



God's River of TIME

God's
Commissions
to His People

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Chapter 1

GOD'S COMMISSION TO ADAM

We can hardly study a commission given by God to a man without studying the man, his work, character and accomplishments and failures. So shall it be with Adam, the first of many to receive a commission from God.

Perhaps you can relate to your own calling and stabilize your relationship to the God who equips those he calls.

We can hardly imagine what it must have been like to be the first and only person on earth. It's one thing for us to be lonely; it was another for Adam, who had never known another human being. He missed much that makes us who we are—he had no childhood, no parents, no family or friends. He had to learn to be human on his own. Fortunately, God didn't let him struggle too long before presenting him with an ideal companion and mate, Eve. Theirs was a complete, innocent, and open oneness, without a hint of shame.

Adam was not left to wonder on who he was and what the meaning of his existence. God revealed to Adam the meaning of his life by giving him a mandate:

"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

The mandate includes two of the three tasks that God had performed during the six days of the creation.

to fill the world with people, just as God had worked to fill the world with plants and animals. If we assume that God created animals in a manner similar to the way that He created man, the animal world, too, would need to increase, and Adam's dominion probably would have included aiding in the multiplication of domestic animals. However that may have been, he was clearly responsible for the propagation of the human race. Fill the earth!

One of Adam's first conversations with his delightful new companion must have been about the rules of the garden.

Before God made Eve he had already given Adam complete freedom in the garden, with the responsibility to tend and care for it. But one tree was off limits, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam would have told Eve all about this. She knew, when Satan approached her, that the tree's fruit was not to be eaten. However, she decided to eat the forbidden fruit. Then she offered some to Adam. At that moment, the fate of creation was on the line. Sadly, Adam didn't pause to consider the consequences. He went ahead and ate.

God gave marriage as a gift to Adam and Eve. They were created perfect for each other. Marriage was not just for convenience, nor was it brought about by any culture. It was instituted by God and has three basic aspects: (1) the man leaves his parents and, in a public act, promises himself to his wife; (2) the man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for each other's welfare and by loving the mate above all others; (3) the two become one flesh in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage. Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.

In that moment of small rebellion something large, beautiful, and free was shattered, God's perfect creation. Man was separated from God by his desire to act on his own. The effect on a plate glass window is the same whether a pebble or a boulder is hurled at it—the thousands of fragments can never be regathered.

In the case of man's sin, however, God already had a plan in motion to overcome the effects of the rebellion. The entire Bible is the story of how that plan unfolds, ultimately leading to God's own visit to earth through his Son, Jesus. His sinless life and death made it possible for God to offer forgiveness to all who want it. Our small and large acts of rebellion prove that we are descendants of Adam. Only by asking forgiveness of Jesus Christ can we become children of God.

Some characteristics of Adam include:

- The first zoologist—namer of animals
- The first landscape architect, placed in the garden to care for it
- Father of the human race
- The first person made in the image of God, and the first human to share an intimate personal relationship with God

Weaknesses and mistakes accredited to Adam

- Avoided responsibility and blamed others; chose to hide rather than to confront; made excuses rather than admitting the truth
- Greatest mistake: teamed up with Eve to bring sin into the world

Lessons from his life include:

- As Adam's descendants, we all reflect to some degree the image of God
- God wants people who, though free to do wrong, choose instead to love him

- We should not blame others for our faults
- We cannot hide from God

- The story of Adam occurs in the "Garden of Eden:.
- Occupation: Caretaker, gardener, farmer
- Relatives: Wife: Eve. Sons: Cain, Abel, Seth. And probably many other children.

"The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it' " (Genesis 3:12). "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

Adam's story is told in Genesis 1:26-5:5. He is also mentioned in 1 Chron. 1:1, Job 31:33; Luke 3:38; Romans 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; and 1 Tim 2:13-14.

Adam's work also included work that would have been analogous to God's work of separating the various aspects of the created world to order and glorify it. Adam was to subdue the world as its ruler. To the modern mind, the notion of bringing the world into submission to man may be offensive, but the meaning of Adam's dominion is further explained as *servicing* and guarding the Garden (Gen 2:15)

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S COMMISSION TO NOAH

Genesis 6:1-7:5

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, [2] That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. [3] And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. [4] There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

[5] And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. [6] And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. [7] And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. [8] But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

[9] These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. [10] And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. [11] The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. [12] And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. [13] And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

[14] Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. [15] And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. [16] A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

[17] And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

[18] But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. [19] And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. [20] Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. [21] And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. [22] Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

[7:1] And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. [2] Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. [3] Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

[4] For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth. [5] And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him.

The story of Noah's life involves not one, but two great and tragic floods. The world in Noah's day was flooded with evil. The number of those who remembered the God of creation, perfection, and love had dwindled to one. Of God's people, only Noah was left. God's response to the severe situation was a 120-year-long last chance, during which he had Noah build a graphic illustration of the message of his life. Nothing like a huge boat on dry land to make a point! For Noah, obedience meant a long-term commitment to a project.

Many of us have trouble sticking to any project. It is interesting that the length of Noah's obedience was greater than the lifespan of people today. The only comparable long-term project is our very lives. But perhaps this is one great

challenge Noah's life gives us—to live, in acceptance of God's grace, an entire lifetime of obedience and gratitude.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Only follower of God left in his generation
- Second father of the human race
- Man of patience, consistency, and obedience
- First major shipbuilder

Weakness and mistake:

- Got drunk and embarrassed himself in front of his sons

Lessons from his life:

- God is faithful to those who obey him
- God does not always protect us from trouble, but cares for us in spite of trouble
- Obedience is a long-term commitment
- A man may be faithful, but his sinful nature always travels with him

Vital statistics:

- Where: We're not told how far from the Garden of Eden people had settled
- Occupation: Farmer, shipbuilder, preacher
- Relatives: Grandfather: Methuselah. Father: Lamech. Sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth

Key verse:

“Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22).

Noah's story is told in Genesis 5:29-10:32. He is also mentioned in 1 Chron. 1:3-4; Isaiah 54:9; Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Matthew 24:37-38; Luke 3:36; Luke 17:26-27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5.

The Noahic Covenant

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. and the fear of

you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea.

In addition, God promises Noah that He will never again destroy the earth by a flood. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma.

Then the LORD said in His heart,
"I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night".

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S COMMISSION TO MOSES

Exodus 3:1-12

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. [2] And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. [3] And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt

[4] And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. [5] And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. [6] Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

[7] And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; [8] And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

[9] Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. [10] Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate for the job God asked him to do. It was natural for him to feel that way. He *was* inadequate all by himself. But God wasn't asking Moses to work alone. He offered other resources to help (God himself, Aaron, and the ability to do miracles). God often calls us to tasks that seem too difficult, but he doesn't ask us to do them alone. God offers us his resources, just as he did to Moses. We should not hide behind our inadequacies, as

Moses did, but look beyond ourselves to the great resources available. Then we can allow God to use our unique contributions.

[11] And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? [12] And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

What a contrast between Moses' life as an Egyptian prince and his life as a Midianite shepherd! As a prince he had everything done for him; he was the famous son of an Egyptian princess. As a shepherd he had to do everything for himself; he was holding the very job he had been taught to despise (Genesis 43:32; Genesis 46:32-34), and he lived as an unknown foreigner. What a humbling experience this must have been for Moses! But God was preparing him for leadership. Living the life of a shepherd and nomad, Moses learned about the ways of the people he would be leading and also about life in the desert. Moses couldn't appreciate this lesson, but God was getting him ready to free Israel from Pharaoh's grasp.

God spoke to Moses from an unexpected source: a burning bush. When Moses saw it, he went to investigate. God may use unexpected sources when communicating to us too, whether people, thoughts, or experiences. Be willing to investigate, and be open to God's surprises.

At God's command, Moses removed his sandals and covered his face. Taking off his shoes was an act of reverence, conveying his own unworthiness before God. God is our friend, but he is also our sovereign Lord. To approach him frivolously shows a lack of respect and sincerity. When you come to God in worship, do you approach him casually, or do you come as though you were an invited guest before a king? If necessary, adjust your attitude so it is suitable for approaching a holy God.

God told Moses to tell the people what he saw and heard at the burning bush. Our God is a God who acts and speaks. One of the most convincing ways to tell others about him is to describe what he has done and how he has spoken to his people. If you are trying to explain God to others, talk about what he has done for you, for people you know, or for people whose stories are told in the Bible.

Some people can't stay out of trouble. When conflict breaks out, they always manage to be nearby. Reaction is their favorite action. This was Moses. He seemed drawn to what needed to be righted. Throughout his life, he was at his finest and his worst responding to the conflicts around him. Even the burning bush experience was an illustration of his character. Having spotted the fire and seen that the bush did not burn, he had to investigate. Whether jumping into a fight to defend a Hebrew slave or trying to referee a struggle between two kinsmen, when Moses saw conflict, he reacted.

Over the years, however, an amazing thing happened to Moses' character. He didn't stop reacting, but rather learned to react correctly. The kaleidoscopic action of each day of leading two million people in the desert was more than enough challenge for Moses' reacting ability. Much of the time he served as a buffer between God and the people. At one moment he had to respond to God's anger at the people's stubbornness and forgetfulness. At another moment he had to react to the people's bickering and complaining. At still another moment he had to react to their unjustified attacks on his character.

Leadership often involves reaction. If we want to react with instincts consistent with God's will, we must develop habits of obedience to God. Consistent obedience to God is best developed in times of less stress. Then when stress comes, our natural reaction will be to obey God.

In our age of lowering moral standards, we find it almost impossible to believe that God would punish Moses for the one time he disobeyed outright. What we fail to see, however, is that God did not reject Moses; Moses simply disqualified himself to enter the promised land. Personal greatness does not make a person immune to error or its consequences.

In Moses we see an outstanding personality shaped by God. But we must not misunderstand what God did. He did not change who or what Moses was; he did not give Moses new abilities and strengths. Instead, he took Moses' characteristics and molded them until they were suited to his purposes. Does knowing this make a difference in your understanding of God's purpose in your life? He is trying to take what he created in the first place and use it for its intended purposes. The next time you talk with God, don't ask, "What should I change into?" but "How should I use my own abilities and strengths to do your will?"

