to awesome events and the

godliest of believers and the Lord. To get a picture of this, we will look at the amazing story of Peter and those who prayed for him in Acts 12.

Read Acts 12:1-19a.

1. a. Who began to persecute the Christians, and what did he do (12:1-4)?

Reference: Note 1, *King Herod*, p. 112.

b. What was the situation that night (12:5-6)?

2. a. How was Peter released from his cell (12:7-9)?

Reference: Note 2, *angels*, p. 112.

b. What happened before Peter realized he was not seeing a vision (12:10-11)?

3. The believers at Mary's home were gathered to pray. What happened in answer to their prayers for Peter (12:12-17)?

Reference: Note 3, *Mary's home*, p. 113.

Note: James (v. 17) is the Lord's brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19). James, the brother of John, had already been killed.

4. In spite of the persecution, what continued to happen (12:24)?

5. Who did Mary say goodbye to as he left with his cousin Barnabas and the apostle Paul for Antioch (12:25)?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

GIVING LIVING

It certainly could be said that Mary of Jerusalem was a giving person. She gave her home to God, her son to God's service and her time to prayer and hospitality. There were risks involved in her life of sacrifice, particularly in a time when professing Christians could face imprisonment or death for their faith. Even so, Mary gave herself completely to the needs of others and courageously submitted to the Lord's purposes for her and her family.

While it may at times seem unreasonable or frightening to avail ourselves to God and others, the Bible promises abundant blessings for "giving living." Indeed, the Scriptures promise that the more we give, the more we receive. Indeed, we cannot out give the Lord.

Jesus said that as we die to a lifestyle focused on selfish desires, we actually find life and are able to give life to others (John 12:24-25). He promises a full and meaningful life to the woman who lets Him live His life

through her (John 10:10b). No doubt Mary experienced this truth and would have had it no other way. In this study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*, we'll look at the practice of "giving living."

1. a. What are some attitudes that keep people from experiencing the rewards of generosity?

b. Of what does the Bible assure us when we practice generosity with our time, talent and treasure?

Proverbs 11:25

2 Corinthians 9:6

c. How have you observed these truths in the life of a generous person you know? Have you experienced these rewards of giving yourself?

Giving of Time and Possessions to God

2. What do these verses instruct or suggest about giving of our time, homes or possessions?

Romans 12:13

1 Peter 4:9

I Timothy 6:17-19

3. What attitudes did Mary's service and generosity require of her? What do the following suggest?

Matthew 25:34-40 (Christ speaking)

Philippians 2:3-4

Colossians 3:23-24

4. What blessings did Mary experience as a result of her hospitality? What can we expect when we dedicate our homes to the Lord and make ourselves available for hospitality?

Giving Our Children to God

5. Mary's son, John Mark, took a treacherous first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, and later did missionary work with Barnabas alone. Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark, was called a "son" by the Apostle Peter (I Peter 5:13), and was sent for by the Apostle Paul in his last days on earth. Mark was a key evangelist in a time of serious Christian persecution.

Even so, what does the following suggest to have been Mary's experience regarding her son Mark?

Proverbs 23:24

6. What did Jesus teach as the most secure path for our children to take?
Matthew 6:31-33

7. If we are parents, what does the Bible tell us to do to ensure our children's best?

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (Proverbs 22:6)

Proverbs 14:26

Note: *Fear of the Lord* means awe and reverent trust in God.

8. What blessings do you think Mary experienced as a result of entrusting her son to the Lord?

Giving Our Time to Prayer

9. What are we instructed to do regarding prayer?
Luke 11:9-10

Philippians 4:6

Colossians 4:2

10. What does God promise when we pray, which was depicted by Peter's miraculous escape from prison?
Psalm 91:15

Jeremiah 33:3

11. What rewards do you expect Mary experienced because she gave her time to prayer?

SUMMARY

12. a. Mary's life was greatly enriched because of her choices to give of her time, treasure and talent to the Lord and others. What does the Lord promise when we are generous with Him and others?

Luke 6:38

b.. What are the benefits of "giving living" as opposed to living simply to please yourself?

13. We all don't have the same gifts or resources. What are some ways that you can give to the Lord and others?

14. a. What are the hard choices required to practice a lifestyle of generosity? What, if anything, has hindered your generosity with the Lord and others?

b. What do you want the Holy Spirit to enable you to do as a result of this study?

