



UNSEEN POWER

Miracles in the
Old Testament

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Old Testament Miracles

God uses miracles as a way to show His love and power to us. God cares for each one, and our lives do matter to Him. He performs supernatural works in us so that our lives can be made better, we or others can become closer to Him, and His will can be accomplished.

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Noah and the Flood

Genesis 7, 8

Noah was a righteous man. He was the only blameless man living on earth at the time. He consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with him. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth had become corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence. God observed all this corruption in the world, and he saw violence and depravity everywhere. So God said to Noah, "I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Yes, I will wipe them all from the face of the earth! "Make a boat from resinous wood and seal it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Construct an opening all the way around the boat, 18 inches below the roof. Then put three decks inside the boat—bottom, middle, and upper—and put a door in the side.

God told Noah that he was going to cover the earth with a flood that would destroy every living thing. Everything on earth would die! God told Noah that he would keep him safe in the boat, with his wife and sons and their wives.

God said: "Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. Pairs of each kind of bird and each kind of animal, large and small will come to you to be kept alive. And remember, take enough food for your family and for all the animals."

Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

Finally, the day came when the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I consider you alone to be righteous.

Take along seven pairs of each animal that I have approved for eating and for sacrifice, and take one pair of each of the others. Then select seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that every kind of living creature will survive the flood. One week from today I will begin forty days and forty nights of rain.

I will wipe from the earth all the living things I have created."

Noah got right to work when God told him to build the ark. Other people must have been warned about the coming disaster (1 Peter 3:20), but apparently they did not expect it to happen. Today things haven't changed much. Each day thousands of people are warned of God's inevitable judgment, yet most of them don't really believe it will happen. Don't expect people to welcome or accept your message of God's coming judgment on sin. Those who don't believe in God will deny his judgment and try to get you to deny God as well. But remember God's promise to Noah to keep him safe. This can inspire you to trust God for deliverance in the judgment that is sure to come.

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came, he and his family went aboard the boat to escape. With them were all the various kinds of animals—those approved for eating and sacrifice and those that were not—along with all the birds and other small animals. They came into the boat in pairs, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. One week later, the flood came and covered the earth.

The rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights. But Noah had gone into the boat with his wife and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives. With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of breathing animal—domestic and wild, large and small—along with birds and flying insects of every kind. Two by two they came into the boat. They were male and female, just as God had commanded. Then the Lord shut them in.

The creation, along with Noah, was doing just as God had commanded. There seemed to be no problem gathering the animals—God took care of the details of that job while Noah was doing his part by building the ark. A time, we do just the opposite of Noah. We worry about details over which we have no control, while neglecting specific areas (such as attitudes, relationships, responsibilities) that *are* under our control. Like Noah, we should concentrate on what God has given us to do, and leave the rest to God.

For forty days the floods prevailed, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the

boat floated safely on the surface. Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, standing more than twenty-two feet above the highest peaks. All the living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all kinds of small animals, and all the people. Everything died that breathed and lived on dry land. Every living thing on the earth was wiped out—people, animals both large and small, and birds. They were all destroyed, and only Noah and those in the Ark were left alive. The water covered the earth for 150 days.

God remembered Noah and all the animals in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the waters, and the floods began to disappear. The underground water sources ceased their gushing, and the torrential rains stopped. So the flood gradually began to recede. After 150 days, exactly five months from the time the flood began, the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 19:24

Two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting there as they arrived. When he saw them, he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed low to the ground. "My lords," he said, "come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up in the morning as early as you like and be on your way again."

"Oh no," they said, "We'll just spend the night out here in the city square." But Lot insisted, so at last they went home with him. He set a great feast before them, complete with fresh bread made without yeast. After the meal, as they were preparing to retire for the night, all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house. The men shouted to Lot, "Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out so we can have sex with them."

Lot stepped outside to talk to them, shutting the door behind him. "Please, my brothers," he begged, "don't do such a wicked thing. We let you settle among us, and now you are trying to tell us what to do! We'll treat you far worse than those other men!" And they lunged at Lot and began breaking down the door. The two angels reached out and pulled Lot in and bolted the door. Then they blinded the men of Sodom so they couldn't find the doorway.

"Do you have any other relatives here in the city?" the angels asked. "Get them out of this place—sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else, for we will completely destroy the city. The stench of the place has reached the Lord, and he has sent us to destroy it."

So Lot rushed out to tell his daughters' fiancés, "Quick, get out of the city! The Lord is going to destroy it." But the young men thought he was only joking.

At dawn the next morning the angels became insistent. "Hurry," they said to Lot. "Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out of here right now, or you will be caught in the destruction of the city." When Lot still hesitated,

the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the Lord was merciful.

"Run for your lives!" the angels warned. "Do not stop anywhere in the valley. And don't look back! Escape to the mountains, or you will die."

"Oh no, my lords, please," Lot begged. "You have been so kind to me and saved my life, and you have granted me such mercy. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die. See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don't you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved."

"All right," the angel said, "I will grant your request. I will not destroy that little village. But hurry! For I can do nothing until you are there." From that time on, that village was known as Zoar.

The sun was rising as Lot reached the village. Then the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah. He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, eliminating all life— people, plants, and animals alike. But Lot's wife looked back as she was following along behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Birth of Isaac at Gerar

Genesis 21:1

Then the Lord did exactly what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant, and she gave a son to Abraham in his old age. It all happened at the time God had said it would. And Abraham named his son Isaac. Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. Abraham was one hundred years old at the time.

And Sarah declared, "God has brought me laughter! All who hear about this will laugh with me. For who would have dreamed that I would ever have a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!"

Who could believe that Abraham would have a son at 100 years of age—and live to raise him to adulthood? But doing the impossible is everyday business for God. Our big problems won't seem so impossible if we let God handle them.

After repeated promises, a visit by two angels, and the appearance of the Lord himself, Sarah finally cried out with surprise and joy at the birth of her son. Because of her doubt, worry, and fear, she had forfeited the peace she could have felt in God's wonderful promise to her. The way to bring peace to a troubled heart is to focus on God's promises. Trust him to do what he says.

The Burning Bush not Consumed

Exodus 3

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he went deep into the wilderness near Sinai, the mountain of God.

Suddenly, the angel of the Lord appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was amazed because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn't burn up. "Amazing!" Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go over to see this."

When the Lord saw that he had caught Moses' attention, God called to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.

"Do not come any closer," God told him. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he hid his face in his hands because he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord told him, "You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come to rescue them from the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own good and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live.

The cries of the people of Israel have reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

"But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?" Moses asked God. "How can you expect me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" Then God told him, "I will be with you. And this will serve as proof that I have sent you: When you have brought the Israelites out of Egypt, you will return here to worship God at this very mountain."

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God

of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they won't believe me. They will ask, "Which god are you talking about? What is his name?" Then what should I tell them?"

God replied, "I Am the One who always is. Just tell them, 'I Am has sent me to you.' " God also said, "Tell them, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This will be my name forever; it has always been my name, and it will be used throughout all generations.

"Now go and call together all the leaders of Israel. Tell them, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—appeared to me in a burning bush. He said, "You can be sure that I am watching over you and have seen what is happening to you in Egypt. 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.

Moses saw a burning bush and spoke with God. Many people in the Bible experienced God in visible form. Abraham saw the smoking firepot and blazing torch.

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.

Aaron's Rod Changed into a Serpent

Exodus 7

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pay close attention to this. I will make you seem like God to Pharaoh. Your brother, Aaron, will be your prophet; he will speak for you. Tell Aaron everything I say to you and have him announce it to Pharaoh. He will demand that the people of Israel be allowed to leave Egypt.

But I will cause Pharaoh to be stubborn so I can multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Even then Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you. So I will crush Egypt with a series of disasters, after which I will lead the forces of Israel out with great acts of judgment. When I show the Egyptians my power and force them to let the Israelites go, they will realize that I am the Lord."

So Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded them. Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron was eighty-three at the time they made their demands to Pharaoh. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Pharaoh will demand that you show him a miracle to prove that God has sent you. When he makes this demand, say to Aaron, 'Throw down your shepherd's staff,' and it will become a snake."

So Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh, and they performed the miracle just as the Lord had told them. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his court, and it became a snake. Then Pharaoh called in his wise men and magicians, and they did the same thing with their secret arts. Their staffs became snakes, too! But then Aaron's snake swallowed up their snakes. Pharaoh's heart, however, remained hard and stubborn. He still refused to listen, just as the Lord had predicted.

God performed a miracle by turning Aaron's staff into a snake, and Pharaoh's magicians did the same through trickery or sorcery. Although miracles can help us believe, it is dangerous to rely on them alone. Satan can imitate some parts of God's work and lead people astray. Pharaoh focused on the miracle rather than the message. We can avoid this error by letting the Word of God be the basis of our faith. No miracle from God would endorse the works of trickery or sorcery.

Waters Become Blood

Exodus 7-12

The Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh is very stubborn, and he continues to refuse to let the people go. So go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes down to the river. Stand on the riverbank and meet him there. Be sure to take along the shepherd's staff that turned into a snake. Say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say, "Let my people go, so they can worship me in the wilderness." Until now, you have refused to listen to him. Now the Lord says, "You are going to find out that I am the Lord." Look! I will hit the water of the Nile with this staff, and the river will turn to blood. The fish in it will die, and the river will stink. The Egyptians will not be able to drink any water from the Nile.'"

Then the Lord said to Moses: "Tell Aaron to point his staff toward the waters of Egypt—all its rivers, canals, marshes, and reservoirs. Everywhere in Egypt the water will turn into blood, even the water stored in wooden bowls and stone pots in the people's homes."

So Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded them. As Pharaoh and all of his officials watched, Aaron raised his staff and hit the water of the Nile.

Suddenly, the whole river turned to blood! The fish in the river died, and the water became so foul that the Egyptians couldn't drink it. There was blood everywhere throughout the land of Egypt. But again the magicians of Egypt used their secret arts, and they, too, turned water into blood. So Pharaoh's heart remained hard and stubborn. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted. Pharaoh returned to his palace and put the whole thing out of his mind. Then the Egyptians dug wells along the riverbank to get drinking water, for they couldn't drink from the river. An entire week passed from the time the Lord turned the water of the Nile to blood.

How were these sorcerers and magicians able to duplicate Moses' miracles? Some of their feats involved trickery or illusion, and some may have used satanic power since worshiping gods of the underworld was part of their religion. Ironically, whenever the sorcerers duplicated one of Moses' plagues, it only made

matters worse. If the magicians had been as powerful as God, they would have reversed the plagues, not added to them.