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Egyptian education; desert training
- Greatest Jewish leader; set the exodus in motion
- Prophet and lawgiver; recorder of the Ten Commandments
- Author of the Pentateuch

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Failed to enter the promised land because of disobedience to God
- Did not always recognize and use the talents of others

Lessons from his life:

- God prepares, then uses. His timetable is life-sized
- God does his greatest work through frail people

Vital statistics:

- Where: Egypt, Midian, Desert of Sinai
- Occupations: Prince, shepherd, leader of the Israelites
- Relatives: Sister: Miriam. Brother: Aaron. Wife: Zipporah. Sons: Gershom and Eliezer.

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time” (Hebrews 11:24-25).

Moses’ story is told in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. He is also mentioned in Acts 7:20-44; Hebrews 11:23-29.

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S COMMISSION TO ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1-7 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: [2] And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: [3] And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. [4] So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. [5] And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

[6] And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. [7] And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

Despite God's swift judgment of sin, most people ignored him and continued to sin. But a few people really tried to follow him. One of these was Abraham. God appeared to Abraham one day and promised to make his descendants into a great nation. Abraham's part of the agreement was to obey God. Through sharp testing and an incident that almost destroyed his family, Abraham remained faithful to God. Throughout this section we discover how to live a life of faith.

When God called him, Abram moved out in faith from Ur to Haran and finally to Canaan. God then established a covenant with Abram, telling him that he would found a great nation. Not only would this nation be blessed, God said, but the other nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram's descendants. Israel, the nation that would come from Abram, was to follow God and influence those with whom it came in contact. Through Abram's family tree, Jesus Christ was born to save humanity. Through Christ, people can have a personal relationship with God and be blessed beyond measure.

God promised to bless Abram and make him great, but there was one condition. Abram had to do what God wanted him to do. This meant leaving his home and friends and traveling to a new land where God promised to build a great nation from Abram's family. Abram obeyed, walking away from his home for God's

promise of even greater blessings in the future. God may be trying to lead you to a place of greater service and usefulness for him. Don't let the comfort and security of your present position make you miss God's plan for you.

Abram built an altar to the Lord. Altars were used in many religions, but for God's people, altars were more than places of sacrifice. For them, altars symbolized communion with God and commemorated notable encounters with him. Built of rough stones and earth, altars often remained in place for years as continual reminders of God's protection and promises.

Abram regularly built altars to God for two reasons: (1) for prayer and worship, and (2) as reminders of God's promise to bless him. Abram couldn't survive spiritually without regularly renewing his love and loyalty to God. Building altars helped Abram remember that God was at the center of his life. Regular worship helps us remember what God desires and motivates us to obey him

We all know that there are consequences to any action we take. What we do can set into motion a series of events that may continue long after we're gone. Unfortunately, when we are making a decision most of us think only of the immediate consequences. These are often misleading because they are short-lived.

Abraham had a choice to make. His decision was between setting out with his family and belongings for parts unknown or staying right where he was. He had to decide between the security of what he already had and the uncertainty of traveling under God's direction. All he had to go on was God's promise to guide and bless him. Abraham could hardly have been expected to visualize how much of the future was resting on his decision of whether to go or stay, but his obedience affected the history of the world. His decision to follow God set into motion the development of the nation that God would eventually use as his own when he visited earth himself. When Jesus Christ came to earth, God's promise was fulfilled; through Abraham the entire world was blessed.

You probably don't know the long-term effects of most decisions you make. But shouldn't the fact that there will be long-term results cause you to think carefully and seek God's guidance as you make choices and take action today?

Strengths and accomplishments:

- His faith pleased God
- Became the founder of the Jewish nation
- Was respected by others and was courageous in defending his family at any cost
- Was not only a caring father to his own family, but practiced hospitality to others

- Was a successful and wealthy rancher
- Usually avoided conflicts, but when they were unavoidable, he allowed his opponent to set the rules for settling the dispute

Weakness and mistake:

- Under direct pressure, he distorted the truth

Lessons from his life:

- God desires dependence, trust, and faith in him—not faith in our ability to please him
- God’s plan from the beginning has been to make himself known to all people

Vital statistics:

- Where: Born in Ur of the Chaldeans; spent most of his life in the land of Canaan
- Occupation: Wealthy livestock owner
- Relatives: Brothers: Nahor and Haran. Father: Terah. Wife: Sarah. Nephew: Lot. Sons: Ishmael and Isaac
- Contemporaries: Abimelech, Melchizedek

Key verse:

“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham’s story is told in Genesis 11-25. He is also mentioned in Exodus 2:24; Acts 7:2-8; Romans 4; Galatians 3; Hebrews 2, 6, 7, 11.

Lesson 5

GOD’S COMMISSION TO JOSHUA

Joshua 1:1-9

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, [2] Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

[3] Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. [4] From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

[5] There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. [6] Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

[7] Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

[8] This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

[9] Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua succeeded Moses as Israel's leader. What qualifications did he have to become the leader of a nation? (1) God appointed him (Numbers 27:18-23). (2) He was one of only two living eyewitnesses to the Egyptian plagues and the exodus from Egypt. (3) He was Moses' personal aide for 40 years. (4) Of the 12 spies, only he and Caleb showed complete confidence that God would help them conquer the land.

Because Joshua had assisted Moses for many years, he was well prepared to take over the leadership of the nation. Changes in leadership are common in many organizations. At such times, a smooth transition is essential for the establishment of the new administration.

This doesn't happen unless new leaders are trained. If you are currently in a leadership position, begin preparing someone to take your place. Then, when you leave or are promoted, operations can continue to run efficiently. If you want to be a leader, learn from others so that you will be prepared when the opportunity comes.

Joshua's new job consisted of leading more than two million people into a strange new land and conquering it. What a challenge—even for a man of Joshua's caliber!

Every new job is a challenge. Without God it can be frightening. With God it can be a great adventure.

Just as God was with Joshua, he is with us as we face our new challenges. We may not conquer nations, but every day we face tough situations, difficult people, and temptations. However, God promises that he will never abandon us or fail to help us. By asking God to direct us we can conquer many of life's challenges.

One of the greatest challenges facing leaders is to replace themselves, training others to become leaders. Many outstanding accomplishments have been started by someone with great ability whose life or career ended before the vision became reality. The fulfillment of that dream then became the responsibility of that person's successor. Death is the ultimate deadline for leadership. One of the best tests of our leadership is our willingness and ability to train another for our position.

Moses made an excellent decision when he chose Joshua as his assistant. That choice was later confirmed by God himself when he instructed Moses to commission Joshua as his successor (Numbers 27:15-23). Joshua had played a key role in the exodus from Egypt. Introduced as the field general of Israel's army, he was the only person allowed to accompany Moses partway up the mountain when Moses received the law.

Joshua and Caleb were the only two among the 12 spies to bring back an encouraging report after being sent into the promised land the first time. Other references show him to have been Moses' constant shadow. His basic training was living with Moses—experiencing firsthand what it meant to lead God's people. This was modeling at its best!

Who is your Moses? Who is your Joshua? You are part of the chain of God's ongoing work in the world. You are modeling yourself after others, and others are patterning their lives after you. How important is God to those you want to be like? Do those who are watching you see God reflected in every area of your life? Ask God to lead you to a trustworthy Moses. Ask him to make you a good Joshua.

Strengths and accomplishments of Joshua include:

- Moses' assistant and successor
- One of only two adults who experienced Egyptian slavery and lived to enter the promised land

- Led the Israelites into their God-given homeland
 - Brilliant military strategist
 - Faithful to ask God's direction in the challenges he faced
- Effective leadership is often the product of good preparation and encouragement
 - The persons after whom we pattern ourselves will have a definite effect on us
 - A person committed to God provides the best model for us

Numbers 27:22-23

And Moses did as the Lord commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: [23] And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

Moses asked God to appoint a leader who was capable of directing both external and internal affairs—one who could lead them in battle, but who would also care for their needs. The Lord responded by appointing Joshua. Many people want to be known as leaders. Some are very capable of reaching their goals, while others care deeply for the people in their charge. The best leaders are both goal-oriented and people-oriented.

Moses did not want to leave his work without making sure a new leader was ready to replace him. First he asked God to help him find a replacement. Then, when Joshua was selected, Moses gave him a variety of tasks to ease the transition into his new position. Moses also clearly told the people that Joshua had the authority and the ability to lead the nation.

His display of confidence in Joshua was good for both Joshua and the people. To minimize leadership gaps, anyone in a leadership position should train others to carry on the duties should he or she suddenly or eventually have to leave. While you have the opportunity, follow Moses' pattern: pray, select, develop, and commission.

CHAPTER 6

GOD'S COMMISSION TO NEHEMIAH

Neh. 1:1-2:8

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, [2] That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. [3] And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

[4] And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, [5] And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: [6] Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. [7] We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. [8] Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: [9] But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. [10] Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. [11] O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

[2:1] And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. [2] Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, [3] And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city,

the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? [4] Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. [5] And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. [6] And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. [7] Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; [8] And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah was concerned about Jerusalem because it was the Jews' holy city. As Judah's capital city, it represented Jewish national identity, and it was blessed with God's special presence in the temple. Jewish history centered around the city from the time of Abraham's gifts to Melchizedek, king of Salem (Genesis 14:17-20), to the days when Solomon built the glorious temple (1 Kings 7:51), and throughout the history of the kings. Nehemiah loved his homeland even though he had lived his whole life in Babylon. He wanted to return to Jerusalem to reunite the Jews and to remove the shame of Jerusalem's broken-down walls. This would bring glory to God and restore the reality and power of God's presence among his people.

Nehemiah broke wept when he heard that Jerusalem's walls still had not been rebuilt. Why did this upset him? Walls mean little in most present-day cities, but in Nehemiah's day they were essential. They offered safety from raids and symbolized strength and peace. Nehemiah also mourned for his people, the Jews, who had been stifled by a previous edict that kept them from rebuilding their walls (Ezra 4:6-23).

