



Theme:

**Women of
the Bible...**

September 22-24, 2006
WEST JEFFERSON CHURCH OF CHRIST



9th Annual
Back To The Bible
Lectures

Theme:
Women of the Bible...

September 22-24, 2006

Hosted By:
The West Jefferson Church of Christ

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FORWARD

Our purpose for the study "Women of the Bible" is to learn the importance of women in the Lord's Church today. Some of the greatest examples of Biblical faith can be seen in godly women. Hebrews 11:6 *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

Most of the women we will see in this study have great qualities that we should all strive as Christian men and women to achieve. However, there are some women in this study that we must only learn from the mistakes that they made and make sure that they are not made in our lives today.

Many of the women in the Bible are overlooked in our study as Christians today. We sometimes fail to see the importance God placed upon the woman in the church, home, and community. God made the woman to be a help meet to her husband (Genesis 2:18). In Romans chapter 16 there are several women mentioned by Paul that assisted him throughout his journeys. These women did a great work for the early church. Paul commended them on their service to the Lord and His church.

We need to recognize the many women of the church today. The Lord established roles for all individuals in the church. The woman is not to lead any part of worship as outlined in the Bible, but we do not need to forget the work that is done behind the scenes. We hope that this study will encourage each and every one of us to take a closer look at the "Women of the Bible."

Doug Frazier
July 12, 2006

Eve

Milton Mathers

Milton Mathers was baptized into Christ 1979 in Indio, CA. Graduated from the Southern California School of Evangelism in Buena Park, CA in 1986. He has a B.A. degree from Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver, CO. Has preached in CA, Oregon, VA, NC and now is presently preaching at the Mountain View Church Of Christ, in Bluff City, TN. He is married to his precious wife, Gwyn Mathers. He help with the Biblical Viewpoints and TV Sunday School TV programs in Elizabethton, TN and with the weekly on-hour live call-in radio program that the Stoney Creek Church Of Christ sponsors. He teaches for the Tri-Cities School of Preaching & Christian Development at the Stoney Creek Church Of Christ in Elizabethton, TN.

TEXT: “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve because she was the Mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The greatness of Eve is unsurpassed by any woman in the Bible.
- B. Her greatness is seen from many angles, both positive and negative.
- C. In this study we shall look at three aspects of Eve’s greatness:
 - 1. The Greatness of Her Coronation.
 - 2. The Greatness of Her Condemnation.
 - 3. The Greatness of Her Consequence.

I. THE GREATNESS OF EVE’S CORONATION.

- A. As the first woman created in the image of God.
 - 1. She was no after-thought - **Gen. 2:18:** “*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*”
 - 2. The word *help meet* does not mean a slave, but one suitable to be his helper. It signifies the woman's essential contribution, not inferiority or inadequacy. (Read **I Pet. 3:1-6**)
 - 3. **I Cor. 11:12:** “*For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man by the woman; but all things of God.*”
- B. As the first wife of the first man, Adam.
 - 1. **Gen. 2:21-24:** “*And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*”
 - 2. Adam’s creation was not complete because he lacked a *helper* who corresponded to him.
 - 3. This deficiency let the Creator to pronounce Adam's condition *not good* (**Gen. 2:18**).
 - 4. God’s provision of a wife for Adam is a concrete example of God’s knowing what is best for man.

5. Companionship replaced isolation (**Gen. 2:23**); Eve complemented Adam thus completing the Divine arrangement for the first home and the two became one (**Gen. 2:24; Pro. 18:22; 19:14**).
 6. This first marriage was both a physical and spiritual union (**Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:4-6; Eph. 5:22-33**).
- C. As an equal partner and co-worker with her husband.
1. *“The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.”* (Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible, 7).
 2. Adam rejoiced greatly as he received his mate as God’s good gift to him. What a wonderful blessing Eve was to him!
 3. **Prov. 5:18-19**: *“Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.”*
- D. As the mother of the head of the Messianic line, Abel (**Gen. 4:1-2**), and then Seth (**Gen. 4:25-26**).
1. Even though Eve strayed from God's will, she did not abandon her acknowledgement of God.
 2. Through Seth, the Jewish Nation and the Son of God would eventually come (**Rom. 5:12-21**).
- E. As the physical and spiritual progenitor of mankind.
1. Eve is the mother of all life or living (**Gen. 3:20**).
 2. Through Eve, the blessings of redemption would flow (**Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4**).

II. THE GREATNESS OF EVE’S CONDEMNATION.

- A. From the beginning, God made demands upon the man and women.
1. His law was given as a means of blessing and the subsequent consequences of disobedience were clearly enunciated.
 2. God is never ambiguous (**Gen. 2:15-17**)!
- B. There is no hint that neither Adam nor Eve misunderstood God’s command (**Gen. 3:2-4**).
- C. Satan focused Eve’s attention on God’s one prohibition implying that God did not really want what was best for them.
- D. Eve’s first mistake was to allow herself to be deceived into denying God’s goodness (**Gen. 3:1-3**). Her reply was a direct perversion of God’s clear message to her and Adam and implied a denial of their subjection to His authority:
1. She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of Divine **permission** as to the other trees.
 2. She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine **prohibition**.
 3. She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine **penalty**.
- E. Eve’s second mistake was to be deceived into denying God’s word.
1. God’s true motive was the welfare of man, but the serpent implied that it was God’s welfare at man’s expense.

2. Doubt of God's Word led to a denial of God's word!
 3. Eve was convinced by Satan that sin does not lead to death or separation from God (**Rom. 6:23**), thus directly contradicting God's Word (**Gen. 2:16-17; 3:11**).
- F. Eve's third mistake was to be deceived into disobeying God's will.
1. While the serpent initiated the first two steps, he allowed her natural desires to take over and carry her head-long into his snare (**James 2:13-18; II Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:14; 3:7; II Tim. 2:26**).
 2. She succumbed to the three avenues of fleshly temptation (**Gen. 3:6; I John 2:15-17**).
 - a. Lust of the flesh - She saw that the tree was *good for food* thus creating a desire to do something contrary to God's will, i.e., eat the tasty fruit.
 - b. Lust of the eyes - She realized that the fruit was a *delight to the eyes* thus creating a desire to have something apart from God's will, i.e., possess the beautiful fruit.
 - c. Pride of life - She understood that the forbidden fruit was *desirable to make one wise* thus creating a desire to be something apart from God's will, i.e., to be as wise as God or gods. Earthly wisdom always leads one down the wrong path (**Prov. 3:5-7; I Cor. 1:18-21; Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:8**).
 3. Both the man and the women were accountable to God, for He called them into account for their actions (**Gen. 3:9**).
 4. Eve should have resisted the devil with all her might (**I Pet. 5:8, 9; Eph. 6:11, 13; James 4:7**).
 5. A Welchman was once asked how he thought best to avoid temptation. He replied, "I can't keep the birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from nesting in my hair."
- G. God punished the women and her husband for their disobedience. Ignorance or disregard of God's Word makes one very vulnerable to temptation (**Psa. 119:11**). These conditions produce distrust, dissatisfaction, and finally disobedience.
- H. Note the consequences of their sin:
1. They felt guilt and shame (**Gen. 3:7a**).
 2. They tried to change these conditions by their own efforts (**Gen. 3:7b**).
 3. They attempted to flee from God's presence out of fear of Him rather than confessing their sin (**Gen. 3:8, 10**).
 4. They tried to blame their sin on one another rather than taking personal responsibility for their own actions (**Gen. 3:12-13**).
 5. God punished them severely (**Gen. 3:16-24**), but still offered a means of redemption (**3:15**). Condemnation is followed by consolation.
 6. **I Tim. 2:12-15**: "*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*"
- I. The condemnation of Eve introduces us to the fact of human freedom as well as reminding us of Divine sovereignty.

III. THE GREATNESS OF EVE'S CONSEQUENCE. (INFLUENCE ON HUMANITY)

- A. Sin and death, both physical and spiritual, were introduced into the world (**Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12, 14, 19**).
- B. Mankind would toil hard to obtain a living from the ground (**Gen. 3:17-18**).

- C. The promise of a Redeemer in **Gen. 3:15**; thus the introduction of the great theme of grace and redemption found in the Scriptures.

CONCLUSION:

- A. The rise and fall of Eve teach us many great lessons that everyone should heed.
1. Rebellion against God results in suffering and death.
 2. Confession of sin and repentance of the same secures His gracious provisions.
 3. Sin is responsible for spiritual death and only the removal of sin will end this horrid condition.
 4. God is a Savior as well as a Judge. His goodness and severity are known to all (**Rom. 11:22**).
 5. Satan is alive and well and seeking whom he may devour (**1 Pet. 5:8**).
 6. The sacrifice of the promised seed, Jesus Christ, far outweighs the effects of sin and death introduced in the Garden of Eden.
 7. Both women and men must respect and live in harmony with their God given spheres of work and influence.
 8. Men are to love their wives and be the spiritual leader of the home (**Eph. 5:23, 25**).
 9. Wives are to be in submission to their husbands (**Eph. 5:22, 24**).
 10. Ultimate hope in the ultimate Paradise someday (**Rev. 21:1-8**). And be restored to the “tree of life” once again (**Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14**).
- B. The greatness of Eve can never be fully appreciated!
- C. **Rom. 15:4**: *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

Elizabeth

The Woman Who Lived Up To Her Name

LUKE 1:5-80

EDDY CRAFT

Eddie Craft was born in Signal Mountain, TN. He graduated from the Memphis School Of Preaching in 1972. He conducts a weekly Television Program Biblical Viewpoints which is seen in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Jackson, MS. He also is involved in a weekly Radio Program, Arise To Truth. He has preached in Saltville, VA Rogersville, TN, Abingdon VA, Luray, VA and Elizabethton, TN.

He has been involved in numerous Gospel Meetings and Lectureships. He is now a full-time instructor for the Tri-Cities School Of Preaching and Christian Development and serves as the Dean Of Students. He is married to Betty (Cook) and they have three children and four grandchildren.

Elizabeth was a woman who lived up to her name. The Bible says of her,

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:5-6).

The name Elizabeth according to Lockyer means: “God is my oath” that is “a worshiper of God.” (All the women of the Bible). All of us should respect our names. If you have a good name do not ruin it. Just think what Jezebel did to that beautiful name. Those of us who are Christians ought to be careful how we live. Are you living up to your name? *“Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called” (James 2:7)?* Zacharias means “Jehovah is renowned,” or “Remembered of Jehovah.”

In God’s eyes, both Elizabeth and Zacharias were righteous, just, and holy. They obeyed God’s commands and received His grace. They lived under the Law of Moses. They had respect for his law and obeyed it. They did not believe in faith alone. *“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7).* They had an active obedient faith. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Joseph was also called a righteous man. *“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily” (Matthew 1:19).* Elizabeth would later announce the virgin birth of Jesus. *“And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:42-43).*

Zacharias and Elizabeth would make great parents but there was a problem. Like Sarah, Elizabeth had been unable to have children. Zacharias and Elizabeth were well stricken in years. There is no doubt that they would bring John up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What a privilege it would have been to have had parents like Zacharias and Elizabeth! There is no substitute for a godly mother! We need this kind of parents in the world today. John’s training started from the time that he came out of the womb. Not only did the soul of John depend upon it but the souls of others. His parents helped to make his work great. Notice what this great preacher would accomplish.

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:15-17).

What would have been the chance of the preceding being true without faithful parents? Like that of Timothy, the faith that was in John was first in his parents. We as parents can't start too early in training our children. While in the womb we need to be praying and making plans for our children. Malachi prophesied, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5-6).* This he did and fulfilled this prophesy (*Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 3:10-18*).

Elizabeth, was from an honored priestly line. *“And Aaron took him Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Naashon, to wife; and she bare him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar” (Exodus 6:23).* She was the wife of a priest, of the course of Abia, that was one of the sets of priests who ministered in the Temple from Sabbath to Sabbath. There was thus a priestly descent on both sides. Priest were allowed to marry pious women. Elizabeth was no doubt careful about who she married and so was Zacharias. In choosing a mate we need to be very careful. We should never marry a person that will not help us go to heaven. Elizabeth became the mother of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. The priestly wife was a woman of unusual piety, strong faith and spiritual gifts. Throughout all life she preserved the blessed traditions of Aaron and his descendants. A part of the teaching of their son would be to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Godly fathers can do this! Once again what a blessing to have them as parents!

Although righteous toward God and most faithful to her husband, we yet have five words containing a world of heartbreak and disappointment *“and they had no child.”* A childless state, especially for the daughter of a priest and the wife of a priest, was humiliating. She was about to become a privileged woman. For this beloved wife with a pious heart and cultivated intellect, God performed a miracle. Although it was not like the one He performed on Mary, who was a virgin, the Lord still richly blessed Elizabeth in taking away her reproach of being childless. John was born into this great family. The parents would again train their children in the ways of God.

“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).

The name John means “the Lord is gracious.” God was gracious to the world by sending John but was also gracious to Elizabeth and Zacharias. John was the Son of God's forerunner an exhibition of Gods graciousness. How appropriate it was for Zacharias to use his restored speech to bless and glorify God. His naming of John was recognized as God being a part of these events. The people wanted to name him Zacharias after his father, which was customary. The birth of John to this great family was God breaking the silence of 400 hundred years. Inspiration was now being given by Zacharias in song (*Luke 1:67-79*).

Elizabeth great character was seen in the fact that she was the first woman to confess Jesus in the flesh.

“And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:41-45).

All of the Messianic hopes were about to be fulfilled. There is no doubt that Elizabeth was one of the great women of the Bible. I pray that more women of our day will study her great life and strive to become more like this godly woman.

Lot's Wife

Luke 17:20-32

Melvin Sapp

Melvin Sapp obey the Gospel on December 14, 1980 at the Church of Christ on McCartha Drive in Columbus, GA. In April of 1984 he enrolled in the Memphis School Of Preaching and graduated in April of 1986. While in school he married Frances Reid and they now have two children; Xavier (17) and Candace (11) years old.

He started full-time preaching for the Northside Church of Christ in Butter, AL. In April of 1986 and labored with that congregation for seven and one-half years (7 ½). He accepted the work with the Kingsbury Road Church Of Christ in Sumter, SC in October of 1993 and continues at this present time. Bro. Sapp was appointed as one of the three elders at Kingsbury Road in February of 2002.

Bro. Sapp is the director and is an instructor for the Central Carolina School Of Preaching in Sumter SC, of which he is one of the founding preachers of the school in January of 1995. CCSP is a full-time school with five instructors and presently nine students and operates under the oversight of the eldership.

Bro. Sapp has spoken on several lectureships including: Memphis School Of Preaching; Seek The Old Path in Corinth, MS; Palmetto Lectureship in Greer, SC; Carolina Lectures; Laborers Together With Him in Pensacola, FL; Men's Fellowship in Rock Hill; Central Carolina School Of Preaching in Sumter, SC.

Bro. Sapp has conducted Gospel Meetings in Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, New York, Michigan and Kentucky.