Although miracles can help us believe, it is dangerous to rely on them alone. Satan can imitate some parts of God's work and lead people astray. Pharaoh focused on the miracle rather than the message. We can avoid this error by letting the Word of God be the basis of our faith. No miracle from God would endorse any message that is contrary to the teachings of his Word.

Egypt was a large country, but most of the population lived along the banks of the Nile River. This 3,000-mile waterway was truly a river of life for the Egyptians. It made life possible in a land that was mostly desert by providing water for drinking, farming, bathing, and fishing. Egyptian society was a ribbon of civilization lining the banks of this life source, rarely reaching very far into the surrounding desert.

Without the Nile's water, Egypt could not have existed. Imagine Pharaoh's dismay when Moses turned this sacred river to blood!

The Plague of Frogs

Exodus 8-14

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh once again and tell him, "This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse, then listen carefully to this: I will send vast hordes of frogs across your entire land from one border to the other. The Nile River will swarm with them. They will come up out of the river and into your houses, even into your bedrooms and onto your beds! Every home in Egypt will be filled with them. They will fill even your ovens and your kneading bowls. You and your people will be overwhelmed by frogs!"

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron to point his shepherd's staff toward all the rivers, canals, and marshes of Egypt so there will be frogs in every corner of the land." Aaron did so, and frogs covered the whole land of Egypt! But the magicians were able to do the same thing with their secret arts. They, too, caused frogs to come up on the land.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and begged, "Plead with the Lord to take the frogs away from me and my people. I will let the people go, so they can offer sacrifices to the Lord."

"You set the time!" Moses replied. "Tell me when you want me to pray for you, your officials, and your people. I will pray that you and your houses will be rid of the frogs. Then only the frogs in the Nile River will remain alive." "Do it tomorrow," Pharaoh said "All right," Moses replied, "it will be as you have said. Then you will know that no one is as powerful as the Lord our God.

So God did as Moses had promised. The frogs in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields all died. They were piled into great heaps, and a terrible stench filled the land. But when Pharaoh saw that the frogs were gone, he hardened his heart. He refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted.

Moses predicted that every house in Egypt would be infested with frogs. The

poor of Egypt lived in small, mud-brick houses of one or two rooms with palm-trunk roofs. The homes of the rich, however, were often two or three stories high, surrounded by landscaped gardens and enclosed by a high wall. Servants lived and worked on the first floor while the family occupied the upper floors. Thus if the frogs got into the royal bedrooms, they had infiltrated even the upper floors. No place in Egypt would be safe from them.

After repeated warnings, Pharaoh still refused to obey God. He hardened his heart every time there was a break in the plagues. His stubborn disobedience brought suffering upon himself and his entire country. While persistence is good, stubbornness is usually self-centered. Stubbornness toward God is always disobedience. Avoid disobedience because the consequences may spill onto others.

The Plague of Lice

Exodus 8:16-9:21

So the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron to strike the dust with his staff. The dust will turn into swarms of gnats throughout the land of Egypt." So Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded them. Suddenly, gnats infested the entire land, covering the Egyptians and their animals. All the dust in the land of Egypt turned into gnats. Pharaoh's magicians tried to do the same thing with their secret arts, but this time they failed. And the gnats covered all the people and animals.

"This is the finger of God!" the magicians exclaimed to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh's heart remained hard and stubborn. He wouldn't listen to them, just as the Lord had predicted.

Some people think, "If only I could see a miracle, I could believe in God." God gave Pharaoh just such an opportunity. When gnats infested Egypt, even the magicians agreed that this was God's work, but still Pharaoh refused to believe. He was stubborn, and stubbornness can blind a person to the truth. When you rid yourself of stubbornness, you may be surprised by abundant evidence of God's work in your life.

Next the Lord told Moses, "Get up early in the morning and meet Pharaoh as he goes down to the river. If you refuse, I will send swarms of flies throughout Egypt. Your homes will be filled with them, and the ground will be covered with them.

But it will be very different in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites live. No flies will be found there. Then you will know that I am the Lord and that I have power even in the heart of your land. I will make a clear distinction between your people and my people. This miraculous sign will happen tomorrow.'"

And the Lord did just as he had said. There were terrible swarms of flies in Pharaoh's palace and in every home in Egypt. The whole country was thrown into chaos by the flies. Pharaoh hastily called for Moses and Aaron. "All right! Go

ahead and offer sacrifices to your God," he said. "But do it here in this land. Don't go out into the wilderness."

But Moses replied, "That won't do! The Egyptians would detest the sacrifices that we offer to the Lord our God. If we offer them here where they can see us, they will be sure to stone us. We must take a three-day trip into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, just as he has commanded us."

"All right, go ahead," Pharaoh, replied. "I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the wilderness. But don't go too far away. Now hurry, and pray for me."

"As soon as I go," Moses said, "I will ask the Lord to cause the swarms of flies to disappear from you and all your people. But I am warning you, don't change your mind again and refuse to let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

So Moses left Pharaoh and asked the Lord to remove all the flies. And the Lord did as Moses asked and caused the swarms to disappear. Not a single fly remained in the land!

But Pharaoh hardened his heart again and refused to let the people go.

Some people think, "If only I could see a miracle, I could believe in God." God gave Pharaoh just such an opportunity. When gnats infested Egypt, even the magicians agreed that this was God's work ("the finger of God")—but still Pharaoh refused to believe. He was stubborn, and stubbornness can blind a person to the truth. When you rid yourself of stubbornness, you may be surprised by abundant evidence of God's work in your life.

Pharaoh wanted a compromise. He would allow the Hebrews to sacrifice, but only if they would do it nearby. God's requirement, however, was firm: The Hebrews had to leave Egypt. Sometimes people urge believers to compromise and give only partial obedience to God's commands. But commitment and obedience to God cannot be negotiated. When it comes to obeying God, half measures won't do.

The Israelites would be sacrificing animals that the Egyptians regarded as sacred, and this would be offensive to them. Moses was concerned about a violent reaction to sacrificing these animals near the Egyptians.

A Plague to the Animals

Exodus 10:3-6

"Go back to Pharaoh," the Lord commanded Moses. "Tell him, "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so they can worship me." If you continue to oppress them and refuse to let them go, the Lord will send a deadly plague to destroy your horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep. But the Lord will again make a distinction between the property of the Israelites and that of the Egyptians. Not a single one of Israel's livestock will die!" "

The Lord announced that he would send the plague the very next day, and he did it, just as he had said. The next morning all the livestock of the Egyptians began to die, but the Israelites didn't lose a single animal from their flocks and herds.

Pharaoh sent officials to see whether it was true that none of the Israelites' animals were dead. But even after he found it to be true, his heart remained stubborn. He still refused to let the people go.

The Plague of Boils

Exodus 9:11

Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take soot from a furnace, and have Moses toss it into the sky while Pharaoh watches. It will spread like fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, causing boils to break out on people and animals alike."

So they gathered soot from a furnace and went to see Pharaoh. As Pharaoh watched, Moses tossed the soot into the air, and terrible boils broke out on the people and animals throughout Egypt. Even the magicians were unable to stand before Moses, because the boils had broken out on them, too. But the Lord made Pharaoh even more stubborn, and he refused to listen, just as the Lord had predicted.

The Plague of Hail

Exodus 9:23

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning. Go to Pharaoh and tell him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you don't, I will send a plague that will really speak to you and your officials and all the Egyptian people. I will prove to you that there is no other God like me in all the earth. I could have killed you all by now. I could have attacked you with a plague that would have wiped you from the face of the earth. But I have let you live for this reason—that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth. But you are still lording it over my people, and you refuse to let them go. So tomorrow at this time I will send a hailstorm worse than any in all of Egypt's history.

Quick! Order your livestock and servants to come in from the fields. Every person or animal left outside will die beneath the hail.' "

Some of Pharaoh's officials believed what the Lord said. They immediately brought their livestock and servants in from the fields. But those who had no respect for the word of the Lord left them out in the open.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Lift your hand toward the sky, and cause the hail to fall throughout Egypt, on the people, the animals, and the crops." So Moses lifted his staff toward the sky, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning struck the earth. The Lord sent a tremendous hailstorm against all the land of Egypt. Never in all the history of Egypt had there been a storm like that, with such severe hail and continuous lightning. It left all of Egypt in ruins. Everything left in the fields was destroyed—people, animals, and crops alike. Even all the trees were destroyed. The only spot in all Egypt without hail that day was the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel lived.

Then Pharaoh urgently sent for Moses and Aaron. "I finally admit my fault," he confessed. "The Lord is right, and my people and I are wrong. Please beg the Lord to end this terrifying thunder and hail. I will let you go at once."

"All right," Moses replied. "As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the Lord. Then the thunder and hail will stop. This will prove to you that the earth belongs to the Lord. But as for you and your officials, I know that you still do not fear the Lord God as you should." All the flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was ripe and the flax was in bloom. But the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed because they had not yet sprouted from the ground.

So Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. As he lifted his hands to the Lord, all at once the thunder and hail stopped, and the downpour ceased. When Pharaoh saw this, he and his officials sinned yet again by stubbornly refusing to do as they had promised. Pharaoh refused to let the people leave, just as the Lord had predicted.

After promising to let the Hebrews go, Pharaoh immediately broke his promise and brought even more trouble upon the land. His actions reveal that his repentance was not real. We do damage to ourselves and to others if we pretend to change but don't mean it.

The Plague of locusts

Exodus 10:10-14

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Return to Pharaoh and again make your demands. I have made him and his officials stubborn so I can continue to display my power by performing miraculous signs among them. You will be able to tell wonderful stories to your children and grandchildren about the marvelous things I am doing among the Egyptians to prove that I am the Lord."

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: How long will you refuse to submit to me? Let my people go, so they can worship me. If you refuse, watch out! For tomorrow I will cover the whole country with locusts. There will be so many that you won't be able to see the ground. They will devour everything that escaped the hailstorm, including all the trees in the fields. They will overrun your palaces and the homes of your officials and all the houses of Egypt. Never in the history of Egypt has there been a plague like this one!" And with that, Moses turned and walked out.

The court officials now came to Pharaoh and appealed to him. "How long will you let these disasters go on? Please let the Israelites go to serve the Lord their God! Don't you realize that Egypt lies in ruins?"