LESSON 22 NOTES

1 *King Herod* (Acts 12) or *Agrippa I* was the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3-12) and tried Jesus. Agrippa I was also the grandson of Herod the Great, a ruthless man who murdered his wife, three sons, many relatives and numbers of others, including the babies in Bethlehem at Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:16). The King Herod in Acts, ruled over Samaria, Judea and some other territories until his death in 44 A.D. recorded in Acts 12.

2 *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.: Genesis 16:7; Numbers 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; Matthew 28:2-3; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 10:1). 2 Corinthians 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. 51.

3 *Mary's home* (Acts 12:12). This Mary was John Mark's mother and Barnabas' aunt (Mark and Barnabas were cousins--Colossians 4:10). Apparently her home was a gathering place for Christians. It may have been the location of the upper room where the Last Supper was held (Mark 14:13-15; Acts 1:13) and the place of prayer in Acts 4:31. *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1667. Mary's son, John Mark, wrote the Gospel of Mark and accompanied Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey.

LESSON 23

PHOEBE

A major event in the early church was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as the Apostle Paul. A rising star among Jerusalem Pharisees, Paul made it his mission to silence the “Way,” as the new sect of Judaism was called. But when Paul was en route to Damascus to arrest believers there, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ actually appeared to Paul and charged him to take the gospel¹ of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 9).

After some years of the Holy Spirit adjusting Paul’s understanding of the Scriptures to the truth of Jesus Christ, Paul completed three missionary journeys. These spread the gospel across the Roman Empire. He also wrote letters to various churches that became Scriptures of the New Testament.

One of these letters was what we know as the book of Romans. Paul was probably in Corinth or nearby Cenchrea on his third missionary journey when he wrote to the believers in Rome to prepare them for his visit. As Paul put this masterpiece in the hands of a trusted believer, a single woman named *Phoebe*, to transport to Rome, they could not have imagined the impact the letter would have on the world. The Book of Romans is considered by many to be the watershed of all Scripture, influenced the conversions of men like Augustine, Luther, and Wesley, and since its writing has explained God’s plan of salvation to multiplied millions the world over.

We can also be sure that Phoebe, whom God trusted to carry this precious piece of literature to Rome, had been taught its contents as she sat under the teaching of Paul. She well could have memorized the letter on the journey to Rome. At any rate, to understand the contents of this letter would be to understand the beliefs of this godly woman.

Phoebe’s name means “pure” or “radiant as the moon.” We only have the mention of her name and service in Romans 16:1-2, where Paul calls her a

“sister” in the Lord. We don’t know how or when Phoebe became a Christian, but Paul testifies to her love and service among believers. The original language points to her being a deaconess and a teacher of women who also ministered to the poor in the church at Cenchrea. Paul also called her a “helper” or *prostatis*, meaning “one who stands by in case of need.” This classical Greek word described a trainer in the Olympic games who stood by the athletes to see that they were properly trained. This depicts Phoebe as one who stood by others, including Paul, unselfishly and liberally helping them to succeed.

Though briefly mentioned, Phoebe is highlighted in God’s Word as a godly single woman who accomplished more than she could even dream of in her devotion to Jesus Christ.

1. What did Paul tell us about Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2?

Note: *sister* in the family of God, made up of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12).

2. It is believed that Phoebe carried the letter, known as the book of Romans in the New Testament, to the church in Rome. What teachings of this book would have been foundations of Phoebe’s faith?

Romans 1:16

Romans 3:22-24

References: Note 2, *Justified*, and Note 3, *Redemption*, p. 123.

Romans 6:3-4

Romans 5:1, 8:1

3. a. What keys to living the Christian life did Phoebe know through Paul's teaching?

Romans 8:5-6

Romans 8:13

Note: *die* refers to spiritual separation from God; *body* speaks of the old sinful nature. The *Holy Spirit* can give power to defeat sin and the old nature.

b. What truths did Paul teach Phoebe that give strength to persevere, especially in hard times?