Men have always wanted to know the exact time in which a decisive act of God would occur. The Pharisees took this occasion to question Jesus regarding the time in which the Kingdom of God would come. The sad thing about asking important questions is the refusal to accept the answer. The Jews knew that the Kingdom of God was coming, but misunderstood the nature of that kingdom. The splendor of the kingdom under the reign of David and Solomon was longed for and anticipated by the average Jew. Jesus informs them that the coming kingdom would be different from the one of the United Kingdom of old. The Kingdom of God would be spiritual instead of physical, universal instead of national. The remnants of the Kingdom of Israel will be destroyed in 70 A.D. with the destruction of Jerusalem. Despite Jesus' clear warning to the Jews, both Jesus and His church were rejected. When the Roman army compassed the city in 70 A.D. only the Christians made efforts to escape, while over one million Jews died in this massacre. The warning fell on deaf ears!

Jesus warned the disciples that the days would come that He no longer would be with them and that they would seek Him in vain. There would also be those who will seek to mislead and deceive those who try to prepare, so as to cause their demise. It is imperative that we pay close attention to the warnings.

The disciples would fail to heed the warnings concerning the suffering and death of Jesus and would not be prepared when it occurred. They would deny Jesus and forsake Him when that time arrived. Jesus likened their lack of readiness to the generation in Noah's day. Despite 120 years of warning, when the rain came the world was not prepared. People carried on as if no warning had been given. They married, feasted and acted like the promises of God were not to be taken seriously. The rain came and washed them all away.

Another example of not heeding the warnings from God is seen in the narrative of Lot. The angels came and warned Lot of the impending doom on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two of Lot's daughters never attempted to leave the city and stayed with their husbands. Lot and his wife were aided out of the city, but Lot's wife fail to heed the warning to not look back. In seeking one last peek, she turned into a pillar of salt. Remember Lot's wife! Lot's wife ought to stick in our minds so that we always remember the danger of not heeding the warnings of God. Yet, there is evidence that many today have failed to 'Remember Lot's Wife.'

AMERICA NEEDS TO REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE?

The Spirit of the Pilgrims made America a great nation. Europe had become an oppressive society as religious freedom was taken away by Inquisitions and Crusades. Catholicism was seeking to stop departures from an apostate church by threat and force. The new world offer religious freedom to worship as the Bible directs.

A government was set up by the people and for the people. A republic that separated the government from religion was set up so as to avoid the state dictating to religion. The government was to protect is citizens and to serve their needs, not religion serving the state.

Our value of freedom and equal opportunity elevated this nation above oppressive societies and made her the envy of the world. The spirit of self-determination made the country proper economically and politically.

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF OUR NATION

Despite the ills of our society, America is still a great nation. Even with the presence of error, America has a general respect for the Bible. A growing segment of our society is trying to remove God from His universe.

THE SINS OF AMERICA OUGHT TO CAUSE US TO REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

- A. Atheism (*Psa. 19:1; 14:1; Rom. 1:20*).
- B. Evolution (*Heb.3:4*)
- C. Humanism (*Rom. 1:23-25*).
- D. Break-down of the Home (*Heb. 13:4*).
- E. Homosexuality (*Rom. 1:26-27*).
- F. Racism (*Acts 17:26; Gal. 3:28*).
- G. Abortion (*Gen. 9:6*).
- H. Substance Abuse (*I Cor. 9:27*).
 1. Crack, cocaine, Marijuana, alcohol, Meth (speed, crystal, ice) and tobacco.
 2. The drug culture is dirty, daring, deceitful and deadly.
- I. Religious Division (*John 17:20-21; I Cor. 1:10*).

THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF SIN:

- A. Sin Will Destroy Your Good Name (*II Tim. 2:19; I Pet. 4:15-16*).
- B. Sin Will Destroy Your Body (*I Cor. 6:19-20*).
- C. Sin Will Destroy Your Prayer Life (*I Pet. 3:12*).
- D. Sin Will Damn Your Soul (*II Pet. 3:9*).

RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTS A NATION

- A. America Needs To Return To Keeping The Commandments of God (*Psa. 119:172*).
- B. Only The Gospel Can Make One Righteousness, Not Materialism (*Rom. 1:16-17*).
- C. America Needs To Be Instructed By The Scriptures, Not Humanism (*II Tim. 3:16-17*).
- D. Only A Change Of Heart Can Help Turn Around Our Nation (*Rom. 6:17-18*).
- E. The Righteous Must Remain Faithful To Save Many Souls From Judgment (*Rev. 19:1-6*).

Ruth

Will T. Winchester

Will T. Winchester was born in Murray, Kentucky in 1938. He graduated from high school in 1958 and married Nancy McClure on August 11, 1956. They have four children and nine grandchildren. He obeyed the gospel in 1963 and entered Memphis School Of Preaching in 1968. He entered full-time preaching work in Waynesville, NC. He then preached full-time in Belle, MO; Highland, AR; and Spindale, NC, before moving to Marion, NC where he has been for 32years. He has preached in gospel meetings and lectureships on numerous occasions. He has written a weekly newspaper article for over 25 years.

It has been his privilege to baptize all four of his children, a daughter-in-law, a son-in-law, and to of his grandchildren. He also preformed the weddings of each of his children.

Thanks for the invitation to speak on this great occasion. It takes a lot of work to put one of these lectureships together. To those who worked so hard, a special thanks is in order. The subject of my lesson is Ruth. A complete book of the Bible is devoted to this woman. Were we to just study the woman Ruth, we would leave out so much of the Book. The Book of Ruth is a beautiful, inspired love story. It also covers every avenue of life. Hunger, tragedy, death, decisions and then joy are all part of this study.

In order to try to cover as much as possible of the events recorded, we will discuss it by chapters; thus dividing the book into four points.

With your Bible open, notice the first five verses of Chapter One. A famine is in the land - a man, his wife, and two sons move to the country of Moab. The man's name is Elimelech. His wife's name is Naomi. His two sons' names are Mahlon and Chilion. They came into the country of Moab and continued there.

Elimelech, Naomi's husband died. Her two sons took wives of Moab. The name of one was Orpah and the name of the other was Ruth. They dwelled there about ten years. Mahlon and Chilion both died. Naomi was left with her husband dead and her two sons dead and she was in a strange land.

Naomi made the decision to return to her homeland. Her two daughters-in-law went with her. Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go return each to her mother's house, the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me." After much persuasion, Orpah returns to her family, but Ruth made a difficult decision. Verses **16** and **17** record Ruth's decision. The material in these two verses has been used in many wedding ceremonies. They contain material very valuable to our lives. When Naomi saw that Ruth was "steadfastly minded" to go with her, she left speaking unto her. The two of them came to Bethlehem.

When Naomi and Ruth were back in Bethlehem, all the city was moved about them and said, "Is this Naomi?" She said, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the

Lord has dealt very bitterly with me.” The name “Naomi” means “pleasant”, but the name “Mara” means “bitter”. She said, “I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.” The famine and hunger that caused them to move to Moab was nothing compared to the loss she sustained while in Moab. There is much more to life than just food, shelter, and clothing. She was full with her family; she was empty when they were gone. We, today, sorely need to learn this lesson. With the divorce rate at unheard of heights, we have multitudes of empty hearts.

The next three chapters turn to Ruth and what a picture they deliver us. Ruth possessed a rare combination of beauty, gentleness, and goodness which caused her to be admired, loved, and respected. The very thought of Ruth is associated with that which is noble and pure. The book of Ruth appears during the period of the judges, a time when war, bloodshed, heartache, and famine were on every hand. The very tone of the book of Ruth and Ruth herself lifts us above the chaos of the time and gives us a glimpse into the hearts of simple people of faith. No sinful character mars the beauty of the story.

In Elimelech’s family, there was a kinsman that was a mighty man of wealth. His name was Boaz. Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace.” So Ruth goes to the fields of Boaz and gleans. Boaz, upon learning who she was, instructed her to glean in his fields and not to go to another. He also instructed his servants not to touch her. She was told to drink water like the servants and to eat at the table with them. Boaz also instructed his young men to let fall some handfuls on purpose for her to glean. She gleaned this day about a bushel of cleaned barley. Many of us will probably never comprehend the work that went into gleaning and cleaning of this day’s work. She took the barley and divided it with Naomi. This shows us that Ruth had real character. She worked hard to supply their needs.

She told Naomi where she had gleaned and Naomi told her, “The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.” She told Naomi how Boaz had instructed her to glean in his fields until the end of barley and wheat harvest and not to go to any other fields. She continued until the end of harvest and dwelt with her mother-in-law.

Chapter three begins the dating game - a whole lot different from today’s dating games. Verse 1, “*Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? Shall I not seek a husband for thee?*” Elimelech’s portion of land went to his sons and since they were both dead and Naomi had no more sons, then it was to go to the next of kin. When there were daughters-in-law, they also were to go to the next of kin for a husband. So the property and the women went to whoever was the next of kin.

Since it was a custom for parents to arrange weddings, Naomi was careful to comply with God’s marriage laws. Because Boaz was a near kinsman, Naomi instructed Ruth how to prepare to make herself available to him. Ruth followed Naomi’s instructions and went to Boaz. Even though she lay at the feet of Boaz that night, no contact was made sexually because Boaz told her that there was a kinsmen nearer than

he. He told her that he could not take her to wife until that next of kin was contacted. It is at this time that Boaz instructs Ruth, *“and now, my daughter, fear not; I will do unto thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.”* This statement from Boaz is probably the greatest statement in the entire book. It tells the world what kind of woman Ruth was. Everybody knew Ruth as a virtuous woman. What did that mean? It meant that Ruth had character - that she had conduct - that she had a reputation above reproach - that she had made a name for herself that was outstanding. Far too often today women fall far short of this kind of character. Ruth was from the land of Moab which was a very wicked and evil land. Yet, she lived in her new land above reproach. Boaz instructed her that he would do the part of the kinsmen if the next of kin could not do the part. He sent her back to Naomi with six measures of barley, telling her, *“Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law.”* Naomi instructed her to *“sit still until thou know how the matter will fall.”*

In chapter four, Boaz locates the near kinsman and brought together ten elders of the city for witnesses. He tells him that Naomi selleth a parcel of land which was Elimelech's and it was to go first to the nearest kinsman. Boaz told him that if he did not want the land, then he, Boaz, would be next in line to purchase it. Boaz instructed the nearest kinsman if he bought the land that he must also buy Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. The near kinsman said, *“I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance.”* He told Boaz to *‘redeem thou my right to thyself.’* The manner of redeeming and changing required a man to pluck off his shoe and hand it to Boaz. Boaz said to the elders and all the people, *“Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, Chilion's and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.”* The elders of the city stated, *“We are witnesses.”*

Verse 13, *“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son. The women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman (redeemer) that his name may be famous in Israel.”*

In verse 15 the woman tell Naomi, the child would be unto her a *“restorer of thy life, a nourisher of thine old age.”* This verse tells us that Ruth, her daughter-in-law, who loved her and was better to her than seven sons, had born this child.

Naomi became nurse to this child. He was named *“Obed”* and he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. Thus, the Gentile Ruth became the mother of Kings: David, Solomon, and the King of Kings. She became a link in God's chain of redemption.

Ruth's decision to go with Naomi was a great decision. Orpah made the decision to stay in Moab and we know nothing more about her. Decisions determine destiny. Many today need to study the book of Ruth and look at the right decisions she made. Remember she told Naomi, *“Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following*

after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Chapter 1:16-17)

We probably will never be able to comprehend all the system under which Naomi and Ruth lived and what was required concerning marriage in that period of time, but we can know that Ruth was a very virtuous woman and lived her life in submission to God’s laws then in effect. This beautiful book reveals the beauty of life under the most trying circumstances and the great reward of doing right. May God help us to do right and receive our reward as New Testament Christians.

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Jezebel

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Jonnie Hutchison has been reaching the gospel for twenty-nine years. He is a 1976 graduate of the Memphis School Of Preaching. Jonnie has labored with congregations in Virginia, Texas, Missouri, North Carolina and presently labors with he Liledoun Road Church of Christ in Taylorsville, NC. where he has been for the past twelve years. He has been married to his faithful companion, Gail, for thirty years. Jonnie and Gail have three children and one grandchild.

The name of Jezebel in the Old Testament is similar to that of Judas in the New Testament. The mere mention of the names immediately identifies the type of persons they were. Indeed, both names have become synonymous with wickedness. The actual meaning of the name Jezebel is “chaste, free from carnal connection.”¹ A careful study of the Bible account of the life of Jezebel will show that her name did not fit the life she chose to live. In reality the name Jezebel invokes thoughts of one who was manipulative, self-centered, arrogant, cruel and vengeful. She was a woman who had the ability to exert enough evil influence to literally turn a whole nation away from God to embrace a false religion. She was a fierce opponent of the prophets of God and sought the destruction of all who opposed her.

JEZEBEL – A WOMAN OF EVIL INFLUENCE

The first mention of Jezebel in the Bible is found in the words of ***I Kings 16:31*** which describe her marriage to King Ahab. “*And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him*” (NKJV). It is obvious from this reading that the marriage of King Ahab to Jezebel was no trivial matter. It was a transgression of the command of God who forbade intermarriage with idolaters (***Deuteronomy 7:1-5***). This restriction upon God’s people was to prevent their apostasy. When Ahab ignored God’s prohibition and married Jezebel (a non-Israelite idolater) the results were both tragic and immediate. The immediate influence for evil which Jezebel exerted upon her new husband led him to allow the Phoenician worship of the idol Baal on a grand scale within his courts. Ahab eventually had a temple to Baal built in Samaria, the capital and very heart of the northern kingdom (***I Kings 16:32***). At Jezebel’s table in the court of Ahab sat no less than 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah (***I Kings 16:31-32; 18:19***). In addition, Jezebel gave orders to have the prophets of God killed (***I Kings 18:4, 13***). Only Obadiah’s efforts to hide one hundred of the prophets of God in caves saved them from complete annihilation (***I Kings 18:4***). King Ahab became nothing more than mere putty in the evil plots of his new queen. Whatever she wanted him to do; he would do it even if it was open rebellion to the God of heaven. The evil influence of Jezebel over Ahab was so great that the Bible describes Ahab in the words, “. . . *Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him*” (***I Kings 16:33*** NKJV). Yes, Jezebel’s influence was the main reason why Ahab did the evil things he did. “*But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up*” (***I Kings 21:25*** NKJV).

The evil influence of Jezebel in the land of Israel did not cease with the death of King Ahab. For some fourteen years after Ahab’s death, Jezebel continued to exert her evil influence in Israel during the reign of her sons Ahaziah and Jehoram. (***I Kings 22:51-53***).