So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. "All right, go and serve the Lord your God," he said. "But tell me, just whom do you want to take along?"

"Young and old, all of us will go," Moses replied. "We will take our sons and daughters and our flocks and herds. We must all join together in a festival to the Lord."

Pharaoh retorted, "The Lord will certainly need to be with you if you try to take your little ones along! I can see through your wicked intentions. Never! Only the men may go and serve the Lord, for that is what you requested." And Pharaoh threw them out of the palace.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Raise your hand over the land of Egypt to bring on the locusts. Let them cover the land and eat all the crops still left after the hailstorm."

So Moses raised his staff, and the Lord caused an east wind to blow all that day and through the night. When morning arrived, the east wind had brought the locusts. And the locusts swarmed over the land of Egypt from border to border. It was the worst locust plague in Egyptian history, and there has never again been one like it. For the locusts covered the surface of the whole country, making the ground appear black. They ate all the plants and all the fruit on the trees that had survived the hailstorm. Not one green thing remained, neither tree nor plant, throughout the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh quickly sent for Moses and Aaron. "I confess my sin against the Lord your God and against you," he said to them. "Forgive my sin only this once, and plead with the Lord your God to take away this terrible plague."

So Moses left Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord. The Lord responded by sending a strong west wind that blew the locusts out into the Red Sea. Not a single locust remained in all the land of Egypt. But the Lord made Pharaoh stubborn once again, and he did not let the people go.

You may wonder how Pharaoh could be so foolish as to see God's miraculous power and still not listen to Moses. But Pharaoh had his mind made up long before the plagues began. He couldn't believe that someone was greater than he. This stubborn unbelief led to a heart so hard that even a major catastrophe couldn't soften him. Finally, it took the greatest of all calamities, the loss of his son, to force him to recognize God's authority. But even then he wanted God to leave, not to rule his country. We must not wait for great calamities to drive us to God, but must open our hearts and minds to his direction now.

Did God really harden Pharaoh's heart and force him to do wrong? Before the ten plagues began, Moses and Aaron announced what God would do if Pharaoh didn't let the people go. But their message only made Pharaoh stubborn—he was hardening his own heart. In so doing, he defied both God and his messengers.

Through the first six plagues, Pharaoh's heart grew even more stubborn. After the sixth plague, God passed judgment. Sooner or later, evil people will be punished for their sins. When it became evident that Pharaoh wouldn't change, God confirmed Pharaoh's prideful decision and set the painful consequences of his actions in motion. God didn't force Pharaoh to reject him; rather, he gave him every opportunity to change his mind. In Ezekiel 33:11, God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

The Plague of Darkness

Exodus 10:21-22

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Lift your hand toward heaven, and a deep and terrifying darkness will descend on the land of Egypt." So Moses lifted his hand toward heaven, and there was deep darkness over the entire land for three days. During all that time the people scarcely moved, for they could not see. But there was light as usual where the people of Israel lived.

Then Pharaoh called for Moses. "Go and worship the Lord," he said. "But let your flocks and herds stay here. You can even take your children with you."

"No," Moses said, "we must take our flocks and herds for sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord our God. All our property must go with us; not a hoof can be left behind. We will have to choose our sacrifices for the Lord our God from among these animals. And we won't know which sacrifices he will require until we get there."

So the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart once more, and he would not let them go. [28] "Get out of here!" Pharaoh shouted at Moses. "Don't ever let me see you again! The day you do, you will die!"

"Very well," Moses replied. "I will never see you again."

Why was Pharaoh so reluctant to let the people go? The Children of Israel were Egypt's free labor—the builders of their great cities. As Egypt's leader, Pharaoh would not easily let such a great resource go.

The Death of the First Born

Genesis 7-12

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will send just one more disaster on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. After that, Pharaoh will let you go. In fact, he will be so anxious to get rid of you that he will practically force you to leave the country.

Tell all the Israelite men and women to ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of silver and gold." Now the Lord had caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the people of Israel, and Moses was considered a very great man in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh's officials and the Egyptian people respected him.

So Moses announced to Pharaoh, "This is what the Lord says: About midnight I will pass through Egypt. All the firstborn sons will die in every family in Egypt, from the oldest son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the oldest son of his lowliest slave. Even the firstborn of the animals will die.

Then a loud wail will be heard throughout the land of Egypt; there has never been such wailing before, and there never will be again. But among the Israelites it will be so peaceful that not even a dog will bark. Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

All the officials of Egypt will come running to me, bowing low. 'Please leave!' they will beg. 'Hurry! And take all your followers with you.' Only then will I go!" Then, burning with anger, Moses left Pharaoh's presence.

Now the Lord had told Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you. But this will give me the opportunity to do even more mighty miracles in the land of Egypt." Although Moses and Aaron did these miracles in Pharaoh's presence; the Lord hardened his heart so he wouldn't let the Israelites leave the country.

This night had been reserved by the Lord to bring his people out from the land of Egypt, so this same night now belongs to him. It must be celebrated every year, from generation to generation, to remember the Lord's deliverance.

As Egypt buried its dead, the Hebrew slaves left the country, a free people at last. Pharaoh made one last attempt to bring them back, but the people escaped when God miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea. But on the other side, the people soon became dissatisfied and complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron about their trek through the desert. Through these experiences of the Hebrews, we learn that the Christian life is not always trouble-free. We still have struggles and often complain bitterly to God about conditions in our lives.

The total number of people leaving Egypt is estimated to have been about two million. The “many other people” may have been Egyptians and others who were drawn to the Hebrews by God’s mighty works and who decided to leave Egypt with them.

The Crossing of the Red Sea

Exodus 14:1-22

Then the Lord gave these instructions to Moses: "Tell the people to march toward Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, opposite Baal-zephon. Then Pharaoh will think, 'Those Israelites are confused. They are trapped between the wilderness and the sea!' And once again I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after you. I have planned this so I will receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies. After this, the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord!" So the Israelites camped there as they were told.

When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites were not planning to return to Egypt after three days, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. "What have we done, letting all these slaves get away?" they asked. So Pharaoh called out his troops and led the chase in his chariot. He took with him six hundred of Egypt's best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with a commander. The Lord continued to strengthen Pharaoh's resolve, and he chased after the people of Israel who had escaped so defiantly. All the forces in Pharaoh's army—all his horses, chariots, and charioteers—were used in the chase. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.

Six hundred Egyptian war chariots were bearing down on the helpless Israelites, who were trapped between the mountains and the sea. The war chariots each carried two people—one to drive and one to fight. These chariots were made of a wood or leather cab placed over two wheels, and horses pulled them. These were the armored tanks of Bible times. But even their power was no match for God, who destroyed both the chariots and their soldiers.

As Pharaoh and his army approached, the people of Israel could see them in the distance, marching toward them. The people began to panic, and they cried out to the Lord for help.

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Israelites, who were trapped between the mountains and the sea. The war chariots each carried two people—one to drive and one to fight. These chariots were made of a wood or leather cab placed over two wheels, and pulled by horses. These were the armored tanks of Bible times. But even their power was no match for God, who destroyed both the chariots and their soldiers.

Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave? Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt? Our Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out here in the wilderness!"

Trapped against the sea, the Israelites faced the Egyptian army sweeping in for the kill. The Israelites thought they were doomed. After watching God's powerful hand delivers them from Egypt, their only response was fear, whining, and despair. Where was their trust in God? Israel had to learn from repeated experience that God was able to provide for them. God has preserved these examples in the Bible so that we can learn to trust him the first time. By focusing on God's faithfulness in the past we can face crises with confidence rather than with fear and complaining.

This is the first instance of grumbling and complaining by the Israelites. Their lack of faith in God is startling. Yet how often do we find ourselves doing the same thing—complaining over inconveniences or discomforts? The Israelites were about to learn some tough lessons. Had they trusted God, they would have been spared much grief.

But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand where you are and watch the Lord rescue you. The Egyptians that you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. You won't have to lift a finger in your defense!"

The people were hostile and despairing, but Moses encouraged them to watch the wonderful way God would rescue them. Moses had a positive attitude! When it looked as if they were trapped, Moses called upon God to intervene. An army may not chase us, but we may still feel trapped. Instead of giving in to despair, we should adopt Moses' attitude to "stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will bring."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving!"

The Lord told Moses to stop praying and get moving! Prayer must have a vital place in our lives, but there is also a place for action. Sometimes we know what to do, but we pray for more guidance as an excuse to postpone doing it. If we know what we should do, then it is time to get moving.

Use your shepherd's staff—hold it out over the water, and a path will open up before you through the sea. Then all the people of Israel will walk through on dry ground. Yet I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will follow the Israelites into the sea. Then I will receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies, chariots, and charioteers. When I am finished with Pharaoh and his army, all Egypt will know that I am the Lord!"

Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to a position behind them, and the pillar of cloud also moved around behind them. The cloud settled between the Israelite and Egyptian camps. As night came, the pillar of cloud turned into a pillar of fire, lighting the Israelite camp. But the cloud became darkness to the Egyptians, and they couldn't find the Israelites.

Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the Lord opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. So the people of Israel walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!

There was no apparent way of escape, but the Lord opened up a dry path through the sea. Sometimes we find ourselves caught in a problem and see no way out. Don't panic; God can open up a way.

The Bible clearly states that the Lord "drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land" (Exodus 14:21; see also Joshua 3:15-16; and 2 Kings 2:13-14). Also, the water was deep enough to cover the chariots (Exodus 14:28). The God who created the earth and water performed a mighty miracle at exactly the right time to demonstrate his great power and love for his people.

The Waters of Marah Sweetened

Ex. 15:23-25

Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the Shur Desert. They traveled in this desert for three days without water.

When they came to Marah, they finally found water. But the people couldn't drink it because it was bitter. (That is why the place was called Marah, which means "bitter.")

Then the people turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded.

So Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord showed him a branch. Moses took the branch and threw it into the water. This made the water good to drink. It was there at Marah that the Lord laid before them the following conditions to test their faithfulness to him: "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and laws, then I will not make you suffer the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you."

The waters of Marah are contrasted with the springs of Elim. Marah stood for the unbelieving, grumbling attitude of the people who would not trust God. Elim stands for God's bountiful provision. How easy it is to grumble and complain too quickly, only to be embarrassed by God's help!