Nehemiah was deeply grieved about the condition of Jerusalem, but he didn't just brood about it. After his initial grief, he prayed, pouring his heart out to God (Neh. 1:5-11), and he looked for ways to improve the situation. Nehemiah put all his resources of knowledge, experience, and organization into determining what should be done.

When tragic news comes to you, first pray. Then seek ways to move beyond grief to specific action that helps those who need it.

Nehemiah fasted and prayed for several days, expressing his sorrow for Israel's sin and his desire that Jerusalem would again come alive with the worship of the one true God. Nehemiah demonstrated the elements of effective prayer: (1) praise, (2) thanksgiving, (3) repentance, (4) specific request, and (5) commitment.

Heartfelt prayers like Nehemiah's can help clarify (1) any problem you may be facing, (2) God's great power to help you, and (3) the job you have to do. By the end of his prayer time, Nehemiah knew what action he had to take (Neh. 1:11). When God's people pray, difficult decisions fall into proper perspective, and appropriate actions follow.

The king noticed Nehemiah's sad appearance. This frightened Nehemiah because it was dangerous to show sorrow before the king, who could execute anyone who displeased him. Anyone wearing sackcloth (mourning clothes) was barred from the palace (Esther 4:2).

Nehemiah wasn't ashamed to admit his fear, but he refused to allow fear to stop him from doing what God had called him to do. When we allow our fears to rule us, we make fear more powerful than God. Is there a task God wants you to do, but fear is holding you back? God is greater than all your fears. Recognizing why you are afraid is the first step in committing it to God. Realize that if God has called you to a task, he will help you accomplish it.

After his prayer, Nehemiah asked the king for permission to go to Judah. As soon as he got a positive answer, he began asking for additional help. Sometimes when we have needs, we hesitate to ask the right people for help because we are afraid to approach them. Not Nehemiah! He went directly to the person who could help him the most. Don't be reluctant to ask those who are most able to help. They may be more interested and approachable than you think. God's answers to prayer may come as a result of our asking others.

Nehemiah had position, power, and many good organizational skills, but he acknowledged that God's gracious hand was upon him. He knew that without God's strength, his efforts would be in vain. Do you acknowledge God as your power source and the giver of your gifts?

God is in the business of working through his people to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. God often shapes people with personality characteristics,

experiences, and training that prepare them for his purpose, and usually the people have no idea what God has in store for them. God prepared and positioned Nehemiah to accomplish one of the Bible's "impossible" tasks.

Nehemiah was a common man in a unique position. He was secure and successful as cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah had little power, but he had great influence. He was trusted by the king. He was also a man of God, concerned about the fate of Jerusalem.

Seventy years earlier, Zerubbabel had managed to rebuild God's temple. Thirteen years had passed since Ezra had returned to Jerusalem and helped the people with their spiritual needs. Now Nehemiah was needed. Jerusalem's wall was still in ruins, and the news broke his heart. As he talked to God, a plan began to take form in Nehemiah's mind about his own role in the rebuilding of the city walls. He willingly left the security of his home and job in Persia to follow God on an "impossible" mission. And the rest is history.

From beginning to end, Nehemiah prayed for God's help. He never hesitated to ask God to remember him, closing his autobiography with these words: "Remember me with favor, O my God." Throughout the "impossible" task, Nehemiah displayed unusual leadership. The wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt in record time, despite resistance. Even Israel's enemies grudgingly and fearfully admitted that God was with these builders. Not only that, but God worked through Nehemiah to bring about a spiritual awakening among the people of Judah.

You may not have Nehemiah's unique abilities or feel that you are in a position where you can do anything great for God, but there are two ways you can become useful to God. First, be a person who *talks* to God. Welcome him into your thoughts and share yourself with him—your concerns, feelings, and dreams. Second, be a person who *walks* with God. Put what you learn from his Word into action. God may have an "impossible" mission that he wants to do through you.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- A man of character, persistence, and prayer
- Brilliant planner, organizer, and motivator
- Under his leadership, the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt in 52 days
- As political leader, led the nation to religious reform and spiritual awakening
- Was calm under opposition
- Was capable of being bluntly honest with his people when they were sinning

- The first step in any venture is to pray
- People under God's direction can accomplish impossible tasks
- There are two parts to real service for God: talking with him, and walking with him

Key verse:

“I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work” (Neh. 2:18).

Nehemiah prayed for success in this venture, not just for the strength to cope with his problems (see also Neh. 2:20). Yet the success he prayed for was not for personal advantage, position, or acclaim. He requested success for God's work. When God's purposes are at work, don't hesitate to ask for success.

CHAPTER 7

GOD'S COMMISSION TO DAVID

I. GOD'S CHOICE OF DAVID (16:6-13)

While Saul is still on the throne, Samuel anoints David as Israel's next king. Young David then bravely conquers Goliath, the Philistine champion, and establishes a lifelong friendship with Jonathan, Saul's son. When Saul realizes that David will become king one day, he grows very jealous and tries to kill David on several occasions. David escapes into Philistine territory until Saul is killed in

battle.

When treated unjustly, we should not take matters into our own hands. God, who is faithful and just, sees all that is happening and will judge all evil.

1 Samuel 16:6-10

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.

[7] But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart

[8] Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. [9] Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. [10] Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these.

Saul was tall and handsome; he was an impressive-looking man. Samuel may have been trying to find someone who looked like Saul to be Israel's next king, but God warned him against judging by appearance alone. When people judge by outward appearance, they may overlook quality individuals who lack the particular physical qualities society currently admires. Appearance doesn't reveal what people are really like or what their true value is. Fortunately, God judges by faith and character, not appearances. And because only God can see on the inside, only he can accurately judge people. Most people spend hours each week maintaining their outward appearance; they should do even more to develop their inner character. While everyone can see your face, only you and God know what your heart really looks like. What steps are we taking to improve our heart's attitude?

1 Samuel 16:11-16

And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. [12] And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. [13] Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his

brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

When we think of David, we think: shepherd, poet, giant-killer, king, ancestor of Jesus—in short, one of the greatest men in the Old Testament. But alongside that list stands another: betrayer, liar, adulterer, murderer. The first list gives qualities we all might like to have; the second, qualities that might be true of any one of us. The Bible makes no effort to hide David’s failures. Yet he is remembered and respected for his heart for God. Knowing how much more we share in David’s failures than in his greatness, we should be curious to find out what made God refer to David as “a man after my own heart” (Acts 13:22).

David, more than anything else, had an unchangeable belief in the faithful and forgiving nature of God. He was a man who lived with great zest. He sinned many times, but he was quick to confess his sins. His confessions were from the heart, and his repentance was genuine. David never took God’s forgiveness lightly or his blessing for granted. In return, God never held back from David either his forgiveness or the consequences of his actions. David experienced the joy of forgiveness even when he had to suffer the consequences of his sins.

We tend to get these two reversed. Too often we would rather avoid the consequences than experience forgiveness. Another big difference between us and David is that while he sinned greatly, he did not sin repeatedly. He learned from his mistakes because he accepted the suffering they brought.

Often we don’t seem to learn from our mistakes or the consequences that result from those mistakes. What changes would it take for God to find this kind of obedience in you?

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Greatest king of Israel
- Ancestor of Jesus Christ
- Listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
- A man described by God himself as a man after his own heart

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Committed adultery with Bathsheba

- Arranged the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband
 - Directly disobeyed God in taking a census of the people
 - Did not deal decisively with the sins of his children
-
- Willingness to honestly admit our mistakes is the first step in dealing with them
 - Forgiveness does not remove the consequences of sin
 - God greatly desires our complete trust and worship

Key verses:

“O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever” (2 Samuel 7:28-29).

His story is told in 1 Samuel 16-1 Kings 2. He is also mentioned in Amos 6:5; Matthew 1:1, 6; Matthew 22:43-45; Luke 1:32; Acts 13:22; Romans 1:3; Hebrews 11:32.

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S COMMISSION TO ELIJAH

1 Kings 17:1 (KJV)

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

Elijah was the first in a long line of important prophets God sent to Israel and Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom, had no faithful kings throughout its history. Each king was wicked, actually leading the people in worshiping pagan gods. There were few priests left from the tribe of Levi (most had gone to Judah), and the priests appointed by Israel's kings were corrupt and ineffective. With no king or priests to bring God's word to the people, God called prophets to try to rescue Israel from its moral and spiritual decline. For the next 300 years these men and women would play vital roles in both nations, encouraging the people and leaders to turn back to God.

Those who worshiped Baal believed he was the god who brought the rains and bountiful harvests. So when Elijah walked into the presence of this Baal-worshipping king and told him there would be no rain for several years, Ahab was shocked. Ahab had built a strong military defense, but it would be no help against drought. He had many priests of Baal, but they could not bring rain. Elijah bravely confronted the man who led his people into evil, and he told of a power far greater than any pagan god—the Lord God of Israel. When rebellion and heresy were at an all-time high in Israel, God responded not only with words but with action.

In a nation that was required by law to care for its prophets, it is ironic that God turned to ravens (unclean birds) and a widow (a foreigner from Jezebel's home territory) to care for Elijah. God has help where we least expect it. He provides for us in ways that go beyond our narrow definitions or expectations. No matter how bitter our trials or how seemingly hopeless our situation, we should look for God's caring touch. We may find his providence in some strange places!

Even when God has done a miracle in our lives, our troubles may not be over. The famine was a terrible experience, but the worst was yet to come. God's provision is never given in order to let us rest upon it. We need to depend on him as each new trial faces us.

1 Kings 18:1 (KJV)

And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

Instead of worshiping the true God, Ahab and his wife Jezebel worshiped Baal, the most popular Canaanite god. Baal idols were often made in the shape of a bull, representing strength and fertility and reflecting lust for power and sexual pleasure.