Romans 8:28

Romans 8:31b-32

Romans 8:34-35, 38-39

4. Given Paul's commendation of Phoebe, how can we be sure she lived her life?

Romans 12:9-12

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

TO BE USED BY GOD

Like Mary of Jerusalem (Lesson 22), Phoebe was a woman who was greatly used by God because she availed herself completely to Him. As a believer in the Corinthian church at Cenchrea, Phoebe was known for her devotion to meeting the material and physical needs of poor and distressed people in her congregation. As a single woman, she gave herself wholeheartedly to God and His purposes and was no doubt challenged and fulfilled by the way He used her to bless others. The Pauline letter, generally believed to have been carried to Rome by Phoebe, would become known as the watershed of Scripture. Phoebe's faithfulness in little things made her trustworthy with this great responsibility.

Often we feel fulfillment will come when we experience a certain set of circumstances. The words "if only" and "should have" rob us of the ever-present possibilities God has for us today. We may feel like our lack of knowledge or our struggles in the Christian life disqualify us from being used by God in the lives of others. So we sit and wait for that day when we will feel "ready."

The truth is, God delights in using imperfect people at any place in life. In His eyes, each of His children is special and uniquely gifted. Through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within, God knows that He can empower us to do what we would never dream we were capable of doing. So the saying goes: "God does not need our ability, only our availability."

Phoebe found the satisfaction that comes from being in the center of God's will and using the unique gifts God had given her. Perhaps there were things she longed for, but she found the fullness of life available *in the present* by simply making herself available to God. As we near the close of our study on *The Challenges of Womanhood*, let's look at how we can experience this same fulfillment today.

1. What might have kept Phoebe from being used by God? What can keep us from being used by God today?

2. Some common obstacles to trusting God to use our lives include areas of sin, fears and a sense of inadequacy. How do the Scriptures instruct us to address:

a. sin in our lives? 1 John 1:9

b. our fears? Joshua 1:9

Isaiah 41:10

c. a sense of inadequacy?
2 Corinthians 3:5-6a

2 Corinthians 9:8, 10-11

2 Corinthians 12:9

3. According to the following verses, how does God enable us to do His work?

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 3:16, 20

Philippians 2:13; 4:13

4. How do we begin to discover God's purposes for us as individuals?
John 15:5 (Jesus speaking)

Ephesians 5:18b

Reference: Note 4, *be filled with the Spirit*, p. 125.

5. The Bible teaches that God gives each one who receives Christ unique spiritual "gifts" or abilities. What do the following say about these gifts?
Romans 12:6-8

I Peter 4:10

SUMMARY

6. What obstacles can keep you from being used by God to build His Kingdom?

b. How can these obstacles be overcome?

7. How does God empower us to be used to build His Kingdom?

8. Often you can identify the gift(s) God has given you by what motivates you to serve others. Although *not a comprehensive list*, the following may be helpful in identifying your spiritual gift(s).

- **Prophecy** - the motivation to reveal sinful motives or actions by presenting God's truth.
- **Serving** - the motivation to demonstrate love by meeting practical needs.
- **Teaching** - clarifying truth; the motivation to search out and validate truth which has been presented.
- **Exhortation or Encouragement** - the motivation to stimulate the faith of others. Sees steps for others to take to reach their potential.
- **Giving** - the motivation to entrust personal assets to others for the furtherance of their ministry.
- **Ruling or leadership** - the motivation to coordinate the activities of others for the achievement of common goals.
- **Showing mercy** - the motivation to identify with and comfort those who are in distress.

a. What spiritual gifts might Phoebe have had and used to build God's Kingdom?

b. To what gifts/motivations can you best relate?

9. What natural talents (musical, artistic, writing, etc.) do you have that might be used by God to build His Kingdom? Have you devoted these to Him and asked His direction in using them?

10. In every season of life, God wants us to be fulfilled as He equips us to help others. If you have not made it a practice, you might want to begin praying the following daily prayer:

Lord, fill me with your Spirit today, and enable me to invest the gifts and resources you have given me for your glory, in Jesus' Name.

LESSON 23 NOTES

1 *gospel* is an Old English word that means "good news." It translates the Greek word euangelion (eu-, "good" and angelion, "message"). The first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—are called Gospels. These books are documentaries of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ written by contemporaries. "Gospel" is also used to simply refer to the "good news" about Jesus Christ; that through Him, one can know God personally and inherit eternal life (John 3:16; 14:6).