Manna sent daily, except on Sabbath

Ex. 16:14-35

Then Moses and Aaron called a meeting of all the people of Israel and told them, "In the evening you will realize that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In the morning you will see the glorious presence of the Lord. He has heard your complaints, which are against the Lord and not against us. [8] The Lord will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. Yes, your complaints are against the Lord, not against us."

It happened again. As the Israelites encountered danger, shortages, and inconvenience, they complained bitterly and longed to be back in Egypt. But as always, God provided for their needs. Difficult circumstances often lead to stress, and complaining are a natural response.

The Israelites didn't really want to be back in Egypt; they just wanted life to get a little easier. In the pressure of the moment, they could not focus on the cause of their stress (in this case, lack of trust in God); they could only think about the quickest way of escape. When pressure comes your way, resist the temptation to make a quick escape. Instead, focus on God's power and wisdom to help you deal with the cause of your stress.

Then Moses and Aaron called a meeting of all the people of Israel and told them, "In the evening you will realize that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. In the morning you will see the glorious presence of the Lord. He has heard your complaints, which are against the Lord and not against us. The Lord will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. Yes, your complaints are against the Lord, not against us."

God promised to meet the Hebrews' need for food in the desert, but he decided to test their obedience. God wanted to see if they would obey his detailed instructions. We can learn to trust him as our Lord only by following. We can learn

to obey by taking small steps of obedience.

Manna appeared on the ground each day as thin flakes like frost. The people gathered it, ground it like grain, and made it into honey-tasting pancakes. For the Israelites the manna was a gift—it came every day and was just what they needed. It satisfied their temporary physical need. In John 6:48-51 Jesus compares himself to manna. Christ is our daily bread who satisfies our eternal, spiritual need.

Water from the Rock at Rephidim

Ex. 17

At the Lord's command, the people of Israel left the Sin Desert and moved from place to place. Eventually they came to Rephidim, but there was no water to be found there. So once more the people grumbled and complained to Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded.

"Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you arguing with me? And why are you testing the Lord?" But tormented by thirst, they continued to complain, "Why did you ever take us out of Egypt? Why did you bring us here? We, our children, and our livestock will all die!" Then Moses pleaded with the Lord, "What should I do with these people? They are about to stone me!"

The Lord said to Moses, "Take your shepherd's staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile. Then call some of the leaders of Israel and walk on ahead of the people. I will meet you by the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come pouring out. Then the people will be able to drink." Moses did just as he was told, and as the leaders looked on, water gushed out.

Again the people complained about their problem instead of praying. Some problems can be solved by careful thought or by rearranging our priorities. Discussion and good counsel can solve some. But only prayer can solve some problems. We should make a determined effort to pray when we feel like complaining, because complaining only raises our level of stress. Prayer quiets our thoughts and emotions and prepares us to listen.

Nadab and Abihu Consumed for Offering Strange Fire

Lev. 10:9-10

Next Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle, and when they came back out, they blessed the people again, and the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community. Fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw all this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over it. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him a different kind of fire than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when he said, 'I will show myself holy among those who are near me. I will be glorified Before all the people.' " And Aaron was silent.

Moses said to the people, "This is what the LORD has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you." Moses, Aaron, and the people then got to work and followed God's instructions. Soon after, the glory of the Lord appeared. Often we look for God's glorious acts without concern for following his instructions. Do you serve God in the daily routines of life, or do you wait for him to do a mighty act? If you depend on his glorious acts, you may find yourself sidestepping your everyday duty to obey.

As a display of his mighty power, God sent fire from the sky to consume Aaron's offering. The people fell to the ground in awe. Some people wonder if God really exists because they don't see his activity in the world. But God is at work in today's world just as he was in Moses' world. Where a large body of believers is active for him, God tends not to display his power in the form of mighty physical acts. Instead he works to change the world through the work of these believers.

When you realize that, you will begin to see acts of love and faith that are

just as supernatural.

What was the unauthorized fire that Nadab and Abihu offered before the Lord? The fire on the altar of burnt offering was never to go out (Leviticus 6:12-13), implying that it was holy. It is possible that Nadab and Abihu brought coals of fire to the altar from another source, making the sacrifice unholy. It has also been suggested that the two priests gave an offering at an unperceived time. Whatever explanation is correct, the point is that Nadab and Abihu abused their office as priests in a flagrant act of disrespect to God, who had just reviewed with them precisely how they were to conduct worship. As leaders, they had special responsibility to obey God. In their position, they could easily lead many people astray. If God has commissioned you to lead or teach others, be sure to stay close to him and follow his advice.

Aaron's sons were careless about following the laws for sacrifices. In response, God destroyed them with a blast of fire. Performing the sacrifices was an act of obedience. Doing them correctly showed respect for God. It is easy for us to grow careless about obeying God, to live our way instead of God's. But if one way were just as good as another, God would not have commanded us to live his way. He always has good reasons for his commands, and we always place ourselves in danger when we consciously or carelessly disobey them.

Some of the People Consumed by Fire at Taberah

Numbers 10:33–11:4

They marched for three days after leaving the mountain of the Lord, with the Ark of the Lord's covenant moving ahead of them to show them where to stop and rest. As they moved on each day, the cloud of the Lord hovered over them. And whenever the Ark set out, Moses would cry, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered! Let them flee before you!" And when the Ark was set down, he would say, "Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel!"

The people soon began to complain to the Lord about their hardships; and when the Lord heard them, his anger blazed against them. Fire from the Lord raged among them and destroyed the outskirts of the camp. The people screamed to Moses for help; and when he prayed to the Lord, the fire stopped. After that, the area was known as Taberah—"the place of burning"—because fire from the Lord had burned among them there.

The Israelites complained, and then Moses complained. But God responded positively to Moses and negatively to the rest of the people. Why? The people complained *to one another*, and nothing was accomplished. Moses took his complaint *to God*, who could solve any problem. Many are good at complaining to each other. We need to learn to take our problems to the One who can do something about them.

Dissatisfaction comes when our attention shifts from what we have to what we don't have. The people of Israel didn't seem to notice what God was doing for them—setting them free, making them a nation, giving them a new land—because they were so wrapped up in what God wasn't doing for them. They could think of nothing but the delicious Egyptian food they had left behind. Somehow they forgot that the brutal whip of Egyptian slavery was the cost of eating that food. Before we judge the Israelites too harshly, it's helpful to think about what occupies our attention most of the time. Are we grateful for what God has given us, or are we always thinking about what we would like to have? We should not allow our unfulfilled desires to cause us to forget God's gifts of life, food, health, work, and friends.

Every morning the Israelites drew back their tent doors and witnessed a miracle. Covering the ground was white, fluffy manna—food from heaven. But soon that wasn't enough. Feeling it was their right to have more, they forgot what they already had.

The Earth Opens at Kadesh

Numbers 16

One day Korah son of Izhar, a descendant of Kohath son of Levi, conspired with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben. They incited a rebellion against Moses, involving 250 other prominent leaders, all members of the assembly. They went to Moses and Aaron and said, "You have gone too far! Everyone in Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and he is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than anyone else among all these people of the Lord?"

Korah and his associates had seen the advantages of the priesthood in Egypt. Egyptian priests had great wealth and political influence, something Korah wanted for himself. Korah may have assumed that Moses, Aaron, and his sons were trying to make the Israelite priesthood the same kind of political machine, and he wanted to be a part of it. He did not understand that Moses' main ambition was to serve God rather than to control others.

When Moses heard what they were saying, he threw himself down with his face to the ground. Then he said to Korah and his followers, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show us who belongs to him and who is holy. The Lord will allow those who are chosen to enter his holy presence. You, Korah, and all your followers must do this: Take incense burners, and burn incense in them tomorrow before the Lord. Then we will see whom the Lord chooses as his holy one. You Levites are the ones who have gone too far!"

Then Moses spoke again to Korah: "Now listen, you Levites! Does it seem a small thing to you that the God of Israel has chosen you from among all the people of Israel to be near him as you serve in the Lord's Tabernacle and to stand before the people to minister to them? He has given this special ministry only to you and your fellow Levites, but now you are demanding the priesthood as well! The one you are really revolting against is the Lord! And who is Aaron that you are complaining about him?"

Moses saw through their charge to their true motivation—some of the Levites wanted the power of the priesthood. Like Korah, we often desire the special qualities God has given others. Korah had significant, worthwhile abilities

and responsibilities of his own. In the end, however, his ambition for more caused him to lose everything. Inappropriate ambition is greed in disguise. Concentrate on finding the special purpose God has for you.

Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they replied, "We refuse to come! Isn't it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us here in this wilderness, and that you now treat us like your subjects? What's more, you haven't brought us into the land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Are you trying to fool us? We will not come."

One of the easiest ways to fall away from following God is to look at our present problems and exaggerate them. Dathan and Abiram did just that when they began to long for better food and more pleasant surroundings. Egypt, the place they had longed to leave, was now looking better and better—not because of slavery and taskmasters, of course, but because of its mouth-watering food! These two men and their followers had completely lost their perspective. When we take our eyes off God and start looking at our problems, and ourselves we begin to lose our perspective as well. Overrating problems can hinder our relationship with God.

Don't let difficulties make you lose sight of God's direction for your life.

Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, "Do not accept their offerings! I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, and I have never hurt a single one of them."

And Moses said to Korah, "Come here tomorrow and present yourself before the Lord with all your followers. Aaron will also be here. Be sure that each of your 250 followers brings an incense burner with incense on it, so you can present them before the Lord. Aaron will also bring his incense burner."

So these men came with their incense burners, placed burning coals and incense on them, and stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle with Moses and Aaron.

Meanwhile, Korah had stirred up the entire community against Moses and Aaron, and they all assembled at the Tabernacle entrance. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community, and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Get away from these people so that I may instantly destroy them!"

But Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground. "O God, the God and source of all life," they pleaded. "Must you be angry with all the people when only one man sins?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "Then tell all the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." So Moses got up and rushed over to the tents of Dathan and Abiram, followed closely by the Israelite leaders. "Quick!" he told the people. "Get away from the tents of these wicked men, and don't touch anything that belongs to them. If you do, you will be destroyed for their sins."

The Israelites were told not even to touch the belongings of the wicked rebels. In this case, doing so would have shown sympathy to their cause and agreement with their principles. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were directly challenging Moses and God. Moses clearly stated what God intended to do to the rebels (Numbers 16:28- 30). He did this so that everyone would have to choose between following Korah or following Moses, God's chosen leader. When God asks us to make a fundamental choice between siding with wicked people or siding with him, we should not hesitate but commit ourselves to be 100 percent on the Lord's side.