In showing that Elijah's God was the true God, God flashed fire from heaven for Elijah, and he will help us accomplish what he commands us to do. The proof may not be as dramatic in our lives as in Elijah's, but God will make resources available to us in creative ways to accomplish his purposes. He will give us the wisdom to raise a family, the courage to take a stand for truth, or the means to provide help for someone in need. Like Elijah, we can have faith that whatever God commands us to do, he will provide what we need to carry it through.

Elijah's single-minded commitment to God shocks and challenges us. He was sent to confront, not comfort, and he spoke God's words to a king who often rejected

his message just because he brought it. Elijah chose to carry out his ministry for God alone and paid for that decision by experiencing isolation from others who were also faithful to God.

It is interesting to think about the amazing miracles God accomplished through Elijah, but we would do well to focus on the relationship they shared. All that happened in Elijah's life began with the same miracle that is available to us—he responded to the miracle of being able to know God.

For example, after God worked an overwhelming miracle through Elijah in defeating the prophets of Baal, Queen Jezebel retaliated by threatening Elijah's life. And Elijah ran. He felt afraid, depressed, and abandoned. Despite God's provision of food and shelter in the desert, Elijah wanted to die. So God presented Elijah with an "audio-visual display" and a message he needed to hear. Elijah witnessed a windstorm, an earthquake, and fire. But the Lord was not in any of those powerful things. Instead, God displayed his presence in a gentle whisper.

Elijah, like us, struggled with his feelings even after this comforting message from God. So God confronted Elijah's emotions and commanded action. He told Elijah what to do next and informed him that part of his loneliness was based on ignorance: 7,000 others in Israel were still faithful to God.

Even today, God often speaks through the gentle and obvious rather than the spectacular and unusual. God has work for us to do even when we feel fear and failure. And God always has more resources and people than we know about. Although we might wish to do amazing miracles for God, we should instead focus on developing a relationship with him. The real miracle of Elijah's life was his very personal relationship with God. And that miracle is available to us.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Was the most famous and dramatic of Israel's prophets
- Predicted the beginning and end of a three-year drought
- Was used by God to restore a dead child to his mother
- Represented God in a showdown with priests of Baal and Asherah
- Appeared with Moses and Jesus in the New Testament transfiguration scene

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Chose to work alone and paid for it with isolation and loneliness
- Fled in fear from Jezebel when she threatened his life

- We are never closer to defeat than in our moments of greatest victory
- We are never as alone as we may feel; God is always there
- God speaks more frequently in persistent whispers than in shouts

Key verses:

“At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.’ Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench” (1 Kings 18:36-38).

Elijah’s story is told in 1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 2:11. He is also mentioned in 2 Chron. 21:12-15; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 11:14; Matthew 16:14; Matthew 17:3-13; Matthew 27:47-49; Luke 1:17; Luke 4:25-26; John 1:19-25; Romans 11:2-4; James 5:17-18.

Lesson 9

GOD'S COMMISSION TO ESTHER

We treasure security, even though we know that security in this life carries no guarantees—possessions can be destroyed, beauty fades, relationships can be broken, death is inevitable. Real security, then, must be found beyond this life. Only when our security rests on God and his unchanging nature can we face the challenges that life is sure to bring our way.

Esther's beauty and character won Xerxes' heart, and he made her his queen. Even in her favored position, however, she would risk her life by attempting to see the king when he had not requested her presence. There was no guarantee that the king would even see her. Although she was queen, she was still not secure. But, cautiously and courageously, Esther decided to risk her life by approaching the king on behalf of her people.

She made her plans carefully. The Jews were asked to fast and pray with her before she went to the king. Then on the chosen day she went before him, and he *did* ask her to come forward and speak. But instead of issuing her request directly, she invited him and Haman to a banquet. He was astute enough to realize she had something on her mind, yet she conveyed the importance of the matter by insisting on a second banquet.

In the meantime, God was working behind the scenes. He caused Xerxes to read the historical records of the kingdom late one night, and the king discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life. Xerxes lost no time in honoring Mordecai for that act. During the second banquet, Esther told the king of Haman's plot against the Jews, and Haman was doomed. There is grim justice in Haman's death on the gallows he had built for Mordecai, and it seems fitting that the day on which the Jews were to be slaughtered became the day their enemies died. Esther's risk confirmed that God was the source of her security.

How much of your security lies in your possessions, position, or reputation? God has not placed you in your present position for your own benefit. He put you there *to serve him*. As in Esther's case, this may involve risking your security. Are you willing to let God be your ultimate security?

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Her beauty and character won the heart of Persia's king
- She combined courage with careful planning
- She was open to advice and willing to act
- She was more concerned for others than for her own security

Lessons from her life:

- Serving God often demands that we risk our own security
- God has a purpose for the situations in which he places us
- Courage, while often vital, does not replace careful planning

Vital statistics:

- Where: Persian empire
- Occupation: Xerxes' wife, queen of Persia
- Relatives: Cousin: Mordecai. Husband: Xerxes. Father: Abihail

Key verse:

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

Esther's story is told in the book of Esther.

Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

My life — It is my only request, that thou wouldst not give me up to the malice of that man who designs to take away my life. Even a stranger, a criminal, shall be permitted to petition for his life. But that a friend, a wife, a queen, should have occasion to make such a petition, was very affecting.

Verse 4

For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

Sold — By the cruelty of that man who offered a great sum to purchase our destruction.

Countervail — His ten thousand talents would not repair the king's loss, in the customs and tributes which the king receives from the Jews, within his dominions.

Verse 5

[5] Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

Who, ... — The expressions are short and doubled, as proceeding from a discomposed and enraged mind.

Durst — That is, to circumvent me, and procure a decree, whereby not only my estate should be so much impaired, and so many of my innocent subjects destroyed, but my queen also involved in the same destruction. We sometimes startle at that evil, which we ourselves are chargeable with. Ahasuerus is amazed at that wickedness, which he himself was guilty of. For he consented to the bloody edict. So that Esther might have said, Thou art the man!

Verse 6

[6] And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.
Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

Afraid — And it was time for him to fear, when the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, his own conscience a witness against him. And the surprising turns of providence that very morning, could not but increase his fear.

Verse 7

[7] And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

Went — As disdainful of the company and sight of so audacious a person: to cool and allay his troubled and inflamed spirits, and to consider what punishment was fit to be inflicted upon him.

He saw — By the violent commotion of the king's mind.

Verse 8

[8] Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

Bed — On which the queen sat at meat.

Force — Will he attempt my queen's chastity, as he hath already attempted her life! He speaks not this out of real jealousy, but from an exasperated mind, which takes all occasions to vent itself against the person who gave the provocation.

They — The king's and queen's chamberlains attending upon them.

Covered — That the king might not be offended or grieved with the sight of a person whom he now loathed: and because they looked upon him as a condemned person; for the faces of such used to be covered.

CHAPTER 10

GOD'S COMMISSION TO GIDEON

Most of us want to know God's plan for our lives, but we're not always sure how to find it. One common misunderstanding is the idea that God's guidance will come to us out of the blue, that it has nothing to do with what we're doing now. But if we're always looking around for God's next assignment, we run the risk of ruining whatever we're working on right now. Fortunately, the Bible points to a kind of guidance that does not put our current projects in jeopardy. In the Bible's descriptions of how God guided many people, we can see that often God's call came while people were completely immersed in the challenge of the moment. A good example of this kind of guidance is seen in Gideon's life.

Gideon had a limited vision, but he was committed to it. His challenge was to obtain food for his family even though hostile invaders were making the growing, gathering, and preparation of the food almost impossible. Gideon was resourceful. He put a winepress to double duty by turning it into a sunken threshing floor. It lacked ventilation to blow the chaff away, but at least it was hidden from the Midianites. Gideon was working in his threshing floor when God sent him a messenger with a challenge.

Gideon was surprised by what God told him to do. He did not want to jump into a task for which he was ill prepared. The angel had to overcome three objections before Gideon was convinced: (1) Gideon's feelings of responsibility for his family's welfare, (2) his doubts about the call itself, and (3) his feelings of inadequacy for the job. Once Gideon was convinced, however, he obeyed with zest, resourcefulness, and speed. He dedicated those personality traits to God, with whom he was now personally acquainted.

Gideon had his weak moments and failures, but he was still God's servant. If you can easily see yourself in the Gideon's weakness, can you also see yourself in being willing to serve? Remember Gideon as a man who obeyed God by giving his attention to the task at hand. Then give your full attention to believing God will prepare you for tomorrow when it comes.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Israel's fifth judge. A military strategist who was expert at surprise

- A member of the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
- Defeated the Midianite army
- Was offered a hereditary kingship by the men of Israel
- Though slow to be convinced, acted on his convictions

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Feared that his own limitations would prevent God from working
- Collected Midianite gold and made a symbol that became an evil object of worship
- Through a concubine, fathered a son who would bring great grief and tragedy to both Gideon's family and the nation of Israel
- Failed to establish the nation in God's ways; after he died they all went back to idol worship

Lessons from his life:

- God calls in the middle of our present obedience. As we are faithful, he gives us more responsibility
- God expands and uses the abilities he has already built into us
- God uses us in spite of our limitations and failures
- Even those who make great spiritual progress can easily fall into sin if they don't consistently follow God

Vital statistics:

- Where: Ophrah, Valley of Jezreel, spring of Harod
- Occupations: Farmer, warrior, and judge
- Relatives: Father: Joash. Son: Abimelech
- Contemporaries: Zebah, Zalmunna

Key verses:

“ ‘But Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’ The LORD answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together’ ” (Judges 6:15-16).

His story is told in Judges 6-8. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:32.

Gideon's Call to Deliver Israel Judges 6:1-32

INTRODUCTION: The Israelites are in trouble again. This time, God sends help through an unlikely leader—so that God will get the glory.