One of the important lessons to be learned from the record of Jezebel and her evil influence upon her husband Ahab, is the tremendous potential for a negative impact that a non-believing companion can

have on the spiritual welfare of a family. This writer continuously encourages Christians **not** to enter into a marriage with a non-Christian. So strongly are my feelings regarding this matter that I refuse to perform a wedding ceremony for a Christian who is marrying a non-Christian. There is simply too much at stake. There are too many variables which may result in the spiritual loss of an entire family and even the precious souls of future generations. Yes, I know that some non-Christians will eventually be converted. Yet, far too often it is the case that the non-Christian will eventually “wear down” the spiritual defenses of the Christian who will then become unfaithful to God. If you are already married to a non-Christian then follow the instruction of scripture (***I Corinthians 7:12-16; I Peter 3:1-2***). If you are not married, please make up your mind that you will remain in that state until you find a faithful Christian to marry. A few days or years of pleasures here on this earth will never make up for an eternity of separation from God. The truth is the God of heaven wants you and your companion to be “*heirs together of the grace of life*” (***I Peter 3:7***).

JEZEBEL AND THE PROPHET ELIJAH

God did not allow the evil of Jezebel to go unopposed. Elijah the Tishbite was sent to warn Ahab against the direction of evil he had chosen. Elijah first came to Ahab to tell him that there would be famine in the land (***I Kings 17:1***). What was the purpose of the famine? Perhaps the purpose of the famine was to help Ahab understand that the God of Israel was still in control. God had the power to stop the rain. The idol, Baal, could do nothing to prevent it. Obviously, Ahab did not get the message for he continued in the evil path initiated by Jezebel.

Some three years later Elijah returns once again to the presence of Ahab. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab’s reaction was “*Is that you, O troubler of Israel?*” (***I Kings 18:17*** NKJV). Elijah’s response was, “*I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals*” (***I Kings 18:18*** NKJV). Elijah calls for Ahab to gather “*the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table*” to Mount Carmel (***I Kings 18:19*** NKJV). On Mount Carmel, God shows His overwhelming superiority and power over the false god Baal. The prophets of Baal dance around and call upon their god all day long but Baal does not answer. They cut themselves with knives and build themselves up to an emotionally charged state. But Baal does not answer. Then it is Elijah’s turn. Elijah cries out: “*...LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.*” (***I Kings 18:36-37*** NKJV). At once, “*fire from the Lord descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones and the earth.*” The demonstration was indeed powerful as can be seen by the reaction of those who witnessed it. “*Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!*” (***I Kings 18:30-39***). The 450 prophets of Baal are seized by the people and, at Elijah’s command, executed with the sword (***I Kings 18:40***). Elijah then tells Ahab to prepare himself for the coming abundant rain. God would end the famine as further evidence of His power and majesty (***I Kings 18:41-45***).

What did Ahab do? He went running back to Jezebel and reported what Elijah had done (***I Kings 19:1***). One might think that Jezebel would have reacted with fear in recognition of the power of the one true and living God. Her prophets had been slain. They could no longer intimidate the people at her command. Her religion and thus her influence had all but been destroyed. The people no longer believed that Baal was powerful. They now knew that “the Lord, He is God.” However, instead of exhibiting fear, Jezebel reacted with anger and sent a messenger to Elijah to tell him that she would kill Elijah within twenty-four hours (***I Kings 19:2***). Jezebel had no intention of giving up her position of influence in Israel. If Elijah had not fled she would probably have carried out her intent to kill him.

What would have been Ahab's reaction to the events on Mount Carmel if Jezebel was no longer in the picture? Would he have given up the worship of Baal? Would he have turned back to serving the one true and living God? The events that occurred at Mount Carmel, though a commanding demonstration of the power of God, did nothing to change the evil Jezebel. Rather than humbling herself she set herself firmly against God and His prophet Elijah, sought vengeance and continued to influence Ahab in his rebellion to God. This speaks volumes concerning the wicked and stubborn disposition of Jezebel.

It is sad but true that many today hold that same disposition toward God and His people. Not content to simply reject God and His will, they do all they can to destroy both the Word of God and to persecute those who serve Him. This should surprise no one who reads his Bible for it plainly declares, *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."* (**II Timothy 3:12-13** NKJV).

It is obvious that the heart of Jezebel was so hardened that she would not allow herself to even consider the possibility that the God of Elijah was more powerful than her false god. She simply chose to overlook the undeniable proof of that fact and concentrate on taking vengeance upon Elijah. You have heard the old saying, "None are as blind as those who will not see." The evidence for the existence of God and the authenticity of His Word, the Bible is abundant. Yet, many simply choose to ignore this evidence rejecting belief in God and His Word. It is not that they **cannot see** but that they **will not see!** They have intentionally closed their minds to the evidence available to them. They are aptly described in the words *"willingly ignorant"* (**II Peter 3:5** KJV).

Another tremendous truth that is illustrated by these events is that God and one man always make a majority! The 450 prophets of Baal had no chance of success against Elijah because Elijah had God on his side. *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (**Romans 8:31** KJV). In a world where the majority has turned their backs on God and embraced both worldliness and false religions the faithful servant of the Lord needs to understand that the ultimate victory belongs to those who are on God's side. *"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (**I Corinthians 15:57** KJV).

JEZEBEL – A CHAMPION OF COVETOUSNESS

One of the events in the life of Jezebel which clearly indicates the type of person she was is found in **I Kings 21**. King Ahab has built a palace in Jezreel. Next to the palace is the vineyard of the Jezreelite Naboth. Ahab approaches Naboth and asks him either to trade or sell his vineyard so that he can plant a vegetable garden in it. Naboth's response is to reject the proposal of Ahab to sell the land that is his family inheritance which he holds in trust for his successors. Ahab returns to his palace childishly sulking over Naboth's refusal, goes to bed and refuses to eat (**I Kings 21:1-4**).

When Jezebel questions King Ahab and he tells her of the events concerning Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel remarks, *"You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite"* (**I Kings 21:7** NKJV). In essence it is the view of Jezebel that King Ahab should just take Naboth's vineyard from him. The King has ultimate authority and can take what he wants. In the King's name Jezebel devises a plan in which false accusers are brought against Naboth who is then stoned to death. An innocent man is murdered through the treachery of Jezebel and the complicity of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard is stolen from his family. This is covetousness gone to seed!

Covetousness is prevalent in the thinking of many people today. Brother Kevin Cauley in a sermon entitled, "A 'Gimme' Society" declared, "Covetousness is a great temptation today. If we don't

have the latest and greatest, we have to have it. If our neighbor has it, then we have to have it. ‘Gimme’ that new car; ‘gimme’ that new sound system; ‘gimme’ that new house; ‘gimme’ that new furniture. ‘Gimme, gimme, gimme!’ Do we really want to define ourselves in terms of our neighbor’s possessions? . . . Our life is not a physical quantity of possessions, but a spiritual quality of holiness.”ⁱⁱ

There is much said about the sin of covetousness in the Bible. Jesus warned against it in the words of **Luke 12:16**, “*And He said to them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*” This statement of Jesus is followed by the parable of the rich farmer in which Jesus describes a man who had an incredible harvest so that his barns were inadequate to hold it. His conclusion was that he would tear down his old barns and build bigger ones. And then he declared, “*And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry*” (**Luke 12:19** NKJV). This farmer believed that he had everything he needed for the rest of his life. He could just sit down and enjoy the material things he had accumulated. The problem was he forgot to make preparation for his soul’s salvation. He overlooked the fact of the brevity and uncertainty of life. He refused to entertain the possibility that he would not live to enjoy the material things he coveted. His treasure was laid up on the earth and he had failed to lay up spiritual treasure in heaven where it really counts. **Luke 12:20** reads, “*But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?*” NKJV. The conclusion of Jesus is, “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (**Luke 12:21** NKJV).

Inspiration declares, “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (**Hebrews 13:5-6** NKJV). Ahab and Jezebel could have lived well without Naboth’s vineyard. But their covetousness led to the murder of an innocent man. This writer doubts that Jezebel ever gave the death of Naboth a second thought.

THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL

The final demise of Jezebel was foretold by Elijah the prophet of God in the words, “*And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel*” (**I Kings 21:23** NKJV). This prophecy was fulfilled and recorded in **II Kings 9**. At the time of her death Jezebel is in the palace of the king in Jezreel. Ahab is already dead having been killed in battle as predicted by Elijah (**I Kings 21:19**). The reign of Jezebel’s son Jehoram has come to an end as a revolt led by Jehu, a former general in Ahab’s army, is taking place. Jehu has killed him with an arrow. When Jehu enters Jezreel, Jezebel has prepared to meet him. She puts on eye makeup and covers her head (**II Kings 9:30**). From a window in a building overlooking the gates of the city, Jezebel greets Jehu with the words, “*Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?*” (**II Kings 9:31** NKJV). The reference to Zimri refers to an earlier instance in the history of Israel when Zimri murdered Elah at Tirzah, and succeeded him on the throne of Israel but just seven days later died in a fire in the palace he himself had set. (**I Kings 16:8-10**). Jezebel was actually mocking Jehu. One might think that with her life on the line Jezebel would have been more respectful to Jehu. But she remained arrogant and rebellious to the very end.

Here is how the Bible describes the death of Jezebel: “*And he looked up at the window, and said, Who is on my side? Who?*” So two or three eunuchs looked out at him. Then he said, *Throw her down. So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, Go now, see to this accursed woman, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter. So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. Therefore they came back and told him. And*

he said, *This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel*" (**II Kings 9:32-36** NKJV).

The death of Jezebel gives real meaning to the words, "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (**Numbers 32:23**). Jezebel received the only end in which her chosen lifestyle could possibly result. "*For the wages of sin is death*" (**Romans 6:23a**). She lived in utter rebellion to the God of heaven. She refused to accept the abundant evidence that the god in whom she believed was nothing more than stone or wood. She rejected the one true and living God. She refused to change her evil ways and she did all she could to influence others to participate in her wickedness.

The fact that the "*soul who sins shall die*" (**Ezekiel 18:20a**) has not changed since the days of Jezebel. One who chooses to live in rebellion to the will of God until the end of his/her life will suffer eternal death (separation) from God in hell. "*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" (**Matthew 25:46** NKJV).

JEZEBEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The name Jezebel is mentioned one time in the New Testament in the book of Revelation. To the church in Thyatira these words were written: "*Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman **Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*" (**Revelation 2:20** NKJV). It is this writer's conviction that this reference to Jezebel in the church in Thyatira does not refer to the actual Jezebel of the Old Testament or to a specific woman named Jezebel in Thyatira. As brother Wayne Jackson writes it is "doubtless a symbolic appellation for an evil woman who was reminiscent of the Israelite queen who corrupted herself through her spineless husband."ⁱⁱⁱ This woman of Thyatira pretended to be a prophet and through her teaching led Christians into idolatry and sexual immorality. The very fact that God would choose to refer to one who was troubling the church as "Jezebel" is indicative of the extent of the reputation of wickedness characteristic of the original Jezebel.

CONCLUSION

After a study of the Biblical account of the life of Jezebel one can hardly attribute anything positive to her character. Yet, some have tried. One writer declared that she was as zealous about her religion as Elijah was about his. However, this is far from a positive characteristic. For Jezebel worshipped and served a false god. Her hope was no hope at all. One should learn from Jezebel that simply being full of religious fervor or zeal is not sufficient for one's salvation. Consider what the inspired Paul wrote, "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God*" (**Romans 10:1-3** NKJV). One must be religiously right based upon the knowledge of and obedience to the plan that God has originated for the purpose of making men and women righteous if eternal life is one's goal.

The original Jezebel is long dead. Yet, sadly in the lives of some women (and men) the reputation of Jezebel lives on. God is not willing that any should perish (**II Peter 3:9**). He provides the means for man to turn from sin and receive forgiveness through the blood of Jesus (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8-9**). He wants you and me to have names which are associated with righteousness and not wickedness. What does your name bring to the minds of those who hear it?

ⁱ JEZEBEL chaste, free from carnal connection. (from Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1998 by BibleSoft)

ⁱⁱ Kevin Cauley, "A 'Gimme' Society", http://www.the-churchofchrist.com/worldliness/a_gimme_society.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ Wayne Jackson, *Revelation, Jesus Christ's Final Message of Hope – Select Studies from the Apocalypse*, pg. 36 (©2004 Courier Publications, Stockton, CA).

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Martha

(a woman distracted by good)

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The name Martha means lady, mistress. Martha was and is the sister of Mary and Lazarus (**John 11:1-2**). She welcomed Jesus into her home (**Luke 10:38**). Jesus also rebuked Martha (**Luke 10:38-42**). Her faith was affirmed in (**John 11:21-32**). She is also found serving supper in the book of (**John 12:1-3**). The writers Luke and John are the only writers that mention or talk about the character Martha. She is mentioned in twelve scriptures. Luke says *“Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house”* (**Luke 10:38**) *“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me”* (**Luke 10:40**). *“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:”* (**Luke 10:41**). The apostle John writes *“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha”* (**John 11:1**). *“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus”* (**John 11:15**). *“And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother”* (**John 11:19**) *“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat still in the house”* (**John 11:20**). *“Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died”* (**John 11:21**). *“Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall arise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (**John 11:24**). *“Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him”* (**John 11:30**). *“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days”* (**John 11:39**). John concludes with *“There they made a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him”* (**John 12: 2**).

Even though there is not much said about Martha we can glean some things from her character and her example, and also from her sister Mary. It is almost pointless to talk about one without the other. Martha was distracted by good.

As Christians, we have many responsibilities in this life that are proper. We are responsible as parents, as spouses, as children, as employees; also employers have a grave responsibility. In **I Tim. 5:8** Paul tells the young evangelist *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his house-hold, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”*. So we have an obligation to our families. The family has a responsibility to each other; this is God’s idea for the family. Listen at Paul again in **Colossians 3:18-21**, *“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be*

bitter towards them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

Yet sometimes what is good can get in the way of what is better. Sometimes when we fail to properly prioritize our activities, we allow ourselves to be distracted by what is good, and then we miss out on what is better. This is what took place in the lives of Martha and her sister Mary. Remember Jesus loves these sisters.

Let's look at the example of Martha and Mary. Martha was distracted, she had invited Jesus into her house (*Luke 10:38*). Her hospitality is certainly commendable, that is a notable trait. Listen at the prophet Isaiah in *Isaiah 58:7*, "*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?*" The Hebrews writer says "*remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also*" (*Heb. 13: 3*). Martha became distracted by much serving (*Luke 10:40*). God's Son had come to her house and that was an honor. She wanted her sister to help her. Martha began to worry and be troubled by many things (*Luke 10:41*). Jesus tells us the opposite in *John 14:1*, He says, "*Let not your mind be troubled*". Now the things that Martha was caring about were not things that were wrong in of themselves, but they took priority when they should not have. These very things can cause anxiety of the mind and distress of the spirit. Martha allowed that which is good to get in the way of that which is better.

Now her sister Mary was a little bit more disciplined. She sat at Jesus feet and heard His word (*Luke 10:39*). Mary was a disciple (a learner) she wanted to learn from Him. She was more concerned about being a good disciple, than a good hostess. Mary chose the one thing needed (*Luke 10:42*). In the end, there is one thing that is really necessary and that would be seeking God's kingdom and righteousness (*Matt 6:33*). Let us let the Bible speak again "*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*" Mary chose that which had eternal consequence (*Luke 10:42*). She chose "*that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*" Jesus truly had blessings that would last *John 4:14*, "*But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*" In *John 5:24* He says "*most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*" He also says in *John 10:27-28*, "*my sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*". Even Martha was aware of that (*John 11:21-27*). Mary had the discipline to seek first things first, putting the better before the good.