So all the people stood back from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Then Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrances of their tents with their wives and children and little ones. And Moses said, "By this you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things that I have done—for I have not done them on my own. If these men die a natural death, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord performs a miracle and the ground opens up and swallows them and all their belongings, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have despised the Lord."

He had hardly finished speaking the words when the ground suddenly split open beneath them. The earth opened up and swallowed the men, along with their households and the followers who were standing with them, and everything they owned. So they went down alive into the grave, along with their belongings. The earth closed over them, and they all vanished. All of the people of Israel fled as they heard their screams, fearing that the earth would swallow them, too. Then fire blazed forth from the Lord and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense.

Aaron's Rod Budding at Kadesh

Numbers 17

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take twelve wooden staffs, one from each of Israel's ancestral tribes, and inscribe each tribal leader's name on his staff.

Inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of the tribe of Levi, for there must be one staff for the leader of each ancestral tribe. Put these staffs in the Tabernacle in front of the Ark of the Covenant, where I meet with you. Buds will sprout on the staff belonging to the man I choose. Then I will finally put an end to this murmuring and complaining against you."

So Moses gave the instructions to the people of Israel, and each of the twelve tribal leaders, including Aaron, brought Moses a staff. Moses put the staffs in the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle of the Covenant. When he went into the Tabernacle of the Covenant the next day, he found that Aaron's staff, representing the tribe of Levi, had sprouted, blossomed, and produced almonds!

When Moses brought all the staffs out from the Lord's presence, he showed them to the people. Each man claimed his own staff. And the Lord said to Moses: "Place Aaron's staff permanently before the Ark of the Covenant as a warning to rebels. This should put an end to their complaints against me and prevent any further deaths." So Moses did as the Lord commanded him.

After witnessing spectacular miracles, seeing the Egyptians punished by the plagues, and experiencing the actual presence of God, the Israelites still complained and rebelled. We wonder how they could be so blind and ignorant, and yet we often repeat this same pattern. We have centuries of evidence, the Bible in many translations, and the convincing results of archaeological and historical studies. But people today continue to disobey God and go their own way. Like the Israelites, we are more concerned about our physical condition than our spiritual condition. We can escape this pattern only by paying attention to all the signs of God's presence that we have been given. Has God guided and protected you? Has he answered your prayers? Do you know people who have experienced remarkable blessings and healings? Do you know Bible stories about the way God has led his people? Focus your thoughts on what God has done, and rebellion will become unthinkable.

Water from the rock, smitten twice by Moses, Desert of Zin Numbers 20:1-24

In early spring the people of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried. There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. The people blamed Moses and said, "We wish we had died in the Lord's presence with our brothers! Did you bring the Lord's people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock? Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, figs, grapes, or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord said to Moses, "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, command the rock over there to pour out its water. You will get enough water from the rock to satisfy all the people and their livestock."

So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the Lord. Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. "Listen, you rebels!" he shouted. "Must we bring you water from this rock?" Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So all the people and their livestock drank their fill.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!" This place was known as the waters of Meribah, because it was where the people of Israel argued with the Lord, and where he demonstrated his holiness among them.

It had been 37 years since Israel's first spy mission into the Promised Land (Numbers 13-14) and 40 years since the exodus from Egypt. The Bible is virtually silent about those 37 years of aimless wandering. The generation of those who had

lived in Egypt had almost died off, and the new generation would soon be ready to enter the land. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb were among the few who remained from those who had left Egypt. Once again they camped at Kadesh, the site of the first spy mission that had ended in disaster. Moses hoped the people were ready for a fresh start.

After 37 years in the desert, the Israelites forgot that their wanderings were a result of their parents' and their own sin. They could not accept the fact that they brought their problems upon themselves, so they blamed Moses for their condition. Often our troubles result from our own disobedience or lack of faith. We cannot blame God for our sins. Until we face this reality, we will have little peace and no spiritual growth.

The Lord had told Moses to speak to the rock; however, Moses struck it, not once, but twice. God did the miracle; yet Moses was taking credit for it when he said, "we bring you water out of this rock." For this he was forbidden to enter the Promised Land. Was God's punishment of Moses too harsh? After all, the people had nagged him, slandered him, and rebelled against both him and God. Now they were at it again (Numbers 20:5). But Moses was the leader and model for the entire nation. Because of this great responsibility to the people, he could not be let off lightly. By striking the rock, Moses disobeyed God's direct command and dishonored God in the presence of his people.

Bronze serpent in the Desert of Zin

Num. 21:1- 9

Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient along the way, and they began to murmur against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this wretched manna!"

So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among them, and many of them were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes." So Moses prayed for the people.

Then the Lord told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to the top of a pole. Those who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to the top of a pole. Whenever those who were bitten looked at the bronze snake, they recovered!

In Psalm 78, we learn the sources of Israel's complaining:

- (1) their spirits were not faithful to God (Numbers 78:8);
- (2) they refused to obey God's law (Numbers 78:10);
- (3) They forgot the miracles God had done for them (Numbers 78:11).

Our complaining sometimes has its roots in one of these thoughtless actions and attitudes. If we can deal with the cause of our complaining, it will not take hold of our lives.

God used venomous snakes to punish the people for their unbelief and complaining. The Desert of Sinai has a variety of snakes. Some hide in the sand and attack without warning. Both the Israelites and the Egyptians had a great fear of snakes. A bite by a poisonous snake often meant a slow death with intense suffering.

When the bronze snake was hung on the pole, the Israelites didn't know the fuller meaning Jesus Christ would bring to this event (see John 3:14-15). Jesus explained that just as the Israelites were healed of their sickness by looking at the snake on the pole, all believers today can be saved from the sickness of sin by looking to Jesus' death on the cross. It was not the snake that healed the people, but their belief that God could heal them. This belief was demonstrated by their obedience to God's instructions. In the same way, we should continue to look to Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 12:2).

Balaam's Donkey Speaks

Numbers. 22:21-35

Then the people of Israel traveled to the plains of Moab and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. The old generation has died and a new generation stands poised at the border, ready to enter the Promised Land.

Neighboring nations, however, cause Israel to begin worshiping other gods. Without Moses' quick action, the nation may never have entered Canaan. We must never let down our guard in resisting sin.

Balak son of Zippor, the Moabite king, knew what the Israelites had done to the Amorites. And when they saw how many Israelites there were, he and his people were terrified. The king of Moab said to the leaders of Midian, "This mob will devour everything in sight, like an ox devours grass!" So Balak, king of Moab, sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor, who was living in his native land of Pethor near the Euphrates River. He sent this message to request that Balaam come to help him:

"A vast horde of people has arrived from Egypt. They cover the face of the earth and are threatening me.

Balaam was a sorcerer, one called upon to place curses on others. Belief in curses and blessings was common in Old Testament times. Sorcerers were thought to have power with the gods. Thus the king of Moab wanted Balaam to use his powers with the God of Israel to place a curse on Israel—hoping that, by magic, God would turn against his people. Neither Balaam nor Balak had any idea whom they were dealing with!

Please come and curse them for me because they are so numerous. Then perhaps I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land. I know that blessings fall on the people you bless. I also know that the people you curse are doomed."

Balak's messengers, officials of both Moab and Midian, set out and took

money with them to pay Balaam to curse Israel. They went to Balaam and urgently explained to him what Balak wanted. "Stay here overnight," Balaam said. "In the morning I will tell you whatever the Lord directs me to say." So the officials from Moab stayed there with Balaam. That night God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men with you?"

Why would God speak through a sorcerer like Balaam? God wanted to give a message to the Moabites, and they had already chosen to employ Balaam. So Balaam was available for God to use, much as he used the wicked pharaoh to accomplish his will in Egypt (Exodus 10:1). Balaam entered into his prophetic role seriously, but his heart was mixed. He had some knowledge of God, but not enough to forsake his magic and turn wholeheartedly to God.

Although this story leads us to believe he turned completely to God, later passages in the Bible show that Balaam couldn't resist the tempting pull of money and idolatry (Numbers 31:16; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11).

Balaam said to God, "Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent me this message: 'A vast horde of people has come from Egypt and has spread out over the whole land. Come at once to curse them. Perhaps then I will be able to conquer them and drive them from the land.' "

"Do not go with them," God told Balaam. "You are not to curse these people, for I have blessed them!"

The next morning Balaam got up and told Balak's officials, "Go on home! The Lord will not let me go with you." So the Moabite officials returned to King Balak and reported, "Balaam refused to come with us." Then Balak tried again. This time he sent a larger number of even more distinguished officials than those he had sent the first time. They went to Balaam and gave him this message:

"This is what Balak son of Zippor says: Please don't let anything stop you from coming. I will pay you well and do anything you ask of me. Just come and curse these people for me!"

But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak were to give me a palace filled with silver and gold, I would be powerless to do anything against the will of the

Lord my God. But stay here one more night to see if the Lord has anything else to say to me."

That night God came to Balaam and told him, "Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But be sure to do only what I tell you to do."

So the next morning Balaam saddled his donkey and started off with the Moabite officials. But God was furious that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the Lord to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, Balaam's donkey suddenly saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road. Then the angel of the Lord stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls.

God let Balaam go with Balak's messengers, but he was angry about Balaam's greedy attitude. Balaam claimed that he would not go against God just for money, but his resolve was beginning to slip. His greed for the wealth offered by the king blinded him so that he could not see how God was trying to stop him. Though we may know what God wants us to do, we can become blinded by the desire for money, possessions, or prestige. We can avoid Balaam's mistake by looking past the allure of fame or fortune to the long-range benefits of following God.

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing there, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved farther down the road and stood in a place so narrow that the donkey could not get by at all. This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat it again with his staff.

Then the Lord caused the donkey to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me these three times?" it asked Balaam. "Because you have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"

The donkey saved Balaam's life but made him look foolish in the process, so Balaam lashed out at the donkey. We sometimes strike out at blameless people who get in our way because we are embarrassed or our pride is hurt. Lashing out at others can be a sign that something is wrong with us. Don't allow your own hurt pride to lead you to hurt others.

"But I am the same donkey you always ride on," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?" "No," he admitted.

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam fell face down on the ground before him. "Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the angel of the Lord demanded. "I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me. Three times the donkey saw me and shied away; otherwise, I would certainly have killed you by now and spared the donkey." Then Balaam confessed to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to block my way. I will go back home if you are against my going."