More specifically, the gospel message is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and now is able to save all who trust Him (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The gospel was promised in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3:15, and touched on by Isaiah (Isaiah 1:18; 53; 55) and other prophets. Although promised by the prophets, they did not fully understand it (1 Peter 1:10-12). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a man, born of a Jewish virgin in the line of David as prophesied (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25). Through His substitutionary death and victorious resurrection, Christ is able to give victory over sin and eternal life to all who believe.

2 *Justified* (Romans 5:1). *Justification* refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute. When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our Lord...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). When we put faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ that paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family. See also Note 3, *Redemption*, below.

3 *Redemption* is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus." As born sinners, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of

His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal 4:4-5). See also Note 2, *Justified*, above.

4 *be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18) does not refer to a quantity of the Spirit (like a glass needing to be filled as opposed to half-filled with water). The phrase refers to the continual choice we can make to allow the Holy Spirit to completely control our lives. Neither does the analogy with alcohol (“do not get drunk with wine”) mean we get drunk with the Spirit in a way that we don’t see, hear, feel or reason realistically or with self-control. The Holy Spirit produces the life of Christ in us, giving us godly perception, power, love, self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7) and the character qualities listed in Galatians 5:22-23. See also, Notes 1-2, *Holy Spirit*, and *Works of the Holy Spirit*, p. 38.

LESSON 24

LOIS AND EUNICE

While the names of *Lois and Eunice* appear only once in the Bible; their noted faithfulness as mother and grandmother to Timothy set them firmly in the annals of history. Eunice, Timothy's mother, was Jewish, the daughter of Lois and an unnamed father. Eunice had married a Greek, and because nothing is said of him, it is assumed he was dead by the time Paul came to Lystra during his first missionary journey. Eunice and her mother, Lois, were probably won to Christ, along with Timothy, as Paul preached in their synagogue.

Eunice and Lois knew the Scriptures and had taught Timothy God's truth since he was an infant. Because of this, it was easy for Timothy to understand as Paul showed from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah. After Timothy became a believer, he already had a depth of understanding in the Word of God that allowed him to be a teacher alongside Paul.

Paul recognized Timothy's potential when he visited Lystra during his second missionary journey and invited the young man to travel with him and Silas. Only one problem--all the Jews in the area knew Timothy had a Greek father and had not been circumcised. This would have been a major roadblock in evangelizing in Jewish synagogues where Paul always went first. Timothy's commitment was shown in that he was willing to be circumcised in order to serve the Lord with Paul.

Timothy completed the second missionary journey and continued on Paul's third journey as well. Later, Paul left this godly young man in Ephesus to pastor the church that Paul had planted and nurtured for several years. After Paul was martyred by Nero around 65 A.D. and Jerusalem was desecrated in 70 A.D. by the Romans, Ephesus became the center for Christendom. Timothy must have been close to the last living apostle, John, who spent his later years living and ministering out of that city.

Without question, Paul had a deep love for Timothy, calling him, “my dear son” (2 Timothy 1:2). He wrote two letters to Timothy that later became New Testament Scripture. This young man, with whom Paul had prayed and served, rejoiced and suffered, laughed and cried, was without a doubt one of the apostle’s closest friends. Paul wrote his final words before his martyrdom to Timothy, longing to see Timothy one more time before he died (2 Timothy 4:6-9, 21).

We don’t know how much of Timothy’s service Eunice and Lois lived to see, but we can imagine there were many fears and fervent prayers, as well as much pride and joy, involved in seeing Timothy be so used of God. From Paul’s writings to Timothy, we learn of the character these women had built into their son and grandson. As one author stated:

“Eunice and Lois had sent forth their son Timothy, a man of eminent unselfishness, one who had the capacity for generous devotion, one who was warmhearted and loyal, one with charm and gentleness, one who had tenderness and patience, and one who was willing to sacrifice himself without reservation to the cause of Christ. These were qualities such as only a consecrated mother and grandmother could bestow upon a son.”¹

1. How do we see the love of Paul for Timothy as he writes from the dungeon in Rome just before his death?

2 Timothy 1:2-4

2. How did Paul describe Timothy’s faithfulness and its roots?

2 Timothy 1:5

3. a. How early did Eunice and Lois teach Timothy the Scriptures, and what did this teaching enable Timothy to do?

2 Timothy 3:14-15

b. How did Scripture teaching under Lois and Eunice, and later Paul, equip Timothy to serve God and build His Kingdom?