From this dynamic duo what can we learn? Are we sometimes distracted? By the things that may be good within themselves? Are we distracted by our duties as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers? What about our responsibilities at work and in the community? Jesus warned against allowing such things to take precedence in our lives. We can not allow family to come before our service to the Lord (*Matt 10:37*). Listen at *Matthew 12:46-50*, "*While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to Him. Then one said to Him, look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You. But He answered and said to the one who told Him, who is My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.*" Family and work cannot come before the kingdom of God (*Luke 14:16-24*). The cares of this world can render us unfruitful (*Luke 8:14*). The cares of this world can leave us unprepared (*Luke 21:34*). Sometimes we can find ourselves distracted by things that are good

and we find ourselves like Martha worried, troubled and stressed out. Do we remember Esau, he sold out for a morsel (**Heb. 12:16**). Question, are we distracted by the good?

What about this, are we disciplined? Do we seek that which is better? What about that which is really needed? The kingdom of God and His righteousness? Eternal life and the blessings which accompany it? Jesus taught of the value of choosing the good part. He taught about God's providential care in our lives (**Matt. 6:31-33**). Jesus taught ample surplus to replace our sacrifice for the gospel (**Mark 10:28-30**). He also taught peace and joy which the world cannot give (**John 14:27; 15:11; 16:33**), and listen what he says in **Philippians 4:6-7** "*Be anxious for nothing, but in every-thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.*" If (that's a big little word) we are disciplined enough to make the proper choices. If we do we will find ourselves like Mary, free of anxiety, and praised by Our Lord. We can find ourselves like Job, experiencing the end intended by the Lord. Are we disciplined to choose that which is better?

Martha had an opportunity to serve the Lord again, this time on a joyous occasion, after the raising of her brother from the dead (**John 12:1-2**). Here she serves with know distraction, she is free from worry, and receives know rebuke from the Lord. We can experience the same thing if we learn from Mary and Martha. If we put first things first, seek God's will and work in our lives. When we put Him first (He want be second) we will become better host, spouses, parents and better workers. We would be better than if we tried to do it on our own, without God's help. Let us seek first the will of God and everything will fall into place. But if even that which is good distracts us, anxiety and problems will be our lot in life. Are we willing to learn from the Bible character MARTHA?

Sarah

Princess

Jimmy Canup

Jimmy Canup was baptized in May 1965 by Dick Milton in High Point, NC. He began part-time preaching at Cottage Grove church in Greensboro, NC and Corinth church in Woodleaf, NC. He accepted full-time work with the Florida Street church in Greensboro, NC in June of 1967. He has preached full time since 1967 with churches in North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia. Presently located with the Fries Church Of Christ in Fries, VA.

He is married to the former Mary Bartlett of Gala, VA. They have five children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Five children and six grandchildren are faithful member of the church.

When we first meet this woman her name is “Sarai.” This is recorded in *Genesis 11:29*. In *Genesis 17:15* God changes her name to “Sarah.” Either spelling or pronunciation of the name means, “Princess.” God explains to Abraham at the time He changed her name that she would be the mother of nations.

We know that her father was Terah. He was also the father of Abraham. We do not know either the name of Sarah or Abraham’s mother. But, having the same father, she is the half sister of Abraham. This is the reference, which we find in *Genesis 12:13-20* when Abraham and Sarah go down into Egypt.

The same deception was attempted the second time in *Genesis 20:1-18*. Only because God intervened was some serious consequences avoided. The motivation behind Abraham engaging in this was a fear for his life. Both individuals involved in this were pagans and both severely rebuked Abraham for his deception. At the time that Abraham left Ur of Chaldees to go to Haran, Sarah was approximately sixty-five years of age. The account of both times of attempted deception took place several years later and even then she continued to be a very beautiful woman. The word “FAIR” in *Genesis 12:11* and *Genesis 12:14* is from the Greek word “YAPHEH” which means beautiful.

Up until the age of seventy-five, Sarah remained childless. So, deciding that she would be unable to bear children she convinced Abraham to have a son by her handmaid, Hagar. As was the custom at this time, the son born to Hagar would be considered as the heir son of Abraham and Sarah.

Hagar conceived and seeing she was with Abraham’s child she treated Sarah with such impudence that her mistress expelled her from their home. Later God commanded Hagar to return to the home and submit to Sarah. After returning she gave birth to a son that was named Ishmael. The name “Ishmael” means, “God is hearing.” Sarah at the time of the birth of Ishmael was about sixty-six years of age and Abraham was approximately seventy-six years of age.

When Sarah was approximately ninety years of age, god made a promise to her and Abraham that she would have a son. Sarah, and understandably so, from the standpoint of human reasoning, laughed because she knew very well that it was impossible for her to bear a child. Naturally, God pointed out the fact that with God there is nothing that is impossible. As

promised, one year later Isaac the son of promise is born. Just a few short years later, Abraham and Sarah give a feast in honor of the weaning of Isaac. At this time, Sarah observes Ishmael making fun of Isaac and she insists that Abraham again expel Hagar and Ishmael from the home. Abraham complies, with God's approval this time. This account is recorded in **Genesis 21**. In the New Testament, Paul uses this situation as an allegory of the two covenants, the Old and the New.

At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, Sarah passes away and is buried in the cave of Machpelah, purchased by Abraham as a family burial place. Separate and apart from the Genesis account of the life of this woman, the only other time she is mentioned in the Old Testament is in **Isaiah 51:2**. In this passage the reference to her is as the mother of God's chosen people, the nation of Israel.

She is mentioned several times in the New Testament. In **Romans 4:19** the reference is to the deadness of Sarah's womb. That is a reference to the impossibility for her to bear children. In **Romans 9:9**, Paul refers to the promise that Sarah would have a son in her old age. In **Galatians 4:21-31**, although her name is not even mentioned, in the allegory of the apostle Paul, the reference is to the two women, Sarah and Hagar and to Isaac and Ishmael and the two covenants, the Old and the New. In **Hebrews 11:11** among the faith characters of the Old Testament, Sarah is mentioned as having received strength to conceive. The final reference to her is in **I Peter 3:6** as Peter mentions her submission to her husband, Abraham.

Many aspects of the life of this Godly woman are not revealed to us and we can only speculate as to her character she possessed. Speculation is dangerous ground and this we can only present that which has been revealed to us.

Mary: The Mother Of Jesus

The Woman Honored Above All Women

Tim Canup

Tim Canup was born in Galax, VA and is the youngest of five children of Jimmy and Mary Canup. His father is also a minister of the Gospel. He is a graduate of the West Virginia School Of Preaching. He has done local work with churches I Statesville and West Jefferson, NC. He is an instructor at the Tri-Cities School Of Preaching. H and his wife Cindy are expecting their first child.

INTRODUCTION

The study of characters of the Bible will always prove to be a beneficial study. There is only one, ultimate example we are to follow, Jesus the Christ (*I Peter 2:21*). However, there are other men and women of the Scripture, which we may look to as a pattern and example because they had patterned their lives after the perfect example. The apostle Paul said, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (*I Corinthians 11:1*{all quotes from NKJV unless otherwise noted}). In *I Corinthians 10*, the apostle Paul used the disbelief of those who wandered in the wilderness forty years as an example of what not to do. The Bible is replete with examples of men and women, both good and bad, for our learning. A study of biblical characters will only be profitable if we are willing to honestly examine ourselves (*II Corinthians 13:5*) and apply those righteous characteristics into our own lives.

The example that is in consideration for this study is Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is a sad case that there is a religious group that has lifted Mary to a height to which she does not belong, deity. Although she is not part of the Godhead, as we shall see, Mary was a great and godly woman, deserving of our study. Her name means “bitterness.” She was chosen for an important task; however, as her name suggests, she was not guarded against the “bitterness” of life, as we shall see.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST TO MARY

Before the creation of the all things, God Almighty knew that mankind would sin against Him and would require sending His Only Begotten Son into the world, in the form of man, to redeem man from his sins. In *Isaiah 7:14*, God gave Isaiah the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah into this world through the birth of a virgin. Many have misunderstood this prophecy and have tried to apply it to some woman of Isaiah’s day. Others have tried to remove the miraculous aspect of His birth by translating the word for “virgin” as “young woman.” Such is simply not the case. God, in His infinite knowledge, wisdom and ability, brought the Messiah into this world by the virgin birth, i.e., of a woman who had never known a man. God, knowing the hearts of all men, would have to choose just the right person to fill the role of bringing forth the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Consider the great responsibility there would have been in fulfilling this role. It would have to be by one who was humble, righteous, and filled with godly, reverential fear.

We are first introduced to Mary in *Luke 1:26-38*, when God sends the angel Gabriel to “*a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph*” (*Luke 1:26-27*). When Gabriel came in, he said to her, “*Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*” (*Luke 1:28*). This troubled Mary and the angel responded to her, “*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with*

God” (**Luke 1:30**). Many have sought, because of a misunderstanding of this statement, to lift Mary to a place to be worshiped. J.W. Shepard noted:

The salutation of Gabriel, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with thee!” has been made the basis of pagan misinterpretation constituting Mary a fountain of grace to be dispensed to others by her. “Hail, Mary! Thou art full of grace.” She was highly favored above all women in being permitted to be the mother of the Lord and Saviour. But the Gospel narratives attribute to her none of the special titles ascribed to her by later so-called Christianity. The *worship* of Mary is not warranted by the simple salutation of the angel here recorded. The “Ava Maria,” which is the daily prayer of millions has no basis in the gospels. Much as we may admire and honor the Virgin-Mother, we may not pray to her or worship her in any way. Mariolatry is but one form of idolatry. The mother merits all honor but her Son our worship (Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels, 23).

Perhaps the misunderstanding comes from the frailty of the translation. G. Campbell Morgan wrote:

That word “Hail” is a greeting, but it is a cognate word of the word favour, or grace. I do not like the rendering “highly favored,” for it suggests that the reference was to the high office which she was to fulfil as Mother Messiah, whereas it was a description of her character. I am going to change the reading, “Grace be unto thee, thou art endued with grace, the Lord is with thee.” Thus Mary is revealed to us here.... Her character is revealed in the salutation of the angel.... This, as I have already pointed out, had no reference to the office she was to fulfil. It had reference to her character, which created her fitness for the office” (Morgan, Studies In The Four Gospels: The Gospel According To Luke, 20).

H. Leo Boles commented:

This was not from any personal worthiness on her part, or any immaculacy of moral character, but from the abundant grace of God bestowed upon her as upon all others who earnestly seek divine favor and guidance. Special reference is made to the great blessing which was about to be conferred upon her in being the mother of the promised Messiah” (Boles, A Commentary on The Gospel According to Luke, 29-30).

I suggest that Mary was “endued with grace,” “God was with her,” and she “found favor with God” because she was a godly and righteous woman; she was one who humbly obeyed her Lord. God would have chosen a woman of no other character for such a monumental task as giving birth to and rearing the very Son of God. How easily it would have been for some to allow this great privilege to lift them up with pride and seek honor and glory from among their fellow man. Not so with Mary. This very fact suggests her meek and humble spirit. Herbert Lockyer spoke of her sanctity when he wrote:

Because Mary’s divine Child was to be “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners,” she herself had to be holy unto the Lord. When Gabriel announced to the virgin whose name was Mary that she was to bring forth a Son to be called Jesus, he recognized her spiritual fitness for such an honor when he said, “The Lord is with thee” (Luke 1:28). The woman who was to give Him birth, whose breast would be His pillow and who would nurse and care for Him in infancy, who would guide His steps through boyhood years, and surround Him with true motherly attention until His manhood, had to be a sanctified vessel and meet for the Master’s use. That Mary excelled in the

necessary, spiritual qualities for her sacred task is evident from the record we have of her character (Lockyer, All The Women of the Bible, 93-94).

There are some, however, such as André Resner, who seeks to bring the character of Mary into question. In an article, Christmas at Matthew's House (Wineskins, Vol. I, Number 7, pages 5-7), he brings the character of Mary into question with such statements as, "For Matthew {The Gospel writer - tac} it begins in sexual scandal and it ends in political power plays. Before he can tell the **scandal** of Mary's 'immaculate conception,' he has to subtly remind us of other scandalous women" (emp. added). Then, he refers to Mary as, "Another sexually questionable woman." When a person brings a Bible character under such attack, without any evidence, then in essence they have demonstrated they do not believe the Word of God is inspired, and in essence, they have attacked God! Such writings should utterly nauseate us!

Upon receiving the announcement of the coming child, she departed from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to visit her "relative," Elizabeth (**Luke 1:36, 39-45**). When Mary entered, Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, greeted Mary by saying, "**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**" (**Luke 1:42-43**, emp. added). Elizabeth understood that the emphasis was not on Mary, but on the child she was carrying! Notice what she said in verse **45**, "**Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord**" (emp. added). I believe the true attitude of Mary is revealed in the hymn she offered in *Luke 1:46-55*:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever" (emp. added).

Mary understood her place in the grand scheme of things. Contrast her own attitude with that of the Roman Catholic Church. There is no place in the Holy Scriptures where Mary is lifted up to a place to be worshipped. In fact, consider **Luke 11:27-28**: "**And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!' But He said, 'More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'**" (emp. added).

MARY'S BACKGROUND AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND CHRIST'S BIRTH

There is very little known about the background of Mary. In fact, the scarcity of the information given should indicate that Mary (nor Jesus' birth and early years) is not where God intended for the emphasis to be placed. The emphasis of the Gospel's accounts of Christ's life is on His teaching and preparations for the coming Kingdom, which culminated in His redeeming work at Calvary. However, there are some indications concerning Mary's background that we should consider. We know from Luke 1:26, that the angel Gabriel was sent to "a city of Galilee named Nazareth." One can safely conclude that this was the home of Mary. There has been a general misunderstanding about the city of Nazareth. First of all, the Jews from Judea looked down on and considered Jews from Galilee as second-rate. This is largely due to the fact that Greek culture has infiltrated into the region of Galilee. G. Campbell Morgan wrote concerning Nazareth:

Nazareth stood on the hillside, and at the foot of the hill ran the great highway between Tyre and Sidon and Jerusalem. Along that highway there passed Roman soldiers, Greek merchants, Greek travelers, Jewish priests. ...Nazareth was thought of as a little village or hamlet of about three thousand souls or less. We know now that Nazareth then had at least fifteen thousand in population, possibly more. It was one of the cities of Galilee; and being where it was geographically, it was the place where Roman soldiers often tarried over-night, and the Greek merchantmen put up in the caravansaries. Nazareth was a hotbed of corruption... When Nathaniel said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he spoke as one familiar with the place. This is one of the popularly misunderstood and misapplied sayings of the Bible. Generally we have imagined that Nathaniel was speaking in contempt for its smallness, and relation to Galilee. Do not forget that he belonged to a neighboring city. He knew Nazareth well; and when he asked the question he was speaking the blunt truth, in the guilelessness of his heart. He said in effect, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth, corrupt as Nazareth is? (Morgan, 19-20).