I. CONQUEST OF THE MIDIANITES (6:1-6)

A. The Oppression of Midian (v.1)

1. A desert people dwelling south and east of Palestine
2. The fourth of six oppressors in the book of Judges
 - a. Mesopotamia (3:8)
 - b. Moab (3:12)
 - c. Canaan (4:2)
 - d. Midian (6:1)
 - e. Ammon (10:7-8)
 - f. Philistia (13:1)
3. Another oppression caused by the sin of Israel
4. Lasting a total of seven years

B. The Fear of the Israelites (v.2)

1. Their defeat in battle – “Midian prevailed”
2. Their hiding in caves

C. The Poverty of the Israelites (v.3-6)

1. The destruction of their crops and herds (v.3-5)
2. The resulting poverty of the land and people (v.6)

II. CRY OF THE ISRAELITES (6:7-10)

A. Israel Again Cries to the Lord (v.7)

B. The Lord Sends a Prophet to Them (v.8-10)

1. The Lord delivered them from Egypt (v.8-9)
2. The Lord gave them the land (v.9)
3. The Lord warned them of false gods (v.10)
4. “but ye have not obeyed my voice” (v.10)

NOTE: Sometimes we want deliverance from God while God wants obedience from us.

III. CALL OF GIDEON (6:11-16)

A. His circumstances (v.11)

1. He is working – God calls those who are already working

2. He is hiding
 - a. From fear of the Midianites
 - b. But also as a practical means of getting the wheat threshed and the family fed
3. God's angel is watching him

B. God's confidence in Gideon (v.12-13)

1. The angel appears to Gideon (v.12)
 - a. He assures him of God's presence
 - b. He calls him a "mighty man of valour"
2. Gideon replies with hard questions (v.13)
 - a. Why have these things befallen us?
 - b. Where are all God's miracles?

NOTE: These questions show a strength of character in Gideon that God had seen. Gideon was disgusted that nothing was happening to show the power of God. He knew the old stories and longed for the God of his fathers.

C. God's Commission to Gideon (v.14)

1. The "Lord looked upon him" – God pays attention to Gideon

2. He commissions Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites
3. He assures Gideon that he is sent by God Himself

D. God's Comfort to Gideon (v.15-16)

1. Gideon excuses himself as unable (v.15)
 - a. My family is poor
 - b. I am the least in my father's house
2. God assures Gideon of victory (v.16)
 - a. He will be with him
 - b. He will destroy the Midianites

IV. CONVERSION OF GIDEON (6:17-24)

- A. Gideon Seeks a Sign of his Calling (v.17-18)
- B. Gideon Presents a Meal to the Angel (v.18-19)
- C. The Meal is Consumed by Fire out of the Rock (v.20-21)

- D. Gideon is Convinced that the Call is from God (v.22-24)
 - 1. He has seen an angel of the Lord (v.22)
 - 2. The Lord assures him that he will not die (v.23)
 - 3. Gideon builds an altar (v.24)
 - a. Called Jevohah-Shalom
 - b. The Lord of peace or the Lord sends peace

V. CONSECRATION OF GIDEON (6:25-32)

- A. The Instructions of the Lord (v.25-26)
 - 1. Take a bullock (v.25)
 - a. Thy father's bullock
 - b. A young bullock
 - c. The second bullock
 - d. A bullock seven years old.
 - 2. Throw down the altar of Baal (v.25)
 - 3. Cut down the grove beside it (v.25);
 - 4. Build an altar to the Lord (v.26)
 - a. On top of the rock

b. In the ordered place

5. Offer the bullock as a burnt sacrifice (v.26)
6. Burn the wood of the grove for the fire (v.26)

B. The Obedience of Gideon (v.27)

1. He did as the Lord said
2. He did it at night because of fear
3. He did it with the help of ten servants

C. The Anger of the Men of the City (v.28-30)

1. Their discovery of the work (v.28)
2. Their discovery of Gideon's responsibility (v.29)
3. Their demand for Gideon's death (v.30)

D. Gideon's Defense by his Father (v.31-32)

1. Joash mocks their defense of a god (v.31)
2. Joash calls his son Jerubbaal (let Baal plead for himself)

CONCLUSION: God is going to use Gideon, not because Gideon is such a great man, but to show the greatness of the God who called and used him. God is not limited by our weaknesses. Our limitations simply give God room to demonstrate

His power. If God were to call you to a great work, would you trust in His power and presence and accept His call?

CHAPTER 11

GOD'S COMMISSION TO ISAIAH

Trees and prophets share at least one important characteristic—both are planted for the future. Yet seedlings are often overlooked and prophets often ignored. Isaiah is one of the best examples of this. The people of his time could have been rescued by his words. Instead, they refused to believe him. With the passing of centuries, however, Isaiah's words have cast a shadow on all of history.

Isaiah was active as a prophet during the reigns of five kings, but he did not set out to be a prophet. By the time King Uzziah died, Isaiah may have been established as a scribe in the royal palace in Jerusalem. It was a respectable career, but God had other plans for his servant. Isaiah's account of God's call leaves little doubt about what motivated the prophet for the next half century. His vision of God was unforgettable.

The encounter with God permanently affected Isaiah's character. He reflected the God he represented. Isaiah's messages—some comforting, some confronting—are so distinct that some have guessed they came from different authors. Isaiah's testimony is that the messages came from the only One capable of being perfect in justice as well as in mercy—God himself.

When he called Isaiah as a prophet, God did not encourage him with predictions of great success. God told Isaiah that the people would not listen. But he was to speak and write his messages anyway because eventually some *would* listen. God compared his people to a tree that would have to be cut down so that a new tree could grow from the old stump (Isaiah 6:13).

We who are part of that future can see that many of the promises God gave through Isaiah have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We also gain the hope of knowing that God is active in all of history, including our own.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Considered the greatest Old Testament prophet
- Quoted at least 50 times in the New Testament
- Had powerful messages of both judgment and hope

- Carried out a consistent ministry even though there was little positive response from his listeners
- His ministry spanned the reigns of five kings of Judah

Lessons from his life:

- God's help is needed in order to effectively confront sin while comforting people
- One result of experiencing forgiveness is the desire to share that forgiveness with others
- God is purely and perfectly holy, just, and loving

Vital statistics:

- Where: Jerusalem
- Occupations: Scribe, prophet
- Relatives: Father: Amoz. Sons: Shear-Jashub, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz
- Contemporaries: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Micah

Key verse:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ ” (Isaiah 6:8).

Isaiah's story is told in 2 Kings 19:2-20:19. He is also mentioned in 2 Chron. 26:22; 2 Chron. 32:20, 32; Matthew 3:3; Matthew 8:17; Matthew 12:17-21; John 12:38-41; Romans 10:16, 20-21.

They are to have six wings. Two cover his face and two cover his feet. The remaining two wings are to be used for flight (Isaiah 6:2). Isaiah then explained about his self-inflicted unworthiness. "Woe is me for I am undone.

Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts" Isaiah 6:5. One of the seraphim then flew to Isaiah and in his hand he carried a live coal. He touched my mouth with it saying, "Behold, this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged" Isaiah 6:7. Not to mention his mouth singed! Just then the Lord spoke- "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?" Isaiah 6:8. In the event you're mystified by the word "Us" that means the triune Godhead as it did in Genesis 1:26. Isaiah replied, "Here I am, send me!" Isaiah 6:8.

He was most certainly an eager beaver in that regard. God said, "Go, and tell this people, keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull (Not Doyle Davidson by the way), and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed" Isaiah 6:9-10.

That particular text of Scripture makes for an excellent chiasm.

Make the heart of this people dull / And understand with their heart

And their ears heavy / And hear with their ears

And shut their eyes / Lest they see with their eyes

Isaiah then inquired as to how long his commission would be? The words of God in response I shall let you read for yourself in Isaiah 6:11-13 just to make sure that your ears are not heavy and in the event that you have shut your eyes and that your heart might be dull.

Song Page for Isaiah 6

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,

12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

13 But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.¹

Bible Commentary

1 The vision is dated, for the greater certainty of it. It was in the year that king Uzziah died, who had reigned, for the most part, as prosperously and well as any of the kings of Judah, and reigned very long, above fifty years. He saw the Lord Jesus; so this vision is explained John 12:41, that Isaiah now saw Christ's glory and spoke of him, which is an incontestable proof of the divinity of our Saviour. He it is who when, after his resurrection, he sat down on the right hand of God, did but sit down where he was before, John 17:5. His throne being erected at the door of the temple (as princes sat in judgment at the gates), his train, the skirts of his robes, filled the temple, the whole world (for it is all God's temple, and, as the heaven is his throne, so the earth is his footstool), or rather the church, which is filled enriched, and beautified with the tokens of God's special presence.²

2 Above the throne, as it were hovering about it, or nigh to the throne, bowing before it, with an eye to it, the seraphim stood, the holy angels, who are called seraphim-burners; for he makes his ministers a flaming fire, Psalms 104:4. Special notice is taken of their wings (and of no other part of their appearance), because of the use they made of them, which is designed for instruction to us. They had each of them six wings, four were made use of for a covering, as the wings of a fowl, sitting, are; with the two upper wings, next to the head, they covered their faces, and with the two lowest wings they covered their feet, or lower parts. This bespeaks their great humility and reverence in their attendance upon God, for he is greatly feared in the assembly of those saints, Psalms 89:7. They not only cover their feet, those members of the body which are less honourable (1 Corinthians 12:23), but even their faces. Two were made use of for flight; when they are sent on God's errands they fly swiftly (Daniel 9:21), more swiftly with their own wings than if they flew on the wings of the wind.²

3 The anthem, or song of praise, which the angels sing to the honour of him that sits on the throne, was sung with zeal and fervency--they cried aloud; and with unanimity--they cried to another, or one with another. The song was the same with that which is sung by the four living creatures, Revelation 4:8. The seraphim praise God with one of his most glorious titles: the Lord of hosts. None of all the divine attributes is so celebrated in scripture as this is. The Jews thought the glory of God should be confined to their land; but it is here intimated that in the gospel times (which are pointed to in this chapter) the glory of God should fill all the earth.²

earth.2

4 The house was shaken; not only the door, but even the posts of the door, which were firmly fixed, moved at the voice of him that cried. This violent concussion of the temple was an indication of God's wrath and displeasure against the people for their sins; and it was designed to strike awe upon us.2