But the angel of the Lord told him, "Go with these men, but you may say only what I tell you to say." So Balaam went on with Balak's officials. When King Balak heard that Balaam was on the way, he went out to meet him at a Moabite town on the Arnon River at the border of his land. "Did I not send you an urgent invitation? Why didn't you come right away?" Balak asked Balaam. "Didn't you believe me when I said I would reward you richly?"

Balaam replied, "I have come, but I have no power to say just anything. I will speak only the messages that God gives me."

The Jordan Divided, so Israel Passed Over Dry shod Joshua. 3:1-17

Early the next morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Acacia and arrived at the banks of the Jordan River, where they camped before crossing. Three days later, the Israelite leaders went through the camp giving these instructions to the people: "When you see the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, follow them. Since you have never traveled this way before, they will guide you. Stay about a half mile behind them, keeping a clear distance between you and the Ark. Make sure you don't come any closer."

The Ark of the Covenant was Israel's most sacred treasure. It was a symbol of God's presence and power. The ark was a golden rectangular box with two cherubim (angels) facing each other on the lid. Inside the ark were the tablets of the Ten Commandments Moses received from God, a jar of manna (the bread God miraculously sent from heaven during the desert wanderings), and Aaron's staff (the symbol of the high priest's authority). According to God's law, only the Levites could carry the ark. The ark was constructed at the same time as the tabernacle (Exodus 37:1-9) and placed in the sanctuary's most sacred room.

Then Joshua told the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do great wonders among you."

Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites were to perform a consecration (purification) ceremony. This was often done before making a sacrifice or, as in this case, before witnessing a great act of God. God's law stated that a person could become unclean for many reasons—eating certain foods (Leviticus 11), childbirth (Leviticus 12), disease (Leviticus 13-14), touching a dead person (Numbers 19:11-22). God used these various outward signs of uncleanness to illustrate man's inward uncleanness that comes as a result of sin. The consecration ceremony pictured the importance of approaching God with a pure heart. Like the Israelites, we need God's forgiveness before we approach him.

In the morning Joshua said to the priests, "Lift up the Ark of the Covenant

and lead the people across the river." And so they started out. The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all the Israelites. Now they will know that I am with you, just as I was with Moses. [8] Give these instructions to the priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant: 'When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river and stop.' " So Joshua told the Israelites, "Come and listen to what the Lord your God says.

Just before crossing over into the Promised Land, Joshua gathered the people to hear the words of the Lord. Their excitement was high. No doubt they wanted to rush on, but Joshua made them stop and listen. We live in a fast-paced age where everyone rushes just to keep up. It is easy to get caught up in our tasks, becoming too busy for what God says is most important—listening to his words. Before making your schedule, take time to focus on what God wants from all your activities. Knowing what God has said before you rush into your day may help you avoid foolish mistakes.

Today you will know that the living God is among you.

Why would God help the Israelites drive out these nations from their native land? God had punished Israel first for its disobedience. He then turned to the rest of the nations. Genesis 15:16 imply that the people of Canaan were wicked and they deserved to be punished for their terrible sins. Israel was to be a vehicle for this punishment. More important was the fact that Israel, as a holy nation, could not live among such evil and idolatrous people. To do so would be to invite sin into their lives. The only way to prevent Israel from being infected by evil religions was to drive out those who practiced them. Israel, however, failed to drive everyone out as God had told them. It wasn't long before Israel—the nation God chose to be his holy people—began following the evil practices of the Canaanites.

He will surely drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Think of it! The Ark of the Covenant, which belongs to the Lord of the whole earth, will lead you across the Jordan River! Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. The priests will be carrying the Ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth. When their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will pile up there in one heap." When the

people set out to cross the Jordan, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant went ahead of them.

The Israelites were eager to enter the Promised Land, conquer nations, and live peacefully. But first they had to cross the flood-level waters of the Jordan River. God gave them specific instructions: in order to cross, the priests had to step into the water. What if these priests had been afraid to take that first step? Often God provides no solution to our problems until we trust him and move ahead with what we know we should do. What are the rivers, or obstacles, in your life? In obedience to God, take that first step into the water.

Now it was the harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the water at the river's edge, the water began piling up at a town upstream called Adam, which is near Zarethan. And the water below that point flowed on to the Dead Sea until the riverbed was dry. Then all the people crossed over near the city of Jericho.

Meanwhile, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Lord's covenant stood on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed as the people passed by them. They waited there until everyone had crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

God had parted the waters of the Red Sea to let the people out of Egypt (Exodus 14), and here he parted the Jordan River to let them enter Canaan.

These miracles showed Israel that God keeps his promises. God's presence was among his people, and his faithfulness to them made the entire journey from Egypt to the Promised Land possible. He was with them at the end of their wanderings just as he was with them in the beginning.

The Israelites crossed the Jordan River in the spring, when it was overflowing its banks. God chose the time when the river was at its highest to demonstrate his power—parting the waters so that the entire nation could cross on dry ground. God showed his great power by working a miracle of timing and location to allow his people to cross the river on dry ground. This testimony of God's supernatural power served to build the Israelites' hope in God and to give them a great reputation with their enemies, who greatly outnumbered them.

The Walls of Jericho Fall Down

Joshua 6:1-21

Now the gates of Jericho were tightly shut because the people were afraid of the Israelites. No one was allowed to go in or out. But the Lord said to Joshua, "I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its mighty warriors. Your entire army is to march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram's horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. When you hear the priests give one long blast on the horns, have all the people give a mighty shout. Then the walls of the city will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the city."

So Joshua called together the priests and said, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant, and assign seven priests to walk in front of it, each carrying a ram's horn." Then he gave orders to the people: "March around the city, and the armed men will lead the way in front of the Ark of the Lord."

After Joshua spoke to the people, the seven priests with the rams' horns started marching in the presence of the Lord, blowing the horns as they marched. And the priests carrying the Ark of the Lord's covenant followed behind them. Armed guards marched both in front of the priests and behind the Ark, with the priests continually blowing the horns. "Do not shout; do not even talk," Joshua commanded. "Not a single word from any of you until I tell you to shout. Then shout!" So the Ark of the Lord was carried around the city once that day, and then everyone returned to spend the night in the camp.

Joshua got up early the next morning, and the priests again carried the Ark of the Lord. The seven priests with the rams' horns marched in front of the Ark of the Lord, blowing their horns. Armed guards marched both in front of the priests with the horns and behind the Ark of the Lord. All this time the priests were sounding their horns. On the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They followed this pattern for six days.

On the seventh day the Israelites got up at dawn and marched around the city

as they had done before. But this time they went around the city seven times. [16] The seventh time around, as the priests sounded the long blast on their horns, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and everything in it must be completely destroyed as an offering to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and the others in her house will be spared, for she protected our spies. Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed, and you will bring trouble on all Israel. Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the Lord and must be brought into his treasury."

When the people heard the sound of the horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the city from every side and captured it. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city. Men and women, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass were all destroyed with the edge of the sword.

The city of Jericho, built thousands of years before Joshua was born, was one of the oldest cities in the world. In some places it had fortified walls up to 25 feet high and 20 feet thick. Soldiers standing guard on top of the walls could see for miles. Jericho was a symbol of military power and strength—the Canaanites considered it invincible.

Israel would attack this city first, and its destruction would put the fear of Israel into the heart of every person in Canaan. The Canaanites saw Israel's God as a nature god because he parted the Jordan and as a war god because he defeated Sihon and Og. But the Canaanites did not consider him a fortress god—one who could prevail against a walled city. The defeat of Jericho showed not only that Israel's God was superior to the Canaanite gods, but also that he was invincible.

God told Joshua that Jericho was already delivered into his hands—the enemy was already defeated! What confidence Joshua must have had as he went into battle!

Christians also fight against a defeated enemy. Our enemy, Satan, has been defeated by Christ. (Romans 8:37-39; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8). Although we still fight battles every day and sin runs rampant in the world, we have the

assurance that the war has already been won. We do not have to be paralyzed by the power of a defeated enemy; we can overcome him through Christ's power.

Why did God give Joshua all these complicated instructions for the battle? Several answers are possible: God was making it undeniably clear that the battle would depend upon him, and not upon Israel's weapons and expertise. This is why priests carrying the ark, not soldiers, led the Israelites into battle. God's method of taking the city accentuated the terror already felt in Jericho (Joshua 2:9). This strange military maneuver was a test of the Israelites' faith and their willingness to follow God completely. The blowing of the trumpets had a special significance. They had been instructed to blow the same trumpets used in the religious festivals in their battles to remind them that their victory would come from the Lord, not their own military might (Numbers 10:9).

Why did God demand that the Israelites destroy almost everyone and everything in Jericho? He was carrying out severe judgment against the wickedness of the Canaanites. This judgment, or *ban*, usually required that everything be destroyed (Deut. 12:2-3; Deut. 13:12-18). Because of their evil practices and intense idolatry, the Canaanites were a stronghold of rebellion against God. This threat to the right kind of living that God required had to be removed. If not, it would affect all Israel like a cancerous growth (as it did in the sad story told in the book of Judges).

A few people and some items in Jericho were not destroyed, but this was a special case. Rahab and her household were saved because she had faith in God and because she helped the Israelite spies. The silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron were kept, not to enrich the people, but to beautify the tabernacle and its services. God's purpose in all this was to keep the people's faith and religion uncontaminated. He did not want the plunder to remind Israel of Canaanite practices.

God also wants us to be pure. He wants us to clean up our behavior when we begin a new life with him. We must not let the desire for personal gain distract us from our spiritual purpose. We must also reject any objects that are reminders of a life of rebellion against God. (For more information on how Israel handled its plunder.

The Sun and Moon Stayed

Joshua 10:1-15

Now Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard that Joshua had captured and completely destroyed Ai and killed its king, just as he had destroyed the city of Jericho and killed its king. He also learned that the Gibeonites had made peace with Israel and were now their allies. He and his people became very afraid when they heard all this because Gibeon was a large city—as large as the royal cities and larger than Ai. And the Gibeonite men were mighty warriors. So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent messengers to several other kings: Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon. "Come and help me destroy Gibeon," he urged them, "for they have made peace with Joshua and the people of Israel." So these five Amorite kings combined their armies for a united attack. They moved all their troops into place and attacked Gibeon.

The men of Gibeon quickly sent messengers to Joshua at Gilgal, "Don't abandon your servants now!" they pleaded. "Come quickly and save us! For all the Amorite kings who live in the hill country have come out against us with their armies."