The point is this: Mary was supposedly raised in this corrupt town, yet she was pure, godly and righteous. Too often our young boys and girls, as well as ourselves, seek after the ways of the world and we seem to excuse it to the society by which they are surrounded. We must maintain our purity in this wicked and sinful world. We do live "in" this world, yet we must not live "of" the world. Paul said, "*that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*" (**Philippians 2:15**). We must not allow ourselves to be pressured by our peers into conforming to this world (**Romans 12:2**).

Another point needs to be considered. Mary, shortly after receiving the news of her miraculous conception, departed to visit Elizabeth. She remained there for three months before returning home (**Luke 1:56**). One can only speculate as to why she stayed so long. Was this length of visit common at this time? Did she stay to help Elizabeth? If so, **Luke 1:57** seems to indicate that she returned back home before John was born. If this is the case, what was so pressing to cause her to stay three months and then leave just before the birth of John? Perhaps, although it is only speculation, she needed to return for her own wedding. After all, she was only betrothed to Joseph; they were not yet married. When she came home, she was three months pregnant. She would have had to tell Joseph of the pregnancy because before the angel of the Lord appears to him to explain the situation, he was thinking of putting her away secretly (note: the commitment of a betrothal required the writing or certificate of divorcement, so she would not have been stoned – cf. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**). Now, the point is this: what rumors were floating about Nazareth, this corrupt town, about Mary and her unexplained situation. This is often the unfortunate situation God fearing Christians find themselves. This wicked world does not understand the concept of righteous living and seeks therefore to bring us down to their level. The world is looking for anything to pervert in order to make righteous souls look as corrupt as them. It is their feeble attempt of justification. Peter spoke of this in **I Peter 4:4**, when he wrote, "In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you."

Another point to be considered to show the strong character of Mary is in the birth of Jesus. Most will concur that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but what most do not consider, and the implication of the text supports is, Joseph and Mary remained in Bethlehem after the birth of the Christ. I am convinced that they went to the "census" in Bethlehem with the intention of staying there. Consider the fact that Mary would not have been required to go to be registered for the taxation, only Joseph (cf. Shepard, 31). Why would he have taken a wife that was at least eight months pregnant on a journey of at least three days when she wasn't even required to go? Perhaps it is as Shepard suggested, that they were surrounded by many "ill-judging people."

We cannot know for certain why they remained in Bethlehem, but the proof is more than abundant that they did. Consider the wise men that came from the east. They came to Jerusalem (led there by the star), where they inquired where the King was that had been born to the Jews. They were directed, by the prophecy of *Micah 5:2*, to Bethlehem. This would have been, at the very least, forty days after His birth, perhaps longer (cf. *Luke 2:22f*; *Leviticus 12:2f*). Matthew tells us these wise men came “to the house,” not to the stable (*2:11*). The inquiry of these wise men about Jesus caused Herod to fear greatly; he feared losing his position (cf. *Matthew 2:3*). He had instructed the wise men to report back to him when they had found the King under the guise that he too could worship Him. God warned these men in a dream to depart another way. The question is, if these men traveling from the east came to Nazareth to see Jesus, then why would they have had to be warned to go home another way; they would not have had to go back through Jerusalem if departing from Nazareth? However, if in Bethlehem, they would have. When these men did not report back to Herod, this enraged him and he sought to kill all male babies two year old and younger “who were in Bethlehem” (*Matthew 2:16*). If Joseph and Mary had returned to Nazareth, why then would God have had to send them to Egypt? Mary demonstrated great strength of character and great faith in her God to endure all these things. In her faithfulness to God, she also was faithful to her husband.

Two events are recorded where we are told that Mary “kept them in her heart.” First, when the shepherds were called out of the field to come into Bethlehem, “*Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things, which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (*Luke 2:16-19*). Then in *Luke 2:41-52*, when at the age of twelve, Jesus remained behind in the temple at Jerusalem, we are told after His parents found Him that “*He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart*” (*Luke 2:52*). Mary knew by the announcement to her by Gabriel, that this Son would “*...be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end*” (*Luke 1:32-33*). Although Mary may not have known the nature and extent of the work of the Messiah and His Kingdom, she did know she had the grave responsibility of raising, guiding and being the proper example to the very Son of God. She accepted the challenge! She knew she did not have to do it alone; God was with her. We should pray as parents to always strive to train and rear our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (*Ephesians 6:4*).

UNTO THE END

We know Mary bore at least six other children to Joseph, four sons and at least two daughters (cf. *Matthew 13:55-56, Mark 6:3*). The idea of Mary being a perpetual virgin is a false conclusion based on the frailty of man-made doctrines. Although Mary had other children with Joseph, there is no reason at all to begin to think she raised them by any other standard. It is the case that Jesus’ brethren were not believers until after His resurrection; however, this does not necessarily reflect on their upbringing by Mary. Mary, by all indications of the Scriptures, was a devoted mother, even unto the bitter end.

We have the mention of Mary at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where both Jesus and His disciples were invited. While there, they had run out of wine (grape juice), which they had been serving to their guests. It is interesting that Mary approaches Jesus for help in what could have been an extremely embarrassing situation for the master of the feast. Why she came to Jesus for help at this time, I cannot answer; He had not yet worked a miracle while in human form. Jesus’ reply to her is interesting. “Jesus replied abruptly: ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee?’ He was not disrespectful when He used the term ‘woman,’ for such was common mode of respectful address among the Hebrews” (Lockyer, 97). Louis Matthews Sweet, wrote concerning the events at this wedding:

The relationship between Jesus and His mother has almost eclipsed other interests in the chapter. It is to be noted that the idea of wanton interference on the part of Mary and of sharp rebuke on the part of Jesus is to be decisively rejected. The key to the meaning of this episode is to be found in 4 simple items: (1) in a crisis of need, Mary turns naturally to Jesus as to the one from whom help is to be expected; (2) she is entirely undisturbed by His reply, whatever its meaning may be; (3) she prepares the way for the miracle by her authoritative directions to the servants; (4) Jesus does actually relieve the situation by an exercise of power.... It is enough that her spontaneous appeal to her Son did not result in disappointment, since in response to her suggestion or, at least, in harmony with it, He “manifested his glory.” The incident confirms the Infancy narrative in which Mary’s quite and forceful personality is exhibited” (Sweet, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. III, 2002).

Mr. Lockyer also noted:

Although blessed among women, Mary was to learn that she must not be permitted to control the operations of the One sent of the Father. As the Son of Mary, Jesus was willingly subject to her, but now as the Son of God, Mary must endeavor to be subject to Him. The very fact that He addressed her as *woman* and not as *mother* must have had but one meaning for her, namely, that from now on the direction of His course had entered into His Father’s hands (Lockyer, 97).

There is only one other indirect mention of Mary in the Scriptures before Jesus crucifixion. J.W. McGarvey suggested that the phrase “His own people” (“friends” – KJV) of **Mark 3:21** refers to His mother and brothers. Whether or not this is the case, there is mention of Mary and the brothers of Jesus in **Mark 3:31** seeking to speak with Him, but could not for the crowd. Jesus had stirred the religious leaders of His day and many commentators suggest that Mary and His brothers, due to the fact they did not understand the nature of His work, were coming to prevent Him from stirring them up anymore.

We do know from **John 19:25**, that Mary was present during at least the first three hours Jesus hung on the cross. Unlike Mr. Gibson’s film, there is no biblical evidence to show Mary was present during the scourging, let alone to wipe up His blood. There is a mention of women present at the end when He died; however, Mary is not directly mentioned. To state where Mary was or what she was doing during this time is to merely speculate. Alfred Edersheim offers this thought:

The narrative (**John 19:25-27**) leaves the impression that with the beloved disciples these four women were standing close to the Cross: the Mother of Jesus, the Sister of His Mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. A comparison with what is related by St. Matthew (**Matt. 27:55**) and St. Mark (**Mark 15:40-41**) supplies further important particulars. We read there of only three women, the name of the Mother of our Lord being omitted. But then it must be remembered that this refers to a later period in the history of the Crucifixion. It seems as if John had fulfilled to the letter the Lord’s command: ‘Behold thy mother,’ and literally ‘from that very hour’ taken her to his own home. If we are right in this supposition, then, in the absence of St. John—who led away the Virgin-Mother from that scene of horror—the other three women would withdraw to a distance, where we find them at the end, not ‘by the Cross,’ as in John 19:25, but ‘beholding from afar,’ and now joined by others also, who had loved and followed Christ” (Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 888).

Certainly we can safely conclude, based on what we do know of Mary, such a scene must have been a heart-wrenching experience for her. During the time at the beginning, John records: “*When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son! Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home’*” (**John 19:26-27**). Again, Mr. Lockyer noted:

At previous meetings with Christ, Mary expressed her feelings. Now, as He dies, she stands in silence. Those around her had no conception of her inner grief as she stood where her Son could see her. No Spartan mother ever displayed such fortitude as Mary manifested at the cross. How impressed we are with the valor of Mary, as the sword pierces her heart again “now that which she brought forth was dying”! Before He died Jesus recognized His human relationship to Mary, which He had during His ministry put in the background, that His higher relationship must stand out more prominently. Commending Mary to John, Jesus did not address her by name, or as His mother, but as “Woman.” To John He said, “Thy mother” (**John 19:26-27**). But even then she did not desert her Son. Some of His disciples forsook Him and fled, but her love never surrendered, even though her Son was dying as a criminal between two thieves” (Lockyer, 98).

What a difficult time this must have been to watch her firstborn Son, the One announced to her that would be “Son of the Highest” (**Luke 1:32**). She would have had to stand there watching her Son being crucified as a common criminal, although He was completely innocent, as I am sure Mary was aware. As mentioned before, her name means “bitterness” and certainly this would have been a time for her that would fulfill her name. We should think back to Simeon’s words in the temple when Jesus was brought there after His birth. Luke records: “Then Simeon blessed them, and **said to Mary His mother**, ‘Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, **a sword will pierce through your own soul also** – spoken to Mary - tac), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (emp. added). These words were fulfilled on that day. Consider the words of a thirteenth-century hymn, *Stabat Mater*:

At the cross her station keeping
Stood the mournful mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart His sorrow sharing,
All His bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword has passed

The story of this godly and righteous woman does not end in heartbreak at the foot of her Son’s cross. There is one final glimpse of this wonderful woman. The last picture of Mary is not one where she is esteemed to a position of worship; rather, she is humbly in the midst of Jesus’ disciples (**Acts 1:12-14**). There is no other mention of her anywhere after this. Consider Mr. Lockyer’s observation:

The last glimpse we have of Mary is a heartwarming one. We find her among the group of believers gathered together in the upper chamber. She is mentioned, not first in the list, before the apostles, where the Roman Catholic Church places her, but *last*, as if she were the less significance than they.... Her Son is alive forevermore, and life has changed for her. So she takes her place among those awaiting the coming of the Spirit to equip them {the 12 apostles – tac} for the beginning of the Christian community. Mary was present in that upper room not as an object of worship, not as the directress of the

infant church, but as a humble suppliant along with the rest, including her sons, who, by this time, were believers. So the last mention of Mary is a happy one (Lockyer, 99).

CONCLUSION

All in all, Mary is mentioned very little in the Scriptures. We are given very little detail about Jesus' early years, let alone explicit information about Mary's role as His mother. Yet, in the background, Mary is fulfilling her role as God's servant who mothered the Messiah. This silence about her is another great indication that neither God nor the Holy Spirit sought the attention to be on Mary; but rather, the emphasis was to be on the Christ. There is a great lesson for us. We need to recognize our roles as God's servants and be content with fulfilling that role unnoticed in the background.

In the opening of Mr. Lockyer's book, he has this unknown quote, "Nations never rise above the quality of their women." Mary, the mother of Jesus: what a great example for us all! Thank God for women who are willing to pattern their lives after this godly example.

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Mary Magdalene

Mark 16:9

Luke 8:2

Eddie James

Eddie James was born in Jacksonville, FL in October of 1946. He graduated from Paxon High School in 1964. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and went on to graduate from Alabama Christian School Of Religion in 1968. On June 8, 1967 he married his lovely wife Linda. They later had four children, Greg (38), Blake (36), Joey (33), and Jessica (27). He has had the pleasure of baptizing all of his children and his 3 daughter-in-laws into the Body of Christ. He has performed the weddings of all his children. He has four grandchildren.

He began full-time preaching in Lake Butler, FL where he remained for 2 years. He has been preaching at the Normandy Church Of Christ in Jacksonville, FL for the past 36 years.

During the past half-century, four major works have focused on the biblical character Mary Magdalene. Tonight, I shall not focus on the uninspired opinions of men; however, I shall clearly present the inspired word of God, removing any ambiguity.

Hebrews 1:1-2 – “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*”

Luke introduces Mary Magdalene to us in **Luke 8:1-3**. Like countless others, she lived in obscurity before her introduction to Jesus Christ, and was among many who were healed from demon possession. This dark piece of Mary Magdalene’s past distinguishes her from the other women named Mary in the New Testament and is the introduction of a more abundant life. **John 10: 9-10** – “*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*”

Although Mary had a troubled, tortured past, Jesus alleviated the source of trouble and expunged Mary’s trespasses. **Philippians 3:13-14** – “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”

Mary Magdalene rose to prominence among Jesus’ followers and is not to be confused with the “sinful woman” who anointed Jesus feet. These two women may be easily confused as the same because of the close proximity of the two as the latter is recorded in **Luke 7** and the former in **Luke 8**. The Holy Spirit provides no evidence linking these two as one; however, as man’s opinions are often confused with facts, this association became so indelible that English dictionaries define Mary Magdalene as a “reformed prostitute”.

Mary Magdalene clearly did not have a good resume. Imagine the terror that was her life as she was continually consumed by demons. Who in that time would want to associate with

someone so unsound and unsightly? She is not one who would have been at the top of an invitation list for a dinner party. For example, it is even possible that some would have regarded her as the “neighborhood nut”.

Jesus is a friend to hurting, sinful, unhappy people. Despite what others thought and believed concerning Mary Magdalene, let us focus on what Jesus thought. **Matt 9:12-13** – *“But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* Jesus prizes each sinful person and enlists each as a follower to become a kingdom builder. The transforming power of Jesus far exceeded restoring Mary Magdalene’s sanity, exhibited in freeing her to make a life altering decision. **Isaiah 1:18** – *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*

Despite current controversies swirling about concerning Mary Magdalene, the Gospel record provides God’s insight. In comparison to the women who knew Jesus, only Mary of Nazareth, Jesus’ physical mother, is mentioned more times than Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene enjoyed the enviable privilege of a face-to-face relationship with Jesus. She is identified by all four Gospel writers as one of the faithful followers. She appears in the following verses: **Matthew 27:55-56, 61; Mark 15: 40-41, 47; 16:1; Luke 8:1-3; 24:10; John 19:25; 20:1.**

Mary Magdalene started on the wrong side of the Christian war. In fact, she was an “enemy stronghold”. The Bible offers no particulars on how Mary Magdalene incurred the demon possession nor what effect it had on her physically and mentally; nor the particular manner in which Jesus freed her. Since demons were defiant and resistant toward Jesus, Mary Magdalene wasn’t seeking Jesus; to the contrary, Jesus was seeking Mary Magdalene. Jesus removed the darkness from Mary Magdalene and brought her into the light, pulling her soul to safety. Prior to the miraculous event that introduced Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene, she had no reason to anticipate or imagine the road she was to travel. This isolated, ostracized woman became one of the devoted disciples.