5 With what a pure lip did the angels praise God! "But," says the prophet, "I cannot praise him so, for I am a man of unclean lips." The angels had celebrated the purity and holiness of God; and therefore the prophet, when he reflects upon sin, calls it uncleanness. What gave occasion for these sad reflections at this time: My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. He saw God's sovereignty to be incontestable--he is the King; and his power irresistible--he is the Lord of hosts. Isaiah was thus humbled, to prepare him for the honour he was now to be called to as a prophet.2

6 One of the seraphim immediately flew to him, to purify him, and so to pacify him. God has strong consolations ready for holy mourners. Further, angels are ministering spirits for the good of the saints, for their spiritual good. Here was one of the seraphim dismissed, for a time, from attending on the throne of God's glory, to be a messenger of his grace to a good man; and so well pleased was he with the office that he came flying to him. Here is a comfortable sign given to the prophet of the purging away of his sin.2

7 The seraph brought a live coal from the altar, and touched his lips with it, not to hurt them, but to heal them--not to cauterize, but to cleanse them; for there were purifications by fire, as well as by water, and the filth of Jerusalem was purged by the spirit of burning, Isaiah 4:4. This live coal was taken from off the altar, either the altar of incense or that of burnt-offerings, for they had both of them fire burning on them continually. An explication of this sign: "Lo, this has touched thy lips, to assure thee of this, that thy iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged.2

8 Here is a communication between God and Isaiah about this matter.

God needs not either to be counselled by others or to consult with himself; he knows what he will do, but thus he would show us that the sending forth of ministers is a work not to be done but upon mature deliberation. God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost all concur, as in the creating, so in the redeeming and governing of man. God now appeared, attended with holy angels, and yet asks, Whom shall I send?

For he would send them a prophet from among their brethren, Hebrews 2:17. It is a rare thing to find one who is fit to go for God, and carry his messages to the children of men: Who is sufficient? Such a degree of courage for God and concern for the souls of men are seldom to be met with. Isaiah had been himself in a melancholy frame (Isaiah 6:5), full of doubts and fears; but now that he had the assurance of the pardon of his sin the clouds were blown over, and he was fit for service and forward to it. What he says denotes His readiness: "Here am I, a volunteer, not pressed into the service."²

9 God takes Isaiah at his word, and here sends him on a strange errand--to foretell the ruin of his people and even to ripen them for that ruin. These verses are quoted in part, or referred to, six times, in the New Testament, which intimates that in gospel time these spiritual judgments would be most frequently inflicted. Isaiah must preach to a people that would hear him indeed, but that is all; they will not heed him; they will not understand him; they will not take any pains, nor use that application of mind which is necessary to the understanding of him; they are prejudiced against that which is the true intent and meaning of what he says, and therefore they will not understand him, or pretend they do not. They see indeed; but they perceive not their own concern in it; it is to them as a tale that is told.²

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10 That, forasmuch as they would not be made better by his ministry, they should be made worse by it; those that were wilfully blind should be judicially blinded (Isaiah 6:10): "They will not understand or perceive thee, and therefore thou shalt be instrumental to make their heart fat, senseless, and sensual, and so to make their ears yet more heavy, and to shut their eyes the closer; so that, at length, their recovery and repentance will become utterly impossible; they shall no more see with their eyes the danger they are in, the ruin they are upon the brink of, nor the way of escape from it; they shall no more hear with their ears the warnings and instructions that are given them, nor understand with their heart the things that belong to their peace, so as to be converted from the error of their ways, and thus be healed."²

11 That the consequence of this would be their utter ruin, Isaiah 6:11,12. The prophet had nothing to object against the justice of this sentence, nor does he refuse to go upon such an errand, but asks, "Lord, how long?" (an abrupt question): "Shall it always be thus? Must I and other prophets always labour in vain among them, and will things never be better?" Or, (as should seem by the answer) "Lord, what will it come to at last? What will be in the end hereof?" In answer to this he is told that it should issue in the final destruction of the Jewish church and nation. "When the word of God, especially the word of the gospel, had been thus abused by them, they shall be unchurched, and consequently undone.

12 Their cities shall be uninhabited, and their country houses too; the land shall be untilled, desolate with desolation, the people who should replenish the houses and cultivate the ground being all cut off by sword, famine, or pestilence, and those who escape with their lives being removed far away into captivity, so that there shall be a great and general forsaking in the midst of the land; that populous country shall become desert, and that glory of all lands shall be abandoned." Note, Spiritual judgments often bring temporal judgments along with them upon persons and places. These he that is born of God has his seed remaining in him, 1 John 3:9.2 predictions being so expressly applied in the New Testament to the Jews in our Saviour's time, doubtless this points at the final destruction of that people by the Romans, in which it had a complete accomplishment, and the effects of it that people and that land remain under to this day.²

13 There was a remnant reserved in the last destruction of the Jewish nation: But in it shall be a tenth, a certain number, but a very small number in comparison with the multitude that shall perish in their unbelief. That they shall return from sin to God and duty, shall return out of captivity to their own land. That they shall be eaten, that is, shall be accepted of God. That they shall be like a timber-tree in winter, which has life, though it has no leaves: As a teil-tree and as an oak, whose substance is in them even when they cast their leaves, so this remnant, though they may be stripped of their outward prosperity and share with others in common calamities, shall yet recover themselves, as a tree in the spring, and flourish again; though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down. The holy seed in the soul is the substance of the man;

1. King James Authorized Version

2. Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible - <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries>

3. HIS MAJESTY by Ray C. Stedman - <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/isaiah/0577.html>

4. CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Seraphim <http://www.newadvent>

CHAPTER 12

GOD'S COMMISSION TO JEREMIAH

Endurance is not a common quality. Many people lack the long-term commitment, caring, and willingness that are vital to sticking with a task against all odds. But Jeremiah was a prophet who endured.

Jeremiah's call by God teaches how intimately God knows us. He valued us before anyone else knew we would exist. He cared for us while we were in our mother's womb. He planned our lives while our bodies were still being formed. He values us more highly than we value ourselves.

Jeremiah had to depend on God's love as he developed endurance. His audiences were usually antagonistic or apathetic to his messages. He was ignored; his life was often threatened. He saw both the excitement of a spiritual awakening and the sorrow of a national return to idolatry. With the exception of the good King Josiah, Jeremiah watched king after king ignore his warnings and lead the people away from God. He saw fellow prophets murdered. He himself was severely persecuted. Finally, he watched Judah's defeat at the hands of the Babylonians.

Jeremiah responded to all this with God's message and human tears. He felt firsthand God's love for his people and the people's rejection of that love. But even when he was angry with God and tempted to give up, Jeremiah knew he had to keep going. God had called him to endure. He expressed intense feelings, but he also saw beyond the feelings to the God who was soon to execute justice, but who afterward would administer mercy.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Wrote two Old Testament books, Jeremiah and Lamentations
- Ministered during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah
- Was a catalyst for the great spiritual reformation under King Josiah
- Acted as God's faithful messenger in spite of many attempts on his life
- Was so deeply sorrowful for the fallen condition of Judah that he earned the title "weeping prophet"

It may be easy for us to identify with Jeremiah's frustrations and discouragement, but we need to realize that this prophet's life is also an encouragement to faithfulness.

Lessons from his life:

- The majority opinion is not necessarily God's will
- Although punishment for sin is severe, there is hope in God's mercy
- God will not accept empty or insincere worship
- Serving God does not guarantee earthly security

Key verses:

“ ‘Ah, Sovereign LORD,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’ But the LORD said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 1:6-8).

Jeremiah's story is told in the book of Jeremiah. He is also mentioned in Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2; Matthew 2:17; Matthew 16:14; Matthew 27:9. See also 2 Chron. 34-35 for the story of the spiritual revival under Josiah.

His prophetic commission began with Judah and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 2:1-2), but was extended to "all the families of the house of Israel" (verse 4.)

So Bible prophecy is twofold in nature. It certainly promises punishment for transgressions of divine law. But it also encourages mankind by promising a golden age of peace, prosperity and plenty following in the wake of global repentance occasioned by Christ's second coming.

CHAPTER 13

GOD'S COMMISSION TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is a key figure in the Biblical stories of Jesus of Nazareth. According to the Gospels, John's role was to announce the coming of Jesus: in John 1:23 he tells interrogators, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" According to Matthew 3:4, he wore clothing made of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey, and baptized people in the river Jordan. (It was after being baptized by John that Jesus was led to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.) John later was executed by the ruler Herod; as told in Matthew chapter 14, Herod granted the demand of Salome to "give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter."

There's no getting around it—John the Baptist was unique. He wore odd clothes and ate strange food and preached an unusual message to the Judeans who went out to the wastelands to see him.

But John did not aim at uniqueness for its own sake. Instead, he aimed at obedience. He knew he had a specific role to play in the world—announcing the coming of the Savior—and he put all his energies into this task. Luke tells us that John was in the desert when God's word of direction came to him. John was ready and waiting. The angel who had announced John's birth to Zechariah had made it clear this child was to be a Nazarite—one set apart for God's service. John remained faithful to that calling.

All that is certainly known about him comes from the Gospels. He was the son of Zachariah, a Temple priest, and his wife Elizabeth, who was a cousin of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was born when his mother was comparatively advanced in years, after the foretelling of his birth and the choice of his name by an angel. Nothing more is heard of him until he began his mission of preaching and baptizing in the river Jordan c.27. His way of life and style of preaching closely resembled those of some OT prophets: his diet was locusts and wild honey, his message one of repentance and preparation for the coming of the Messiah and his Kingdom. Among his disciples were the future apostles Peter and Andrew. He himself baptized Christ and recognized him as the Messiah when he saw the Spirit come down upon him. Later Christ praised him, saying that none among the sons

of women had arisen who was greater than him.