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Reference: Note 2, *God-breathed*, p. 133.

4. How did Timothy become a frontline worker with the Apostle Paul and Silas on the second and third missionary journeys?

Acts 16:1-3

Note: Timothy was circumcised so his work among the Jews would be more effective. Paul always preached Jesus Christ in the Jewish synagogue first when he came to new city.

5. a. What did Paul know as he wrote his second letter to Timothy?

2 Timothy 4:7-8

b. Not knowing how much longer he would wait before Nero ordered his death, what did Paul ask of Timothy?

2 Timothy 4:9, 13

6. a. What did Paul instruct Timothy to do that the apostle had done countless times in front of him?

2 Timothy 2:2-3

b. Lois and Eunice had also done this as they disciplined their son and grandson. What can we learn from them concerning teaching the Word of God?

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

FAITH THAT OUTLIVES OUR OWN

The spiritual truth exemplified by Lois and Eunice is that when we live and impart a life of sincere faith, there will be far-reaching ripple effect into future generations. To live an authentic Christian life, therefore, is our greatest privilege and the most important thing we can do with our lifetime on earth. As we bring our study of *The Challenges of Womanhood* to a close, let's review a few of the everyday ways we can be assured of leaving a legacy of faith for those who come after us.

1. a. On what do we tend to focus our energies from day to day?

b. How might a daily reminder of the spiritual legacy we are leaving behind affect our priorities and actions?

2. What daily decisions must be predominant in order to have a positive spiritual impact on future generations? What do the following suggest?
Deuteronomy 6:5

Psalm 119:36-37

Matthew 6:31-33

3. a. What is the increasing result of putting Christ first and experiencing His love?
Ephesians 3:16-19

Galatians 5:22-23

b. What spiritual impact does God want us to have on those around us and on future generations? What do the following suggest?

2 Corinthians 2:14

Matthew 5:13a, 14a, 16

4. The faithful women we have studied in *The Challenges of Womanhood* encouraged the believers around them. Our encouragement of others can increase the spiritual legacy they leave behind. What is our role among believers, as suggested by the following?

I Peter 1:22

I Thessalonians 5:14-15

Hebrews 3:13

5. a. What does the Lord Jesus continually do for us that we are instructed to do for others?

Romans 8:34

I Timothy 2:1

b. What do these verses reveal about the power of our intercessory prayers for others?

James 5:16

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (prayer being one of our spiritual "weapons")

c. How can intercessory prayer impact the spiritual legacy we leave behind?

SUMMARY

6. a. What are some things the faithful women in our study had in common as they left a positive spiritual legacy—women like Ruth, Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Eunice and Lois?

b. These faithful women were also imperfect. How does this truth encourage you?

7. What did ungodly women teach you about our choice of pursuits in life—women like Delilah, Jezebel and Herodias?

8. a. As you think about these godly and ungodly women, what contrasting words come to mind to describe their lives?

b. These contrasts describe the ripple effect each of us as women can have on the future. As you look at these words, describe the legacy you want to leave for those after you.

c. What can you do to have this kind of legacy?

9. What has been most helpful to you in this study of *The Challenges of Womanhood*? Are there particular verses or lessons that have spoken to you?

10. The women of our study spanned 2200 years of Israel's history, from the time of Abraham through the time of the apostle Paul. During this period, God systematically unfolded His plan of salvation, finally accomplished through the cross and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

Has this overview of biblical history been significant to you as you studied these women of the Bible? If so, how? (See also, Timetable, p. 5.)

Perhaps you would like to take a moment to thank God for what He has taught you through this study.

LESSON 24 NOTES

1 Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 240.

2 *God-breathed* 2 Timothy 3:16. “Paul affirms God’s active involvement in the writing of Scripture, as involvement so powerful and pervasive that what is written is the infallible and authoritative word of God.”

2 Peter 1:20-21 states this as it says, “...no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” To be *carried along by the Holy Spirit* means that “in the production of Scripture both God and man were active participants. God was the source of the content of Scripture, so that what it says is what God has said. But the human author also actively spoke; he was more than a recorder. Yet what he said came from God. Although actively speaking, he was carried along by the Holy Spirit.” *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 1846, 1900.

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CHALLENGES OF WOMANHOOD II

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-932395-70-9

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