From our youth, so many of us are trained in Bible school about Peter, James and John, but so few of us are trained by the literature written by faithful brothers regarding Mary Magdalene. The women in **Luke 8** traveled with Jesus from town to town. **Luke 9:23** *“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*

Mary’s Determinations

The Bible is full of people that met Jesus and soon forgot him; however, this is not true regarding Mary Magdalene. Jesus took Mary Magdalene from bondage, restored her right mind, and freed her to follow him. She not only followed Jesus, but she and other women also served him **Matthew 20:26-28**. Although many offered excuses to why they could not follow Jesus, Mary Magdalene offered no such excuses. We should never overlook the importance of these women to serve the Lord. Putting her needs in the background, Mary Magdalene thought only of the service to her Master, bringing his needs to the foreground. So many people benefit from the Lord’s power only to walk away and live for their own delight. Mary Magdalene received a blessing and became a blessing, demonstrating her care for Jesus and the twelve. She knew her life was one of misery and uselessness; therefore she became a contributor to Christ, advancing

the Kingdom of God. Unlike so many of us today, she found a way to serve Jesus, not a way out of responsibility.

The words “Thank You” are beautiful words, especially when they come from a grateful heart **Luke 17:12-19**. Often we who are sincerely grateful find these words inadequate; however, Mary Magdalene’s thank you was expressed with a life of service.

Mary Magdalene did not grow weary in well-doing. **Galatians 6:9** – “*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*” Mary Magdalene did not offer phrases such as: “I’m tired” or “I need a vacation”

Mary Magdalene’s life-changing process illustrates many of Jesus’ beatitudes. She became “poor in spirit” in that she humbled herself to Jesus. She realized that she needed not only a physical change in her life, but she needed a spiritual transformation. Mary Magdalene illustrates “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” in that one meeting with Jesus was not enough for her starving spirit. Mary Magdalene appreciated what Jesus could offer her and demonstrated the words of James. **James 2:18** – “*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*” **Ephesians 2:10-12** – “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.*”

Mary Magdalene’s life is a true study of discipleship. God will not hold us accountable for talents we do not possess, but he does expect us to utilize those talents we have been given. Mary Magdalene was not a wealthy woman and in fact gave that which she did possess as in **Exodus 35:22**. When Moses was assembling the articles of the tabernacle, these women were “willing-hearted”. Isn’t this the difference between ordinary and unusual people? The difference is in what people do. Mary Magdalene’s love for Jesus is dressed in her hands and feet, which were offered to help Jesus **Matthew 10:40-42**.

Mary Magdalene’s spiritual qualities are love, concern, care, kindness, faithfulness, and devotion **John 13:33-35**. Although Mary served tables for Jesus, she was able to hear his teaching, being saturated in his nature.

Mary’s Defining Moment

Mary Magdalene is recognized in scripture when Jesus is crucified, buried and is risen from the grave. The call to follow Jesus faithfully carries the ultimate privilege to become like him. Discipleship involves enormous faith. Mary demonstrates this in that she is not a careless or indifferent follower.

Mary Magdalene witnessed some tense moments in Jesus’ last days. She, like the twelve, stumbled over Jesus’ words about dying on the cross and being raised the third day. Some things don’t register because you don’t want them to. As things began to unravel, Mary Magdalene’s life is surrounded with doubts and fears; but she never lacked courage. While watching Jesus’ death on the cross, Mary’s world was coming to an end. In each of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death, Mary Magdalene’s presence at the cross is reported. Unlike most of the twelve who fled or

denied Jesus, Mary Magdalene and other faithful women from Galilee stayed with Jesus to the bitter end. (**John 19:25; Luke 23:55**).

Although being at the cross was not a safe place to be especially for a woman, Mary Magdalene did not leave Jesus. She obviously didn't take the easy way out; for Jesus was her life **John 6:56-62**. What would she do without him? When Mary saw Joseph and Nicodemus take Jesus' body to the new tomb and roll the stone, sealing the tomb, her heart sank, her shoulders sagged and her heart became as heavy as lead. Here are Mary and other women alone in the night and Jesus is there to talk to her and calm her.

Then we observe Matthew's account. **Matthew 27:61** – “*And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.*” Mary Magdalene would likely think of the precious moments she shared with Jesus. Mary and the other women have one last opportunity to minister to Jesus, though with heightened security around his tomb presented a level of risk. These women planned to return to Jesus' tomb as early as possible after the Sabbath to anoint the body of Jesus; therefore, when these women went home they spent their time preparing spices and perfumes.

What kept these women so devoted? Had Mary Magdalene slept at all? When they arrived at the tomb they begin to think, “Who shall roll away the stone”; but they continue toward the tomb. This is a natural event for Mary to come to the tomb and provide for Jesus' body as she had provided for him during his life.

When the women arrived, they were shocked to find the stone removed. Mary took one look and ran to tell Peter and John. We are told in scripture that John arrived before Peter to the site of the tomb and once Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb, both Peter and John have come and gone.

How can you change the worst of situations? Mary has conversations with angelic servants and then with one she believes to be a gardener. The women had risen early in the morning on the third day but One had risen earlier.

Suddenly Jesus speaks her name “Mary”. (**John 10**) When Mary Magdalene heard that voice, the clouds of despair were lifted, vanishing her fears and then she called Jesus “Master”. This isn't an official title to Mary; however, she describes her relationship to Jesus. While traveling to Emmaus, a village near Jerusalem, two men conversed with Jesus; however he didn't identify himself to them as Jesus. Why didn't Jesus reveal himself to Peter and John? Why did he reveal himself to a woman? The Holy Spirit declares to us this point and we should listen to him rather than to men such as Dan Brown.

Jesus asks some questions such as: Why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? Why would Jesus ask these questions? Is it possible to replenish Mary Magdalene's faith? **John's gospel is a gospel of “seeking” and “looking”.**

To answer the previous question regarding Jesus revealing himself to a woman, let us consider: After being held hostage by several demons, who better than Mary Magdalene to witness that Satan couldn't hold Jesus either? (**Romans 6:20-23**) Mary who had realized personal victory over Satan knew that her Master is alive. The freedom she had from the demons didn't match her joy to see and hear Jesus. Jesus ended her grief in a cemetery.

What an honor for Mary Magdalene to be an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus told her "but go" which is recorded for us in *Matthew 28:18-20*. Mary Magdalene was obedient and promptly accepts Jesus' enlistment for her to go tell the good news to the disciples *John 20:17*. This great opportunistic mission demonstrates the trust Jesus held in Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene ran to fulfill this awkward assignment, further solidifying that Jesus knew she would do as he asked, without wavering.

Mary Magdalene was lost at the cross, first at the grave. She was not asked to sit down and drink a cup of coffee with Jesus and converse regarding the "good old days". During the next forty days, it would become evident to Mary Magdalene regarding Jesus' purpose and his desire for coming to the earth.

Conclusion:
Titus 3:1; Is 6:8

There was an orchard owner who owned vast rolling hills full of fruit and nut trees. Each day he inspected the incoming produce, ensuring that the outgoing product was worthy to carry a label with his name affixed to it. The owner knew each tree by name and had planted each with love. Some of these trees bore much fruit and yet some seemed scarcely alive. The owner employed numerous servants, whose job it was to cultivate the weak or struggling trees, to prune and fertilize the trees when necessary, and to remove any malignant trees containing virulent infestations.

The owners four sons also helped in the fields, each learning the process of judging where and how to place new trees, where and when to harvest the trees to obtain the greatest return, and also when to remove trees fallen due to the cold or disease.

During this process, each son noticed what seemed to be a sorely infected, neglected, disease ridden, fully mature tree which seemed to be wasting precious field space. Each son recommended removing the tree; however, the owner, not ready to destroy his investment pressed for patience and caution. He would send his sons out through time to perform their regular obligations and to closely watch and report back concerning the unfruitful trees' status.

The first son went out immediately and thought that the tree was just dormant and that next season it would produce again. A few months latter, the second son returned after inspecting the tree and gave his report to the owner, "the tree is definitely dead". The owner immediately sent the third son out for another opinion before he had the tree removed. This son spent his time considering pollination. After inspecting several trees in the area, he reported back exclaiming that there were some fruit buds but without sufficient pollination, the blossoms would not bear appreciable fruit. The owner decided to send his youngest son to verify his brother's claims. The last son returned two months latter with his report, "I believe the tree is cankerous and must be destroyed at once".

The perplexed owner had sent four sons; each returning with a different report and without confirmation, destroying the tree would be foolish. So the next morning the owner went out across his plantation to personally inspect the tree he had planted so many years previously. The owner was willing to spend as much time as was needed and he pruned many severely damaged and diseased limbs off the tree. The owner painstakingly removed any weeds that would compete with the tree for any available nutrient. Next he fed and watered the tree appropriately. The owner also ensured that the tree was in the strength of the sun by removing

any impediments. After some time and all of these actions, the owner revisited the tree, with his sons, believing it would soon bear much fruit. The tree was completely full of fruit.

This story is analogous to the story of Mary Magdalene. Many people, possibly even chosen men of God had not observed the good fruit or the potential she possessed. However, Jesus spent valuable time removing harmful agents from her and cultivating her for many good works. In time she was a great servant for the Kingdom of God.

Can Jesus help you?

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Esther

For Such A Time As This

Paul Kirkpatrick

Paul Kirkpatrick is in his third year of service as the pulpit minister for the Warners Chapel Church of Christ in Clemmons, NC. Paul was born and reared in Parkersburg, WV. He is a graduate of the East Tennessee School Of Preaching And Missions in Knoxville, TN and has course work from Ohio Valley College and West Virginia University of Parkersburg. He was awarded the Regents Bachelor Degree and The Master of Arts from the Theological University Of America. Paul has served churches in Kansas, West Virginia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

He has been preaching for twenty-four years and has preached the Gospel meetings in West Virginia, Indiana, North Carolina and South Carolina. He has been a guest speaker on lectureships in Indiana, North Carolina and South Carolina. He has made mission trips to Jamaica and Thailand. He has articles published in the Carolina Christian, Palmetto Messenger and Carolina Messenger. He is also a former Board Chairman and Associate Editor for the Palmetto Messenger (now the Carolina Messenger), and currently serves as a board member. Paul is active in youth work, such as the South Midlands Youth Rally, and Christian camps in Ohio, Tennessee, South Carolina and North Carolina.

Paul has also done radio and television work for several years. He is a part-time instructor for the Fishers Of Men evangelism program. He was an instructor in the Central Carolina School Of Preaching in Sumter, SC from 2001-2004. He will be directing the North Carolina School Of Biblical Studies that will begin in August 2007.

He and his wife Carla, have been married for twenty-seven years and have three children, Myca (21), Jennifer (20) and Joshua (17).

I want to share a story from the Bible with you tonight. This story is a drama, filled with suspense, romance, murder, jealousy and anger. There are heroes and villains, rich and poor. And, as with any good story, there is a happy ending. It is probably one of the most interesting stories in the Bible, and yet one that many people have never read.

It is the story of Esther. In fact, an entire book in the Old Testament is dedicated to her story. It is one of only two books in the entire Bible named after a woman. Both are exciting stories. Let me try to sum up the "book" for you and then quickly give you three principles that I've discovered in this amazing story.

THE STORY OF ESTHER

For those who are not familiar with the story of Esther, it is a story with four major characters: the king, Haman (the prime minister), Esther, and Esther's righteous cousin - Mordecai.

During a search for a Queen, the King of Persia is introduced to Esther, a beautiful Jewish maiden. He flips out when he sees her, because she is more beautiful than any other woman, and he asks her to become his queen. Soon after she becomes queen, Esther's cousin Mordecai uncovers a conspiracy to kill the king. He informs Esther, who in turn warns the king, and the men involved are put to death.

In comes the prime minister, Haman. Haman is second-in-command to the King. He's a man who loves power. He demands to be worshipped by the people of Persia. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay him honor. Mordecai worshipped God alone, and would not bow before any man.

Mordecai is asked why he would not bow down before Haman. He simply replies, "I am a Jew."

In a fit of anger, Haman convinces the king to issue a decree to have all the Jews in Persia put to death.

Jews all across Persia began fasting, weeping and wailing as they awaited the fateful day they would be put to death.

Mordecai goes to Esther and convinces her to try and get the king to change his mind. But this is not as easy as it seems. You see, no one, not even the queen, can approach the king without an invitation. If Esther approached the king without first being summoned, she would likely be put to death. The only exception would be if the king extended the gold scepter towards her.

She decides to approach the king. She decides that it would be better for her to die than to allow such a terrible thing happen to her people, the Jews. She decides that it would be better to die doing God's will, than to live in disobedience.

For three days, night or day, Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews in the land fasted and prayed.

On the third day, Esther entered the inner court of the palace in front of the king's hall, and waited for the king to respond. Would he extend the gold scepter? Or have her put to death? (Imagine intense music here!)

I'm sure a whispered, "Thank You Jehovah" escape her lips as she watched her husband extend the gold scepter.

As she approached, the king's love for her was evident, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

But Esther knew a secret that has been passed down to women for centuries ... The way to a man's heart is ... through his stomach.

All Esther asks is for the king and Haman to have lunch with her. At lunch, the king again asks Esther what she wanted. The intelligent woman that she is, Esther invites the king and Haman to have supper the next day.

Haman runs to his friends and begins boasting about being invited to have supper with the king and queen. As he is telling his buddies about how important he is, Haman notices Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. Haman burns with hatred towards Mordecai and decides to build a gallows, seventy-five feet high and ask the king to have Mordecai hanged in the morning.

But that night, the king can't sleep. After tossing and turning for hours, the king orders the book of chronicles, the record of his reign to be read to him. As he listens to all that has happened during his reign, he is reminded of the time Mordecai uncovered the plot to have him killed. The king realizes that Mordecai has never been rewarded for his faithfulness.

The next morning, Haman approaches the king. Before Haman can say anything, the king asks him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman immediately thought the king was talking about him. So he tells the king that he should put a royal robe around the man and carry him through the city streets proclaiming what a wonderful man he is.

The king tells Haman to go get Mordecai and place a royal robe around him and take him through the city proclaiming what a wonderful man he is.

That night at supper, Esther finally asks the king to spare her people. The king is furious that someone would trick him into making such a decree. He demands to know who did it. Esther tells him that Haman is the guilty man. The king becomes so angry that he storms out of the banquet.