John also denounced the incestuous union of Herod Antipas with his niece and brother's wife, Herodias, and was imprisoned for doing so. His death was brought about by the hatred of Herodias and the weakness of Herod. When Salome, her daughter, had greatly pleased the king with her dancing at his birthday feast, he promised she could have from him whatever she liked 'even if it is half my kingdom'. Instigated by her mother, she demanded the head of John the Baptist on a dish. Herod, without a trial of any kind, dispatched an executioner to John's prison (identified as Machaerus by the Dead Sea Scrolls) and had his head presented to Salome, who passed it on to her mother.

This wild-looking man had no power or position in the Jewish political system, but he spoke with almost irresistible authority. People were moved by his words because he spoke the truth, challenging them to turn from their sins and baptizing them as a symbol of their repentance. They responded by the hundreds. But even as people crowded to him, he pointed beyond himself, never forgetting that his main role was to announce the coming of the Savior.

The words of truth that moved many to repentance goaded others to resistance and resentment. John even challenged Herod to admit his sin. Herodias, the woman Herod had married illegally, decided to get rid of this desert preacher.

Although she was able to have him killed, she was not able to stop his message. The One John had announced was already on the move. John had accomplished his mission.

God has given each of us a purpose for living, and we can trust him to guide us. John did not have the complete Bible as we know it today, but he focused his life on the truth he knew from the available Old Testament Scriptures. Likewise we can discover in God's Word the truths he wants us to know. And as these truths work in us, others will be drawn to him. God can use you in a way he can use no one else. Let him know your willingness to follow him today.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- The God-appointed messenger to announce the arrival of Jesus
- A preacher whose theme was repentance
- A fearless confronter
- Known for his remarkable life-style
- Uncompromising

Lessons from his life:

- God does not guarantee an easy or safe life to those who serve him
- Doing what God desires is the greatest possible life investment
- Standing for the truth is more important than life itself

Vital statistics:

- Where: Judea
- Occupation: Prophet
- Relatives: Father: Zechariah. Mother: Elizabeth. Distant relative: Jesus
- Contemporaries: Herod, Herodias

Key verse:

“I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11).

John’s story is told in all four Gospels. His coming was predicted in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 4:5; and he is mentioned in Acts 1:5, 22; Acts 10:37; Acts 11:16; Acts 13:24-25; Acts 18:25; Acts 19:3-4.

CHAPTER 14

GOD'S COMMISSION TO JESUS

The Promise in Eden

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel". (Genesis 3:15)

God began to announce that there would be **two lines (groups) of people** in the world: The people of Satan and the people of God. The people of Satan are those who refuse to believe the Word of God. The people of God are those who believe God's Word and put their trust in the promised Redeemer. (John 1:9-13)

“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. [11] He came unto his own, and his own received him not. [12] But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: [13] Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”.

Thus, on the day that Adam and Eve sinned, God began to announce His wondrous plan to redeem sinners.. God's prophets announced the coming of a holy Savior who would free sinners from the hand of the devil. The final outcome is that the seed of the woman shall be triumphant where as the seed of the serpent shall go down in utter defeat. We can rest assured that the human family will ultimately be brought into a wonderful relationship with God -- greater than that which existed before the fall!

Our Blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of mankind. The name "Jesus" signifies Savior or Redeemer, and this name was given to Our Lord by an Angel who appeared to Joseph and said: "Mary shall bring forth a Son; and thou shall call His name Jesus."

The name "Christ" means the same as Messiah, and signifies Anointed; because, as in the Old Law, Prophets, High Priests and Kings were anointed with oil; so Jesus, the Great Prophet, High Priest and King of the New Law, was anointed as man with the fullness of divine power.

Christ showed and proved His divine power chiefly by His miracles, which are extraordinary works that can be performed only by power received from God, and which have, therefore, His sanction and authority.

The miracles of Jesus Christ proved that whatever He said was true, and that when He declared Himself to be the Son of God He really was what He claimed to be.

Why did God send Jesus into the world? What was the commission God gave to Jesus? Notice some of the many reasons found in the scripture for the coming of Jesus into the world to redeem all who trust Him.

. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I Timothy 1:15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to call sinners to repentance. Mark 2:17 "Jesus...saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and save the lost. Luke 19:10 "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

. Jesus came into the world to demonstrate the true purpose of life and give Himself a ransom. Matthew 20:28 "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to be a King and bear witness to the truth. John 18:37 "Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art thou a king? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to do the Will of His Father. John 6:38 "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to be a Light in the world. John 12:46 "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness."

. Jesus Christ came into the world that men might have the Abundant Life. John 10:10 "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to Judge the world. John 9:39 "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to Proclaim or preach the Good News about the Kingdom of God. Mark 1:38 "And He said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to die on the cross. John 12:27 "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfill the law. Matthew 5:17 "Think not that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

. Jesus Christ came into the world to be a Divider of men. Matthew 10:34-35 "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

14. Jesus Christ came into the world because the Father sent Him. John 20:21 "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you."

A. The Father SENT Jesus to be the Propitiation for our sins. I John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

The Father SENT Jesus and gave Jesus as the Saviour of the world. John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that rather the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

The Father SENT Jesus to bless us by turning us from our iniquities. Acts 3:26 "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

God SENT His Son, to redeem us from the curse of the law. Galations 4:4-5 "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

. God SENT His Son to make possible a new power in the hearts of men, a power to enable him to fulfill the righteousness of the law. Romans 8:3-4 "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

Jesus Christ came into the world as a demonstration of God's love. I John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we God, but that He us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

CHAPTER 15

Jesus Commission to the 70

Luke 10:1-9 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. [2] Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. [3] Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. [4] Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. [5] And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. [6] And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. [7] And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. [8] And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: [9] And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

70 is the number of judges appointed by Moses to help lead Israel, but this seems strained, to me, as the men sent out were not leaders or judges in the same sense (Num. 11:16 ff, 24 ff). If you add the two who remained in camp, it's 72!

Genesis 10 lists 70 nations of the world.

Or maybe it's as simple as Jesus having 35 towns he wanted visited by these men in preparation for his coming visits.

These 70 disciples were to prepare the towns for Jesus' coming (in a sense, the same work of Christian ministers today!). It would seem that if the town rejected these men, Jesus, they were not to remain there. We have a "personal" relationship with Jesus, but the Bible also teaches an essential corporate relationship—we are part of the "body" of Christ and the "bride" of Christ.

That personal relationship very much depends on being part of the institutional body. See 1 Cor. 12, for example.

The instructions are similar to those given as to the sending of the 12
V. 2 is the voice of prophecy. Jesus knew people hungered for the good news.

B. V. 3 is a reference to the innocence of the disciples. There will be opponents, but the disciples are to trust the people to support them—they should be as naïve and simple as sheep. This isn't common sense. It may not be smart. But it's God's way for this mission.

The phrase also indicates danger, and hence their reliance on God's protection.

V. 4. "No sandals" means "no second pair of sandals." They weren't sent barefoot.

"Greet no one" presumably means don't slow down—not "be rude." In the East, greetings could take a very long time, due to elaborate social custom.

"Peace" is *shalom* in Hebrew, being a greeting similar to "hello" but with the meaning "peace be with you" and having obvious religious significance.

V. 7. It's only polite to eat what you're offered when you're a guest. But be willing to accept the gift. Those who preach the gospel are entitled to support because those who support them are benefited by the message. There is genuine value in their work.

But this may also be an injunction not to worry about being *kosher*—clean food. They may find themselves in the home of a Gentile or non-observant Jew. There's not time for such things—the mission is urgent!

And this tells us a lot about how we should approach mission work today. We aren't to be fastidious about minor concerns that interfere with the greater concern of getting God's word out.

Jesus again commands them to stay in the first house that invites them in. They are certainly "worth their hire" but they shouldn't waste time trying to improve their situation. Good enough is good enough. Spend your time in mission, not in shopping for a softer bed.

Nor should they feel guilty for taking advantage of just one family's hospitality. God will make it up to their hosts! Don't spend time deciding where to eat or sleep!

10 "But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, *11* 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.' Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near. *12* I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

- A. Sodom is considered an example of the sin of inhospitality, as well as the sin of homosexuality. Homosexuality is condemned, but inhospitality is lack of concern for the needy is the charge levied against Sodom.

The disciples will be travelers under the protection of whichever house takes them in. They won't stay in the inns (which were rare and generally unpleasant places).

The refusal to be hospitable to and support a man on God's own mission is worse than what the Sodomites did! There's no reason to take this as exaggeration.

Jesus sent men to send the message, rather than waiting for these people to find him. Perhaps the lesson is that Jesus reaches out to us—we don't so much have to seek God as not run from God's seeking!

CHAPTER 16

GOD'S COMMISSION TO MARY

Luke 1:26-66

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, [27] To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. [29] And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. [30] And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. [31] And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. [32] He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: [33] And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. [34] Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? [35] And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. [36] And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. [37] For with God nothing shall be impossible. [38] And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

[39] And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; [40] And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. [41] 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: [42] And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. [43] And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. [45] And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

[46] And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, [47] And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. [48] For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. [49] For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. [50] And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. [51] He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. [52] He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. [53] He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. [54] He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; [55] As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. [56] And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Other Scriptural locations where the story of Mary is told are:

. (Matthew 1:18-25, 2:13-15, 20-23; Luke, 2:1-52; John 2:1-10)

Motherhood is a painful privilege. Young Mary of Nazareth had the unique privilege of being mother to the very Son of God. Yet the pains and pleasures of her motherhood can be understood by mothers everywhere. Mary was the only human present at Jesus' birth who also witnessed his death. She saw him arrive as her baby son, and she watched him die as her Savior.

Until Gabriel's unexpected visit, Mary's life was quite satisfactory. She had recently become engaged to a carpenter, Joseph, and was anticipating married life. But her life was about to change forever.

Mary found the angel's greeting puzzling and his presence frightening. What she heard next was the news almost every woman in Israel hoped to hear—that her child would be the Messiah, God's promised Savior. Mary did not doubt the message, but rather asked how pregnancy would be possible. Gabriel told her the baby would be God's Son. Her answer was the one God waits in vain to hear from so many other people: "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Later, her song of joy shows us how well she knew God, for her thoughts were filled with his words from the Old Testament.