Haman realizes that he is in deep trouble so he turns to Esther and begs for his life. Just then the king comes back in and sees Haman wrapped around Esther's legs. The king has Haman hung on the gallows Haman had built for Mordecai.

The Jews are saved.

ESTHER HAD COME TO A POSITION OF INFLUENCE AT A NOTABLE TIME

Esther 4:13-16. It was a time of worldly pomp and show. It was a time when the King and leaders of 127 provinces recklessly took a six-month vacation for wickedness and sin. They neglected the nation and its welfare – their homes and children, education, etc. Today, our nation is neglecting to preserve our freedom and to purify the streams of morality, etc. **II Tim. 3:15; Eccl. 12:13-14; II Timothy 3:1-5.** It was a time of strong drink. We are slowly becoming a nation of drunkards and alcoholics and problem drinkers (**Proverbs 20:1**)

Proverbs 23:29-35. It was a time of immodesty and debauchery. It was a time when the king demanded Vashti the Queen to come before the leaders of 127 provinces and display her body before the lustful eyes of wicked men **Est. 1:2.**

We should be thankful that the Queen had the moral courage to dare to do right. (**I Timothy 2:8-10 NKJV**) – *“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”*

It was a time when the sanctity of marriage was at low ebb. The King was willing to get rid of the Queen for no fault of hers. We are now seeing one divorce for every two or three marriages in our country **Matt. 19:3-9.**

It was a time when human life was cheap. The leaders were willing to sign a decree to have 2,000,000 Jews killed, because one of them would not bow and tip his hat to Haman, a wicked scoundrel.

We would never do anything that wicked? 98% of all abortions in America are for reasons of convenience.

The papers are full of murder, adultery, theft, and hate.

It was a time that cried out for good woman of courage, Esther (**4:13-16**). Her silence would have been sin – in a responsible position, in a time that needed good people – of conviction and prayer.

It was true in her time.

It is still true in our time?

ESTHER HAD COME TO A POSITION OF INFLUENCE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Mordecai thought Esther had come to the throne “for such a time as this.” What sort of a time was it? It was a time when the King and the leaders of the nation were selfish, wicked, and immoral. Sin was in the saddle (*Proverbs 29:2*).

When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan. Haman was wicked to the core.

The leaders of all provinces were wicked. Consider the morals of some of our leaders (*Proverbs 14:34*). Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

We live in a world of ungodliness and immorality. God’s morals are not the world’s morals. God’s values are not the world’s values. God’s desires are not the world’s desires, and if we are going to bring Him the honor and glory He desires and longs for, then we as His people should learn to live in this wicked world system with a great passion for what He wants, and when we do, we bring Him the recognition He desires and our willingness to be used by Him brings Him great pleasure.

Here’s what must happen in our lives though, both in our lives as individuals and as a church body: we must position ourselves so that God can use us to accomplish His will through us – His will of bringing glory to Himself through us. That positioning is central to our being used by God. In other words, if we as a people have resigned ourselves to just getting along in this world when we could be turning it upside down for Christ, if we have chosen the path of passive resignation, the path of getting along for the sake of getting along when we could be actively pursuing God’s kingdom and righteousness, then God will be unable to use us the way He really desires and we will miss out on the blessings He has for us.

I believe that nothing disappoints God more than having children who refuse to be used by Him: people who want His blessings without accepting the responsibilities that go along with being called a child of God.

LESSONS FROM ESTHER

Four lessons we can learn from this story:

I. Never forget that we are sometimes asked to do things for God that seem difficult to us.

Isaiah 20:2-5. Isaiah was not a backward nomad, but was a counselor to Hezekiah, a good king. Nonetheless, God commanded him to walk naked and barefoot as a sign to the people. He being an obedient man of God, did exactly as was commanded.

Joshua 6:3-5. Fortified cities were taken by these means that God supplied (*Ezek. 4:2*). It made no sense whatsoever to simply march around a city to conquer it. *Heb. 11:30* - They did what was commanded, trusting that the results would come.

Jonah 1:1-3. To go preach to the Ninevites was a hard command to Jonah because they were the hated enemies of the Israelites. The Ninevites were noted for their cruelty to their captives. Jonah wanted them dead! He didn’t want to preach to them, because if they repented, God would be merciful to them. *Jonah 4:2-3*.

Hosea 1:2-3. Hosea was commanded to take an adulterous woman as wife. As was expected, she was not faithful to her husband. The third child was named, “Not mine.” Evidently, her baby was not

Hosea's. God made a comparison of Hosea's wife to the Israelites **Hosea 2:5**. Later, after Hosea's wife had been used by her so-called lovers, she was being sold on the auction block as a slave. Hosea was commanded to go get her.

Abraham - **Gen. 22:1-18**. Without murmuring or complaining, Abraham set in his heart to do as commanded. We wonder how he may have felt when asked by Isaac -**Gen. 22:7**. Abraham was ready to carry out God's command, thinking that God would take care of the matter **Heb. 11:17-19**.

God was allowing Esther to be in a position of influence in the court of the King. All the while, her life was in danger.

II. Never forget, God is in control – you can trust Him.

Do you realize that there are over 170 passages of Scripture which speak about the providence of God? 170!!

Psalm 23; *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*

Psa. 146:7; *“(The Lord) upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, and the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”*

Jeremiah 31:35; *“This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the Lord Almighty is his name.”*

Matthew 6:26; *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

I Cor. 2:9; *“... it is written: No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

On and on we could read. God has displayed His providence all through history. He saved Noah; protected Abraham; delivered the Israelites; divided the Red Sea; supplied manna and quail; conquered Canaan; fought the battles of Israel; fed Elijah and the widow; warned Joseph in dreams; warned the wise men of Herod's true desire; protected Paul; cared for John while on the island of Patmos.

We serve an All-powerful and an All-knowing God who will never leave us or forsake us. He is always with you. Perhaps you are wondering, “Where is God?” Allow me to answer that question with complete assurance: He is with you.

So people may read the Esther and think, “What a bunch of coincidences!” I read it and think, “God had it all worked out!”

God was working His plan when Esther became queen. God placed Mordecai in position to uncover the plot to kill the king. Late one night, God reached down and touched the king with a little insomnia, so he would remember Mordecai's faithfulness. When the Jews were crying out to God to save them from death, God was already working it all out.

To illustrate this, think of one driving a car - we can only see a little of what lies ahead. God is like an eagle. He knows what trouble lies ahead, and He begins working out tomorrow's problems today.

God knows your situation. He is already doing the needed work. Have confidence in that fact. He is still in control.

Lean on the providence of God. He will take you through today in order to prepare you for tomorrow. Wait on Him. God knows what He's doing.

III. Never forget who you are – You are a child of God.

We are God's people; God's children.

The Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 8:15-17** that we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

II Cor. 6:18 says, I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

We are God's children. Ephesians tells us that we are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's households.

We are citizens of heaven.

Esther could have ignored who she was. She was in no danger of death. The Jews would be put to death, but the king did not know she was a Jew. If she kept silent, she would be spared. But by speaking up, she risked being put to death herself. But she knew that she was a child of God first. The queen of Persia was a secondary title. First and foremost, she was a Jew: a child of God.

I am proud to be an American. Not enough people seem to be willing to say that. Many today are making public statements criticizing the current administration and calling our military baby killers and such. I'm angered at that, but being an American is secondary to me. First and foremost, I am a citizen of Heaven; a child of God. Esther remained true to who she was: God's child.

IV. Never forget that God's promises are trustworthy.

I wonder how Mordecai felt. He had uncovered a plot to kill the king. He saved the king's life - yet did not even receive a simple, "thank-you."

He could have become bitter. He could have become angry with the king. "Next time, I'll let them kill you." He could have done so many things.

And what did he do? He remained faithful to the king.

Sometimes we wonder where God's blessing is. I try to follow Him in obedience, yet sometimes I feel empty inside. He promises to look after me; so why do I struggle so much? Stay focused. Don't give up. Continue to trust Him. God is faithful in his promises.

Mordecai continued to serve the king. The night the king had the official records read to him, he realized Mordecai had not been thanked properly. It turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to Mordecai. Haman had planned to kill Mordecai in the morning. It would have worked if not for the king remembering the day Mordecai saved his life.

At the end of the book of Esther, Mordecai is placed in the position Haman once held - second in command to the King. Mordecai was elevated to a high position in the kingdom.

Unlike the king of Persia, God remembers his promises. He is aware of your faithfulness. He knows the struggle you are experiencing. He plans to keep His promises. His will never fail you.

This life is but a vapor of time - it is passing quickly before us. I've talked before about people who live with an "eternal mindset". These are people who realize that this life is not all there is. They live their life realizing that even if they struggle here and now, the day is coming, when Heaven will be their reward. When they will see God, The King, face to face.

The day is coming when He will reward His faithful servants. We will stand before Him and hear Him say those words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into your reward!"

Yes, God wants to bless us here on Earth. God has so many things in store for us if we will just remain faithful to Him.

But nothing can compare to the reward He has in store for His people.

If you are wondering where he is tonight, realize again, that He is right there with you, He will never leave you. His strength will hold you up. His promises are ever true.

Just wait on Him - and your strength will be renewed. You will mount up on wings of an eagle; you will run and not grow weary, you will walk and will not faint! - just wait on Him.

Jesus makes this promise in **Rev. 2:10** – "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" He that overcomes, Jesus promises, will, like them, be dressed in white. He will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels **Rev. 3:5**.

Lois And Eunice

Timothy's Mother And Grandmother

II Timothy 1:5 – “Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith that is in thee; which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, in the also.”

Doug Frazier

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Very little is said about Lois and Eunice in the Bible. From what little we know of them, we can be certain that they were very devoted Christians. We can see that it does not matter how much you are talked about, but what is said about you. Although Lois and Eunice were not main characters in the Bible they are still very valuable to our learning.

Lois was the grandmother of Timothy and evidentially the mother of Eunice. The only scripture that mentions Lois is *II Timothy 1:5*, “Having been reminded of the unfeigned faith that is in thee; which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, in the also.” The name Lois means “agreeable” or “desirable.”

Eunice was the mother of Timothy. The only scripture that refers to her by name is also in *II Timothy 1:5*. In *Acts 16:1* we read that she was a Jewess. Eunice and Lois lived in Lystra. On Paul’s first journey to Lystra, Eunice, Lois and Timothy were all likely converted to the Christian faith. Because of their devout Jewish faith, the Old Testament prepared their hearts to hear the words of God regarding eternal life. The name Eunice means, “conquering well.”

These two individuals helped influence young Timothy to be a faithful Christian. It is encouraging to know that they were willing to teach Timothy about the Lord. One of the most important things for parents to do is to teach their children sound doctrine. Parents are to be an example to their children.

Timothy was not circumcised at childbirth, seeing that his father was a gentile. We do not know much about Timothy’s father. There is a reference to him in the book of Acts. *Acts 16:1* - “And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek.” We do not know the name of Timothy’s father all we can gather from the information given is that he was a gentile. Timothy’s father most likely was not a Christian. Although Timothy’s father was a gentile, Eunice and Lois did all that was in their power to teach the word of God to Timothy at a young age.

In *II Timothy 1:5* we find the word “unfeigned”. Unfeigned comes from the word “hypocrite” and literally means “unhypocritical”. Timothy is complimented on his “unfeigned faith.” We learn from the study of God’s word that it is impossible to be pleasing to God without

faith. **Hebrews 11:6** – “*and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.*”

The apostle Paul says that the faith was first present in the grandmother Lois. We can safely say that Lois taught her daughter the things of the Lord. Then in return, they taught Timothy the word of God. The word of God was handed down or simply passed on.

We all need a strong Christian influence in our lives and Timothy’s was his mother and grandmother. Some of the greatest examples of Biblical faith can be seen in godly women. If Timothy did not have his mother and grandmother to teach him the things of God most likely he would not have been a faithful Christian.

In **II Timothy 1:5** we also find the word “dwelt.” The word “dwelt” means to live at home. The faith that Timothy received was the faith that “dwelt” in their home. Our homes must consist of the same faith that dwelt in the home of Timothy.

In order from someone to have faith they must first hear God’s word. **Romans 10:17** – “*So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” These individuals had to first hear God’s word and be taught. It is impossible for anyone to have faith in something that they have not heard. People can not have faith in God unless they hear His word. The first step to becoming a child of God is hearing his word.

As we read in the Old Law, we can see the responsibility placed upon the parents to teach their children to serve God. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** – “*Hear O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah. And thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by thy way, and when thy liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates.*” It can be clearly seen that it was very important for the parent’s in the Old Testament to teach their children the things of God. In this verse we can see that they were to teach their children God’s word continually. Parents have the responsibility in teaching their children. If a parent loves God with all their heart, soul and mind they will teach their children, as the people were commanded in the above passage.

Parents must never stop teaching their children the word of God. If they stop teaching their child they could fall into the corruption of the world or the power of Satan. A parent can not be slack when it comes to teaching their children the things concerning the Lord. This is one of the biggest problems of today. When parents are too lazy to teach their children what thus says the Lord, the children become weak.

There were some throughout the Bible who were poor parents. **I Samuel 3:13** - “*For I have told him that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons did bring a curse upon themselves, and he strained them not.*” Eli was a poor father because he did not restrain his children. He knew what they were doing and did nothing about it. **II Chronicles 22:3** - “*He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.*” Athaliah was a terrible mother because she did not teach her son to do right. She encouraged him to do wicked.

Parents must make sure they teach their children the right things. If parents teach their children anything other than the true gospel of God they have perverted it.

Galatians 1:6-9 – *“I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel. Which is not another gospel only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema.”* We can see from this verse that it is very important for a parent to teach their children the true gospel. No parent should want to teach his or her child a faulty concept about God.

Lois and Eunice taught Timothy the true word of God. We must sit our children down every day and discuss with them the word of God. Parents must take the time and teach their children. In **Acts 17:11** we are told of the nobleness of the Berea’s in that they *“received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.”* We can not rely on others to teach our children the true word of God. Parents must take the responsibility in training their children. We should not rely on bible teachers, school teachers, or the preacher to train our children. It must come from home!

Proverbs 22:6 - *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* Lois and Eunice trained up Timothy in the way he should go. They trained him through the word of God. There is no better way to train a child than to teach them God’s word. Parents must be like Lois and Eunice. We as parents must train our children in the words of God. We must not allow our children to make choices that could damage them in the future. Imagine if Timothy was allowed to choose his own personal choice of religion. A child knows nothing about the word of God, unless he is taught. If parents do not teach their children the correct ways for worship, as directed by the word of God, the parent becomes inconsistent. Imagine if all the parents that allow their children to choose if they want to go to church or not, would allow them to choose when they wanted to go to school or to eat healthy food instead of junk food. We as parents enforce the unimportant things of this life, instead of enforcing the things that will lead them to eternal life with Christ. Listen to what the writer Paul says in **Ephesians 6:4** – *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.”*

Lois and Eunice were consistent in training Timothy from a young age. Parents should start training their children from babes. **II Timothy 3:15** – *“And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* Paul says that Timothy was taught from a babe God’s word. We see in this scripture the process of the transferring of the faith that Lois and Eunice possessed. Parents today should began teaching their kids at an early age the word of God. If they are taught at a young age they can begin to know more about God and his word as they get older.