Within a few weeks of his birth, Jesus was taken to the temple to be dedicated to God. There Joseph and Mary were met by two devout people, Simeon and Anna, who recognized the child as the Messiah and praised God. Simeon directed some words to Mary that must have come to her mind many times in the years that followed: "A sword will pierce your own soul" (Luke 2:35). A big part of her painful privilege of motherhood would be to see her son rejected and crucified by the people he came to save.

We can imagine that even if she had known all she would suffer as Jesus' mother, Mary would still have given the same response. Are you, like Mary, available to be used by God?

Mary is admired as:

- The mother of Jesus, the Messiah

- The one human who was with Jesus from birth to death
 - Willing to be available to God
 - Knew and applied Old Testament Scriptures
- God's best servants are often ordinary people available to him
 - God's plans involve extraordinary events in ordinary people's lives
 - A person's character is revealed by his or her response to the unexpected

'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's story is told throughout the Gospels. She is also mentioned in Acts 1:14. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren".

Knowing the Will of God: Reflections on Mary, the Mother of Jesus

By looking at the life of Mary, the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we will see time and time again how God reaffirmed His specific will to Mary and how we, like Mary, can expect God to periodically restate His will for us so that we also know His ways and that the promises and provision He has for us are indeed true and will come to pass.

The commission that Mary received was a part of the willingness that Joseph, who became her husband, received as his commission to marry Mary.

As is often the case, God's commissions to one person may often include the faithfulness of others.

Lesson 17

The Great Commission

Mark 16:15-18

And he said unto him or her, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. [16] He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. [17] And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; [18] They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

1. Go into all the World.

The first is the commission which our Savior gave his twelve apostles, when he sent them forth on their great work: "He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." That was their commission.

Until Paul's conversion little had been done about carrying the gospel to non-Jews. Philip had preached in Samaria and to an Ethiopian man; Cornelius a Gentile was converted under Peter; and in Antioch in Syria, some Greeks had joined the believers. When Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to check on this situation, he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring to Antioch and together they worked among the believers there. They were then sent to a missionary journey, the first of three Paul would take that would carry the gospel across the Roman empire.

Believers have a mission to perform: taking the gospel into all the world. That work begins at home, right where we live. And it extends to the place where we work and where we play. It also involves taking the message of Jesus Christ into far away places, where people speak different languages and have very different customs.

We not only owe it to the Lord Jesus, who died for everyone, but we also owe it to all the people. They are our human family. We owe it to the little children of every race and tribe, to the hard-working men and women of every community, to the grandmothers and grandfathers of every land. Every human soul needs Jesus, just as we do. Our children and loved

ones are precious to the Lord, and so are the little ones and people of all nations.

2. Preach the gospel to every creature.

If God the Father has predestined only a limited number to be saved, and if God the Spirit quickens only God's elect, then what is the use of giving the Gospel to the world at large, and where is the warrant for telling sinners that "Whoever believeth in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life"?

First, it is of great importance that we should be clear on the Gospel itself. The Gospel is God's good news concerning Christ, and not concerning sinners, Romans 1:1,3. It is God's purpose to proclaim far and wide the truth that His own Son became "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The Gospel is God's witness of the glorious person and work of Christ in having saved sinners by His blood and righteousness.

Today, the Gospel of Christ is being spread in many ways such as: churches, house to house, street meetings, radio, television, internet, and many other ways. Believers must seek to spread the gospel continuously.

The issue of whether Gentile believers had to obey Jewish laws before they could become Christians caused many problems in the early church. Paul worked hard to convince the Jews that Gentiles were acceptable to God, but he spent even more time convincing the Gentiles that they were acceptable to God. The lives Paul touched were changed and challenged by meeting Christ through him.

3. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved

You must hear the word, believe, repent of your sin, confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God, be buried in Christ's death through baptism and live righteously to the end.

Posted by Charles Spurgeon:

Mr. MacDonald asked the inhabitants of the island of St. Kilda how a man must be saved. An old man replied, "We shall be saved if we repent, and forsake our sins, and turn to God." "Yes," said a middle-aged female, "and with a true heart too." "Aye," rejoined a third, "and with prayer"; and, added a fourth, "It must be the prayer of the heart." "And we must be diligent too," said a fifth, "in keeping the commandments."

Thus, each having contributed his mite, feeling that a very decent creed had been made up, they all looked and listened for the preacher's approbation, but they had aroused his deepest pity. The carnal mind always maps out for itself a way in which self can work and become great, but the Lord's way is quite the reverse. Believing and being baptized are no matters of merit to be gloried in-they are so simple that boasting is excluded, and free grace bears the palm.

It may be that the reader is unsaved-what is the reason? Do you think the way of salvation as laid down in the text to be dubious? How can that be when God has pledged his own word for its certainty? Do you think it too easy? Why, then, do you not attend to it? Its ease leaves those without excuse who neglect it. To believe is simply to trust, to depend, to rely upon Christ Jesus. To be baptized is to submit to the ordinance which our Lord fulfilled at Jordan, to which the converted ones submitted at Pentecost, to which the jailer yielded obedience the very night of his conversion. The outward sign saves not, but it sets forth to us our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus, and, like the Lord's Supper, is not to be neglected.

Reader, do you believe in Jesus? Then, dear friend, dismiss your fears, you shall be saved. Are you still an unbeliever, then remember there is but one door, and if you will not enter by it you will perish in your sins.

Jeffery Cottingham states: "As ministers, we must remember that Jesus commanded us to repent and be baptized, Period. He did not leave an option on the matter. Secondly, you are hard pressed to find an example of someone coming to Christ in the book of Acts without receiving baptism immediately or shortly thereafter. The case of Phillip and the eunuch came to mind. He said, "There is water, what then prevents me from being baptized?"

There was no question to this eunuch after Phillip preached that Gospel that he must follow in the footsteps of Jesus and receive baptism. I think that regardless of

ones theology on the subject we should take Jesus' command seriously and follow this advice and "just do it."

4. **Signs shall follow them that believe:**

The second part of the commission, is Jesus' declaration to the disciples of the consequences that would follow their belief of that gospel, on the one hand, or their disbelief of it, on the other hand. If they believed the message,

If they truly believed, it would save them: for the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" "He that believeth and is baptized **shall be saved**," but if they rejected the message, it would be to their condemnation: "He that believeth not, shall be damned," that is, condemned.

The Great Commission clearly states the signs that should follow believers.

(a) In my name shall they cast out devils.

- **Demons were cast out by Word or Command:**

Matthew 8:16 - When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.

Matthew 8:31-32 - So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

Mark 5:13 - And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

Mark 1:27 - And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

Luke 4:36 - And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

- **By the Spirit or Finger (Authority) of God**

Matthew 12:28 - But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Luke 11:20 - But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

(b) **They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.**

We see a distinction between laying hands on the sick and casting out devils: The laying on of hands was often used to heal the sick. Sometimes only the Word was spoken.

Mark 6:13 - And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Matthew 10:1 - And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease

Mark 5:23 - And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

Mark 16:18 - They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Acts 28:8 - And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

(c) They shall speak with new tongues.

The tongue that is spoken of is a language. There were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost people from about 16 different nations, who spoke over ten different languages. During this period in history the world spoke mostly Greek, however, you will notice in Acts 2:11, that the people heard the apostles speaking in their own language.

As the result of the people hearing in their own language, the people were amazed and perplexed.

In the records in 1 Corinthians, the obvious giving of languages (tongues) was a working of the Holy Spirit in the same sense that workings of miracles, prophecies, discerning of spirits and the interpretation of tongues.

Acts 2:3-4

3 And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ASV

Acts 2:11-12

11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God.

12 And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? ASV

Acts 10:46

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,
ASV

Acts 19:6

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and

they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

ASV

1 Corinthians 12:10

10 and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits; to another (divers) kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues:

ASV

1 Corinthians 12:28-13:1

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, (divers) kinds of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all (workers of) miracles?

30 have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

31 But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And moreover a most excellent way show I unto you.

1 Corinthians 13:1

13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal.

ASV

1 Corinthians 13:8

8 Love never faileth: but whether (there be) prophecies, they shall be done away; whether (there be) tongues, they shall cease; whether (there be) knowledge, it shall be done away.

ASV

1 Corinthians 14:2-9

2 For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men edification, and exhortation, and consolation.

4 He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

5 Now I would have you all speak with tongues, but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

6 But now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophesying, or of teaching?

7 Even things without life, giving a voice, whether pipe or harp, if they give not a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?

8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?

9 So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air.

ASV

1 Corinthians 14:13-14 3 Wherefore let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. ASV

(d) They shall take up serpents

Jeffrey Cottingame states:

“I think that one part of the great commission as located in Mark's gospel that is often ignored and misunderstood is the phrase, "they shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them."

“This phrase is analogous, in my opinion, to the trials and sufferings that being a minister of the gospel is prone to. In the face of a feel good Christianity of our day, this statement is very unpopular. Both the Apostles Paul, Peter, and James speak of our suffering and tribulations in this world as a result of our decision to follow Christ.”

Harold Bollinger states: “As a child growing up in the midwest, I was bitten two times by rattle snakes. My parents and others prayed for me each time, and I soon recovered. This is all part of Divine Healing”.

“Can any man Tempt God? By trying to force God into his plan?”

(e) If they drink any deadly things, it shall not hurt them.

As a child, Harold Bollinger remembers his mother telling about being in a service where Charles Parham was preaching. He always kept a glass of water on the pulpit to drink as he preached. On one occasion, he took a drink and sensed that something had been put in the water. He continued to preach without harm. After service, he had the water analyzed. There was enough poison left in the glass to kill several men.

No one should purposely tempt God by daring him to show his power. Rather, we through faith, when faced with near death or disaster, the God of Love will provide protection. All this can be read in Psalms 91.

Grace received through faith in Christ is available to all people. Obedience results from a relationship with God, but obedience will never create or earn that relationship. Real freedom does not come until we no longer have to prove our freedom. God will use our past and present so we may serve him with our future.

References

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

Additional comments taken from:

Life Application Study Bible. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print