Look at Timothy, he was a faithful child of God and he listened to his grandmother and mother. We know this because he obeyed their teaching. In **Acts 16:1-5** we see that Paul choose Timothy to accompany him on his missionary journey. *“And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra: and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek. The same was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those parts: for they all knew that his father was a Greek. And as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to keep which*

had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Not only do we as parents have a responsibility to teach our children the word of God, but God also places some responsibility upon the child. In **Proverbs 1:7-9** Solomon writes, "*The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; But the foolish despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, And forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*" Children are required by God to be obedient to their parents. They were directed under the Old Law in **Exodus 20:12** to, "*Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee.*" Under the New Law children are likewise directed in **Ephesians 6:1** – "*Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.*"

We as parents do have to place some responsibility upon the child. We have to teach them the correct ways of the Lord, and continually impress upon them the importance of following all the commandments of the Lord. We must not be slack in teaching them this importance. We are to create the foundation of faith in them, as did Lois and Eunice. It is then up to the child to continue to build upon that foundation which was laid for them by the word of God.

The word of God is a book of instruction that we must use in raising our children. God has given us the Bible so that we can prepare our lives for the second coming of Christ. Lois and Eunice taught Timothy by the word of God. Parents must teach their children like Timothy was taught. Parents should not neglect their children souls.

Many parents provide their children with things to survive on earth but they forget to supply them with the spiritual things. The things of God should be a parent's number one priority. Lois and Eunice showed that raising a child in the word of God was very important. If parents are going to be successful when it comes to raising children they have to look a Lois and Eunice as an example.

Lois and Eunice, through their actions, should give us the encouragement on how to raise a child. We can see that they loved the Lord and young Timothy. We must continue to put God first in our lives. Anything that we put before God becomes our god. **Exodus 20:3** – "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" There is a great responsibility that lies with training our children. With the strength and knowledge that is found in God's word, we are all capable of raising children like Timothy.

Dorcas

A Woman Who Touched the Lives of Others

Acts 9:36-9:43

Michael M. Jordan

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First, let me say how thrilled I am to be on the lectureship at West Jefferson once again. I want to express my thanks to the committee who have entrusted me the subject to which I will be addressing.

Our discussion for the day is an interesting but needed lesson. I have been given the task of discussing a female figure in the New Testament that some have basically overlooked as an example of how we, whether male or female, should be as Christians. Dorcas is the subject of the hour. We find that she is mentioned in **Acts 9:36-43**. Let's look at these verses as a base for our lesson. We read:

Acts 9:36-43 – “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. **37** - But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. **38** - And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. **39** - Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. **40** - But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. **41** - Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. **42** - And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. **43** - So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.”

Her Name

Her name was Tabitha. It is interesting that we are told very little about her. The meaning of her name would imply “the female of a roebuck” “a gazelle” which means a thing of beauty. The physical beauty is not spoken of, but the inner beauty is revealed by the way they looked at what she did, and we will look at that in a moment. She was a resident of the seaport city of Joppa, located on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Whether she was a mother or not, there are some things she had in her life that every mother and or single woman needs in her life even today. The generation in which we live is experiencing a shortage of the right kind of women. For any society to be what it should there must be good women who will see to the needs of others more than their own. It has been said that she was so well loved in the community because of what she did that they started a “Dorcas Society” in honor of her work. She must have been in a Godly home because she used her talent of sewing, to make garments and had a very skilled needle. Some commentators have stated that she was like Paul and devoted her life to God. She used her skill in benevolence.

As A Christian

We are introduced to Dorcas being referred to as a “*certain disciple*” (*Acts 9:36*). Through the Evangelist Phillip, a church had been established at Joppa. Dorcas probably came to know Christ because of the ministry of the Spirit filled man called Phillip. She did not hesitate or shrink to be identified as a believer. How Dorcas became a Christian we are not told. Some believe that she was converted by Phillip. I am glad that she was a disciple of Christ because she had truly been converted by the actions that are recorded of how she served Christ with her money and needle. Behind her sewing of garments was a soul that was truly converted to Christianity. It seems Dorcas knew what it was to be a Christian and this was the source of her good and unselfish life in service to Christ and the community. If any woman in the Bible showed her talents, Dorcas did. She did more than give money, she gave of herself. Ladies, today you should not be ashamed to call yourself a Christian, if you have been born from above. Read the sobering words that flowed from the lips of Jesus in *Mark 8:38*:

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

In various churches and communities there are women who are engaged in various activities to help the poor and do good. But, some are not doing it for the glory of Christ but for themselves. We need women in the church and society that will emulate Dorcas. Think about it, when Luke said that Dorcas was “full of good works and charitable deeds” the word “full” comes from the Greek word “πλερεσ - pleres” which means replete, or covered over; by analogy, complete. This word comes from the root word “πλετηο - pletho” a prolonged form of a primary pleo (pleh'-o) (which appears only as an alternate in certain tenses and in the reduplicated form pimplemi); to “fill” (literally or figuratively [imbue, influence, supply]); specifically, to fulfill (time). We can see how

her inward love for Christ prompted her outward deeds for the poor. There was nothing lazy about the woman Dorcas. After she was saved, she began to find ways to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with her money and her sewing ability. She was willing to help relieve the poor and make life easier for the widows who lived around her. She believed that whatever she gave for the Lord would be rewarding in this life and also in the life to come (*Matt.10:42*). Her doings show her wisdom. She both worked and was wise. Dorcas had to be a very happy woman. She had to be woman of means to serve others so generously. There are many people who mean to do well who sit and talk about charitable works but never take time to do them. We talk about doing different good works and when push-comes-to-shove we blame others for why we did not do the work. Dorcas, on the other hand, was not only caught up in thinking of ways of helping the needy, she carried out her plans. She knew her talents and what she was capable of doing, AND THEN SHE DID IT! It is interesting how many women in the Bible are remembered for what they did. Rizpah we remember because of her loving care of the dead (*II Sam. 21:8-11*). The widow of Zarephath for giving bread to the hungry (*I Kings 17:8-16*). Anna the prophetess for her fasting and prayers day and night (*Luke 2:36-38*). Martha, the queen of gracious hospitality (*Luke 11:38-42; John 11:1 - 12:2*). Mary for her box of fragrant ointment (*John 12:1-2*). Joanna, and her ministering unto Jesus (*Luke 8:1-3*). Then there was Dorcas for her care of widows and clothing the poor (*Acts 9:36*). An interesting thought of Dorcas has been written this way:

“The question came to Dorcas as it did to Moses when he felt he was not the man to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, “*What is that in thy hand?*” And Moses answered, “*A rod*” (*Exodus 4:2*). And that rod became the symbol of delegated power. “What is that in thine hand?” the Lord asked Dorcas. She said, “A needle,” and He took what she had and she stitched for Christ’s sake. All praise, then, to the needle that represented practical benevolence among the needy.”

Like Peter imitated Jesus, this godly woman Tabitha was also imitating someone. Remember Philip? At the end of chapter eight he left the Ethiopian eunuch and traveled up the coast to Ceasarea, preaching the good news as he went. Both Lydda and Joppa were towns that he would have passed through. Tabitha probably heard the gospel first from Philip. Tabitha began a ministry of serving the widows. She was good with needle and thread, so she made coats and dresses for them. Remember that Philip's first ministry was with Stephen serving the widows in Jerusalem. Tabitha probably imitated Philip, who taught her the gospel. It is shown that Philip cared deeply for widows, and so Tabitha began ministering to them as well. We think if we want to learn about prayer, we need to read a good book on prayer. If we want to learn about evangelism we need to buy a book on evangelism. But then after reading the book, we think to ourselves, “That was a good book.” and put it back on the shelf. We don't arise! My friends, if you want to learn about prayer, find someone who prays and ask if you can pray with them. If you want to learn about evangelism, find someone who regularly shares their faith and go with them. If you want to learn how to be humble, find a humble person and spend time with them. If you want to learn

how to serve, find someone who serves and serve with them. There are people in the church who are doing all these things.

Her Death

But then it happened. One day Dorcas died. It was a shock to the church and a sad day in Joppa, since she had left such a distinguishable mark for God. “Death loves a shining mark, a single blow,” and death certainly found such a mark in the bountiful life of Dorcas whose death was a blow to the community. She left this world at a time she was very productive in her life; that is often a mystery and we often ask the reason why. She may have been sewing a garment for a needy person and died in that very act of kindness. I have a feeling that a vessel containing expensive ointment was broken and the odor filled the house and the kindness of people were expressed as the body laid in rest from her good works. Loving and kind hands washed the body of Dorcas and placed it in the upper chamber.

Sister, thou wast mild and lovely,
Gently as the summer breeze
Pleasant as the air of mourning
When it floats among the trees.
-- copied

Historians think she owned her home and it seems she had no relatives to mourn so the ones that she helped while she lived came to try to return to Dorcas what was done to them while she lived. But the life of Dorcas did not end at death.

Her Resurrection

The disciple in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda and set for him. They knew since he was one of the apostles that were endowed with the Holy Spirit, he could help in their time of sadness. The scriptures say that they showed Peter all the garments and good things she had done while alive. Peter was moved as he viewed all of the things she had done that were on display. Peter put the people out of the room and prayed to God. How fitting that Peter pray at this time. We need to be thankful for those who have done good for the kingdom of God. Not only do we need to be thankful at the time of death but before they die as well. You remember in **John 11:41-42** when Jesus was at the tomb of Lazarus, He commanded the stone be rolled away and Jesus prayed to God. Peter would remember back to the day when the ruler of the synagogue came urgently to Jesus saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death!” And how on the way news came that the girl had already passed away. But Jesus said “Do not be afraid, only believe.” Like Jesus, Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. As he prayed he probably pictured how Jesus had taken the little girl by the hand and said to her “Talitha, cumi” in Aramaic. “Little girl, Arise”. And how the little girl had immediately walked. Turning to the body after praying Peter said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up (**Acts 9:40**). Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

Her Inspiration

Because of her being raised from the dead, there was a revival and many believed. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. We are not told of how Tabitha felt or Peter's response. But the response of the people is indicated, *"this became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."*

I found this article and I believe it is a problem today that needs to be resolved. Sometimes when we sit in the pews or when we sit behind the pulpit we don't look very alive. We are sometimes tired, sometimes drained and sometimes feeling entirely too human and vulnerable. And sometimes we need people to pray for us and to tell us to get up. Sometimes we need them to tell us this softly and gently, sometimes we need them to yell it at us...but there are times when we need to hear—GET UP! Then we need to look around us, get up and go make a difference.

We need to let Jesus into our lives to make a difference. We should not place Him in a box and take Him out when it is convenient. We shouldn't set Him on a shelf and take Him down and show Him off as if He were a trophy. We need to let Him shine all the time. We need to be the beacons of Christ's love. We need to let God shine through us in all things and all the time. We need to shout it out to our fellow Christians..."GET UP!!"

We need to shout it to ourselves—"GET UP!!" We sometimes become complacent. We become comfortable with our everyday program. We don't want anything to change, we don't want our lives altered, but change is good. We might be surprised to find that we like the changes and we will assimilate those changes into our lives.

Change...can be good, it can be life altering and it can be helpful. Understand that there is a difference between not changing and having a routine.

We need a routine for prayer time and Bible study time. We need that routine to help us grow in our spiritual life.

The change's that we need not be afraid of — is spiritual growth, more reverence in worship services, challenges in our Sunday school classes. Not only spiritual but numeric growth. Everyday our Christian walk should bring about change and transformation — we should not stay the same week after week. We should grow, we should share, we should adapt. We should become more than we were before. Let's illustrate: Timmy's kindergarten teacher announced that they would draw a picture. Good, Timmy thought. He liked to draw pictures. He could draw lions and tigers and trains and boats. He took out his crayons and began to draw. But the teacher said, "Wait, it's not time to begin." She paused until everyone looked ready. "Now," she said, "we are going to draw flowers." Good, Timmy thought. He began to draw beautiful flowers with his orange and pink and blue crayons. But the teacher said, "Wait." She drew a

picture of a flower on the blackboard. It was red with a green stem. “There,” she said, “now you may begin.” Timmy looked at his teacher’s flower. He liked his better, but he didn’t say anything. He just turned his paper over and made a flower like the teacher’s. It was red with a green stem. A few days later the teacher said, “Today we are going to make something with clay.” Good, Timmy thought. He could make all kinds of things with clay—snakes and snowmen and elephants and mice. He began to pinch and pull his ball of clay. But the teacher said, “Wait, I’ll show you how.” And she showed everyone how to make a dish. So Timmy rolled his clay into a ball, flattened it, and made a dish like the teacher’s. Timmy learned to wait and watch and make things just like the teacher’s. And pretty soon he stopped making creations of his own. Then one day Timmy’s family moved to another city, and Timmy started at a new school. On his first day, Timmy’s new teacher said, “Today we are going to draw a picture.” Good, Timmy thought. And he waited for the teacher to tell him what to do. But the teacher didn’t say anything. She just walked around the room. When she came to Timmy, she said, “Don’t you want to draw a picture?” “Yes,” said Timmy. “What are we going to draw?” “Well, I don’t know until you draw it,” the teacher said. “How should I make it?” he asked. “Why, any way you like.” “And any color?” “Any color,” the teacher said. “If everyone drew the same thing in the same color, how would I know who made what?” “I don’t know,” said Timmy. And he began to draw a flower. It was red with a green stem. When Timmy was very young, he was robbed of his creativity. His teacher told him that there was only one way to draw a flower or shape a lump of clay. We may be more like Timmy than we realize. We were given the potential to draw outside the lines, to be creative, to use our talents and gifts in a remarkable and unique way, but the world has told us that you can’t do it. The world we live in conditions us at an early age to believe that we all have to look the same, act the same, and think the same. Then when Jesus calls us to be different, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to respond to his call.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). If we will allow Jesus to have control of our life, we can break out of the world’s mold and become what God wants us to be. We can change, transform, create, and be God’s hands and feet. Most of all we can get up and make changes in our life and the lives of those around us. It is time for us to...Get Up!

Conclusion

Let’s be more like Dorcas in doing good for mankind and when we lay with our hands folded on that sad day, will we be remembered as Dorcas was remembered? I close with a song written by Sherril Brown entitled, “What will I leave behind?”

After I leave for worlds unknown, Over the border line;
Never again on earth to roam, What will I leave behind?

Will I be missed by those I love, Or have I been unkind?
Have I been true to God above, What will I leave behind?

This is my prayer, O Lord, today, Let me be wholly thine;

When I am called from earth away, Let heaven then be mine.

Leave behind, yes, leave behind, What will I leave behind?
After I leave for worlds unknown, What will I leave behind?

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