So Joshua and the entire Israelite army left Gilgal and set out to rescue Gibeon. "Do not be afraid of them," the Lord said to Joshua, "for I will give you victory over them. Not a single one of them will be able to stand up to you."

This alliance of enemy kings from the south actually helped Joshua and his army. Because the enemies had united to attack Gibeon, Joshua didn't have to spend the time and resources required to wage separate campaigns against each fortified city represented in the coalition. Joshua confidently confronted this coalition of armies and defeated them in a single battle because he trusted God to give Israel the victory.

Joshua's response shows his integrity. After having been deceived by the Gibeonites, Joshua and the leaders could have been slow about their attempt to rescue them. Instead, they immediately responded to their call for help. How willing would you be to help someone who had deceived you, even though you had

forgiven him or her? We should take our word just as seriously as Joshua did.

Joshua traveled all night from Gilgal and took the Amorite armies by surprise. The Lord threw them into a panic, and the Israelites slaughtered them in great numbers at Gibeon. Then the Israelites chased the enemy along the road to Beth-horon and attacked them at Azekah and Makkedah, killing them along the way. As the Amorites retreated down the road from Beth-horon, the Lord destroyed them with a terrible hailstorm that continued until they reached Azekah. The hail killed more of the enemy than the Israelites killed with the sword.

On the day the Lord gave the Israelites victory over the Amorites, Joshua prayed to the Lord in front of all the people of Israel. He said, “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.”

The Strength of Samson
Judges 14-16:31
A Lion is Slain

As Samson and his parents were going down to Timnah, a young lion attacked Samson near the vineyards of Timnah. At that moment the Spirit of the Lord powerfully took control of him, and he ripped the lion's jaws apart with his bare hands. He did it as easily as if it were a young goat. But he didn't tell his father or mother about it.

“The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power” refers to the unusual physical strength given him by the Spirit of the Lord. Samson did not seem to be affected in any other ways than increased physical strength.

Philistines Killed

As Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines came shouting in triumph. But the Spirit of the Lord powerfully took control of Samson, and he snapped the ropes on his arms as if they were burnt strands of flax, and they fell from his wrists. [15] Then he picked up a donkey's jawbone that was lying on the ground and killed a thousand Philistines with it. And Samson said,

"With the jawbone of a donkey, I've made heaps on heaps!
With the jawbone of a donkey, I've killed a thousand men!"

When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was named Jawbone Hill.

The Lord's strength came upon Samson, but he was proud and boasted only of his own strength. "With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men," he said, and later asked God to refresh him because of *his* accomplishments (Judges 15:16- 18). Pride can cause us to take credit for work we've done only because of God's strength.

Now Samson was very thirsty, and he cried out to the Lord, "You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagan people?"

Samson was physically and emotionally exhausted. After a great personal victory, his attitude declined quickly into self-pity— "Must I now die of thirst. During these times of vulnerability, avoid the temptation to think that God owes you for your efforts. It was *his* strength that gave you victory. Concentrate on keeping your attitudes, actions, and words focused on God instead of you.

Water Gushed out of a Hollow in the Ground

Judges 15:19

So God caused water to gush out of a hollow in the ground at Lehi, and Samson was revived as he drank. Then he named that place "The Spring of the One Who Cried Out," and it is still in Lehi to this day. Samson was Israel's judge for twenty years, while the Philistines ruled the land.

Samson Carries away the City Gates

One day Samson went to the Philistine city of Gaza and spent the night with a woman. Word soon spread that Samson was there, so the men of Gaza gathered together and waited all night at the city gates. They kept quiet during the night, said to their selves, "When the light of morning comes, we will kill him."

But Samson stayed in bed only until midnight. Then he got up, took hold of the city gates with its two posts, and lifted them, bar and all, right out of the ground. He put them on his shoulders and carried them all the way to the top of the hill across from Hebron.

Dagon's House is Broken Down

Judges 16:30

Half-drunk by now, the people demanded, "Bring out Samson so he can perform for us!" So he was brought from the prison and made to stand at the center of the temple, between the two pillars supporting the roof.

Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines, the god of grain and harvest. Many temples were built to Dagon, and the worship there included human sacrifice. The temples were also the local entertainment centers. Just as people today crowd into theaters, Philistine townspeople crowded into the local temple. They sat on the flat temple roof and looked into the courtyard below. What they often saw was the torture and humiliation of prisoners.

Since the Philistines had control over the Israelites, they thought their god was stronger. But when the ark of God was placed before Dagon in a similar temple, the idol fell over and broke into pieces (1 Samuel 5:1-7). God's strength goes beyond numbers or physical might.

After Samson was lead into the temple, Samson said to the servant who was leading him by the hand, "Place my hands against the two pillars. I want to rest against them." The temple was completely filled with people. All the Philistine leaders were there, and there were about three thousand on the roof who were watching Samson and making fun of him.

Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me one more time so that I may pay back the Philistines for the loss of my eyes." Then Samson put his hands on the center pillars of the temple and pushed against them with all his might.

"Let me die with the Philistines," he prayed. And the temple crashed down on the Philistine leaders and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.

In spite of Samson's past, God still answered his prayer and destroyed the pagan temple and worshipers. God still loved him. He was willing to hear Samson's prayer of confession and repentance and use him this final time.

Men of Beth-shemesh Smitten for Looking into the Ark

1 Samuel 6:19

But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark.

The cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the Lord. And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the Lord.

And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day. And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the Lord; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the Lord: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Beth-shemite.

And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth-shemesh said, who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us? So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Please come here and get it!"

**Thunderstorm Causes a Panic
among the Philistines at Eben-ezer
1 Samuel 7:2-13**

And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, if ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, we have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

Thunder and Rain in Harvest at Gilgal

1 Samuel 12:13-22

All right, here is the king you have chosen. Look him over. You asked for him, and the Lord has granted your request.

"Now if you will fear and worship the Lord and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the Lord's commands, and if you and your king follow the Lord your God, then all will be well. But if you rebel against the Lord's commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors.

"Now stand here and see the great thing the Lord is about to do. You know that it does not rain at this time of the year during the wheat harvest. I will ask the Lord to send thunder and rain today. Then you will realize how wicked you have been in asking the Lord for a king!"

So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain. And all the people were terrified of the Lord and of Samuel. "Pray to the Lord your God for us, or we will die!" they cried out to Samuel. "For now we have added to our sins by asking for a king."

"Don't be afraid," Samuel reassured them. "You have certainly done wrong, but make sure now that you worship the Lord with all your heart and that you don't turn your back on him in any way. Don't go back to worshiping worthless idols that cannot help or rescue you—they really are useless! The Lord will not abandon his chosen people, for that would dishonor his great name. He made you a special nation for himself.

Sound in the Mulberry Trees at Rephaim

2 Samuel 5:22-25

After a while the Philistines returned and again spread out across the valley of Rephaim. And once again David asked the Lord what to do. "Do not attack them straight on," the Lord replied. "Instead, circle around behind them and attack them near the balsam trees. When you hear a sound like marching feet in the tops of the balsam trees, attack! That will be the signal that the Lord is moving ahead of you to strike down the Philistines." So David did what the Lord commanded, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

Uzzah smitten for touching the ark at Perez-uzzah

2 Samuel 6:1-7

Then David mobilized thirty thousand special troops. He led them to Baalah of Judah to bring home the Ark of God, which bears the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the hillside home of Abinadab. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were guiding the cart with the Ark of God on it, with Ahio walking in front. David and all the people of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark of God. Then the Lord's anger blazed out against Uzzah for doing this, and God struck him dead beside the Ark of God.

Jeroboam's Hand Withered.
His new Altar Destroyed at Bethel
1 Kings 13:1-6

At the Lord's command, a man of God from Judah went to Bethel, and he arrived there just as Jeroboam was approaching the altar to offer a sacrifice. Then at the Lord's command, he shouted, "O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: A child named Josiah will be born into the dynasty of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests from the pagan shrines who come here to burn incense, and human bones will be burned on you." That same day the man of God gave a sign to prove his message, and he said, "The Lord has promised to give this sign: This altar will split apart, and its ashes will be poured out on the ground."

King Jeroboam was very angry with the man of God for speaking against the altar. So he pointed at the man and shouted, "Seize that man!" But instantly the king's hand became paralyzed in that position, and he couldn't pull it back. At the same time a wide crack appeared in the altar, and the ashes poured out, just as the man of God had predicted in his message from the Lord.

The king cried out to the man of God, "Please ask the Lord your God to restore my hand again!" So the man of God prayed to the Lord, and the king's hand became normal again.

Three hundred years later, this prophecy was fulfilled in every detail when Josiah killed the pagan priests at their own altars. The story is found in 2 Kings 23:1-20.

Causing the Rain to Cease for 3 ½ Years.

I Kings 17:1-8

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. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying,

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 also responded 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!

Widow of Zarephath's Meal and Oil Increased

1 Kings 17:14-16

For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

When the widow of Zarephath met Elijah, she thought she was preparing her last meal. But a simple act of faith produced a miracle. She trusted Elijah and gave all she had to eat to him. Faith is the step between promise and assurance. Miracles seem so out of reach for our feeble faith. But every miracle, large or small, begins with an act of obedience. We may not see the solution until we take the first step of faith.

Widow's Son Raised from the Dead

1 Kings 17:17-24

Some time later, the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. She then said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son?"

But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the boy's body from her, carried him up to the upper room, where he lived, and laid the body on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, why have you brought tragedy on this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?" And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, please let this child's life return to him." The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he came back to life! Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look, your son is alive!" he said. Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you."

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.

Calling of Fire from Heaven on the Altar

I Kings 18:30-38

Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, and he used the stones to rebuild the Lord's altar. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood." After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said, and the water ran around the altar and even overflowed the trench.

At the customary time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch!

Using 12 stones to build the altar took courage. This would have angered some of the people because it was a silent reminder of the split between the tribes. While the 10 tribes of the north called themselves Israel, it was a name originally given to all 12 of the tribes together.

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.

Causing it to rain.

I Kings 18:41-46

Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go and enjoy a good meal! For I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!" So Ahab prepared a feast. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and fell to the ground and prayed. Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the sea." The servant went and looked, but he returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything." Seven times Elijah told him to go and look, and seven times he went. Finally, the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a hand rising from the sea." And sure enough, the sky was soon black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel.

Now the Lord gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.

Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!' "

Elijah ran the six miles back to the city in order to give Ahab a last chance to turn from his sin before joining Jezebel in Jezreel. His run also ensured that the correct story of what happened would reach Jezreel.

Ahaziah's Captains Consumer

2 Kings 1:10-12

After King Ahab's death, the nation of Moab declared its independence from Israel. One day Israel's new king, Ahaziah, fell through the latticework of an upper room at his palace in Samaria, and he was seriously injured. So he sent messengers to the temple of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether he would recover.

But the angel of the Lord told Elijah, who was from Tishbe, "Go and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, 'Why are you going to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether the king will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, therefore, this is what the Lord says: You will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die.' " So Elijah went to deliver the message.

When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you returned so soon?" They replied, "A man came up to us and said, 'Go back to the king and give him this message from the Lord: Why are you sending men to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to ask whether you will get well? Is there no God in Israel? Now, since you have done this, you will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die.' "

"Who was this man?" the king demanded. "What did he look like?"

They replied, "He was a hairy man, and he wore a leather belt around his waist."

"It was Elijah from Tishbe!" the king exclaimed. Then he sent an army captain with fifty soldiers to arrest him. They found him sitting on top of a hill. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king has commanded you to come along with us."

But Elijah replied to the captain, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and killed them all.

So the king sent another captain with fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, the king says that you must come down right away." Elijah replied, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your fifty men!"

And again the fire of God fell from heaven and killed them all.

Baal-Zebub was not the same god as Baal, the Canaanite god worshiped by Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31-33). Baal-Zebub was another popular god whose temple was located in the city of Ekron. Because this god was thought to have the power of prophecy, King Ahaziah sent messengers to Ekron to learn of his fate. Supernatural power and mystery were associated with this god. Ahaziah's action showed the king's disrespect for God.

The River Jordan is Divided

2 Kings 2:7-14

Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?" "Quiet!" he answered again. "Of course I know it."

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to the Jordan River. "But again Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you." So they went on together. Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

Elisha Receives a Double Portion Blessing

2 Kings 2:10

When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "What can I do for you before I am taken away?" And Elisha replied, "Please let me become your rightful successor." "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah replied. "If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won't."

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father! My father!

The chariots and charioteers of Israel!" And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his robe in two. Then Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak and returned to the bank of the Jordan River. He struck the water with the cloak and cried out, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" Then the river divided, and Elisha went across.

When the group of prophets from Jericho saw what happened, they exclaimed, "Elisha has become Elijah's successor!" And they went to meet him and bowed down before him. "Sir," they said, "Just say the word and fifty of our strongest men will search the wilderness for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has left him on some mountain or in some valley."

"No," Elisha said, "don't send them." But they kept urging him until he was embarrassed, and he finally said, "All right, send them." So fifty men searched for three days but did not find Elijah. Elisha was still at Jericho when they returned. "Didn't I tell you not to go?" he asked.

A "company of the prophets" was like a school, a gathering of disciples around a recognized prophet, such as Elijah or Elisha. These companies of prophets, located throughout the country, helped stem the tide of spiritual and moral decline in the nation begun under Jeroboam. The students at Bethel were eyewitnesses to the succession of the prophetic ministry from Elijah to Elisha.

The Waters of Jericho Healed

2 Kings 2-7-8

Now the leaders of the town of Jericho visited Elisha. "We have a problem, my lord," they told him. "This town is located in beautiful natural surroundings, as you can see. But the water is bad, and the land is unproductive."

Elisha said, "Bring me a new bowl with salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring that supplied the town with water and threw the salt into it. And he said, "This is what the Lord says: I have made this water wholesome. It will no longer cause death or infertility."

Elijah's cloak was a symbol of his authority as a prophet.

Water for Jehoshaphat's Army

2 Kings 3:15-20

Now bring me someone who can play the harp. "While the harp was being played, the power of the Lord came upon Elisha, and he said, "This is what the Lord says: This dry valley will be filled with pools of water!

You will see neither wind nor rain, says the Lord, but this valley will be filled with water. You will have plenty for yourselves and for your cattle and your other animals. But this is only a simple thing for the Lord, for he will make you victorious over the army of Moab! You will conquer the best of their cities, even the fortified ones. You will cut down all their trees, stop up all their springs, and ruin all their good land with stones."

And sure enough, the next day at about the time when the morning sacrifice was offered, water suddenly appeared! It was flowing from the direction of Edom, and soon there was water everywhere.

Jehoshaphat's request for "a prophet of the LORD" shows how true worship and religious experience in both Israel and Judah had declined. In David's day, both the high priest and the prophets gave the king advice. But most of the priests had left Israel, and God's prophets were seen as messengers of doom (1 Kings 22:18). This miracle predicted by Elisha affirmed God's power and authority and validated Elisha's ministry. In 2 Chron. 18, King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahab of Israel gave the prophet Micaiah a similar request. But they ignored God's advice— with disastrous results.

In Old Testament times music often accompanied prophecy (1 Chron. 25:1).

The morning sacrifice was one of two sacrifices that the priests were required to offer each day.

The Widow's Oil Multiplied

2 Kings 4-1-7

One day the widow of one of Elisha's fellow prophets came to Elisha and cried out to him, "My husband who served you is dead, and you know how he feared the Lord. But now a creditor has come, threatening to take my two sons as slaves."

"What can I do to help you?" Elisha asked. "Tell me, what do you have in the house?" "Nothing at all, except a flask of olive oil," she replied. And Elisha said, "Borrow as many empty jars as you can from your friends and neighbors. Then go into your house with your sons and shut the door behind you. Pour olive oil from your flask into the jars, setting the jars aside as they are filled."

So she did as she was told. Her sons brought many jars to her, and she filled one after another. Soon every container was full to the brim! "Bring me another jar," she said to one of her sons, "There aren't any more!" he told her. And then the olive oil stopped flowing. When she told the man of God what had happened, he said to her, "Now sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and there will be enough money left over to support you and your sons."

The woman and her sons collected jars from their neighbors, pouring oil into them from their one pot. The oil was probably olive oil and was used for cooking, for lamps, and for fuel. The oil stopped pouring only when they ran out of containers. The number of jars they gathered was an indication of their faith. God's provision was as large as their faith and willingness to obey. Beware of limiting God's blessings by a lack of faith and obedience. God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephes. 3:20).

Shunammite's Son Raised

2 Kings 4:15-37

"Call her back again," Elisha told him. When the woman returned, Elisha said to her as she stood in the doorway, "Next year at about this time you will be holding a son in your arms!" "No, my lord!" she protested. "Please don't lie to me like that, O man of God."

But sure enough, the woman soon became pregnant. And at that time the following year she had a son, just as Elisha had said. One day when her child was older, he went out to visit his father, who was working with the harvesters. Suddenly he complained, "My head hurts! My head hurts!"

His father said to one of the servants, "Carry him home to his mother." So the servant took him home, and his mother held him on her lap. But around noontime he died. She carried him up to the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and left him there. She sent a message to her husband: "Send one of the servants and a donkey so that I can hurry to the man of God and come right back." "Why today?" he asked. "It is neither a new moon festival nor a Sabbath." But she said, "It's all right." So she saddled the donkey and said to the servant, "Hurry! Don't slow down on my account unless I tell you to."

As she approached the man of God at Mount Carmel, Elisha saw her in the distance. He said to Gehazi, "Look, the woman from Shunem is coming. [26] Run out to meet her and ask her, 'Is everything all right with you, with your husband, and with your child?' "

"Yes," the woman told Gehazi, "everything is fine." But when she came to the man of God at the mountain, she fell to the ground before him and caught hold of his feet. Gehazi began to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone. Something is troubling her deeply, and the Lord has not told me what it is." Then she said, "It was you, my lord, who said I would have a son. And didn't I tell you not to raise my hopes?"

Then Elisha said to Gehazi, "Get ready to travel; take my staff and go! Don't

talk to anyone along the way. Go quickly and lay the staff on the child's face." But the boy's mother said, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I won't go home unless you go with me." So Elisha returned with her. Gehazi hurried on ahead and laid the staff on the child's face, but nothing happened. There was no sign of life. He returned to meet Elisha and told him, "The child is still dead."

When Elisha arrived, the child was indeed dead, lying there on the prophet's bed. He went in alone and shut the door behind him and prayed to the Lord. Then he lay down on the child's body, placing his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes on the child's eyes, and his hands on the child's hands. And the child's body began to grow warm again! Elisha got up and walked back and forth in the room a few times. Then he stretched himself out again on the child. This time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes!

Then Elisha summoned Gehazi. "Call the child's mother!" he said. And when she came in, Elisha said, "Here, take your son!" She fell at his feet, overwhelmed with gratitude. Then she picked up her son and carried him downstairs.

Elisha's prayer and method of raising the dead boy show God's personal care for hurting people. We must express genuine concern for others as we carry God's message to them. Only then will we faithfully represent our Father in heaven.

The Deadly Porridge Cured

2 Kings 4:38-41

Elisha now returned to Gilgal, but there was a famine in the land. One day as the group of prophets was seated before him, he said to his servant, "Put on a large kettle and make some stew for these men." One of the young men went out into the field to gather vegetables and came back with a pocketful of wild gourds.

He shredded them and put them into the kettle without realizing they were poisonous. But after the men had eaten a bite or two they cried out, "Man of God, there's poison in this stew!" So they would not eat it. Elisha said, "Bring me some flour." Then he threw it into the kettle and said, "Now it's all right; go ahead and eat." And then it did not harm them!

One Hundred Men Fed with 20 Loaves

2 Kings 4:42-44

One day a man from Baal-shalishah brought the man of God a sack of fresh grain and twenty loaves of barley bread made from the first grain of his harvest. Elisha said, "Give it to the group of prophets so they can eat." "What?" his servant exclaimed. "Feed one hundred people with only this?"

But Elisha repeated, "Give it to the group of prophets so they can eat, for the Lord says there will be plenty for all. There will even be some left over!" And sure enough, there was plenty for all and some left over, just as the Lord had promised.

“Death in the pot” means that the food was poisonous. Perhaps a poisonous wild vegetable or herb had been mixed in with the edible plants.

Naaman Cured of His Leprosy

2 Kings 5:10-14

But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of leprosy."

But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would surely come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! Aren't the Abana River and Pharpar River of Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel put together? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply to go and wash and be cured!" So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his flesh became as healthy as a young child's, and he was healed!

Naaman, a great hero, was used to getting respect, and he was outraged when Elisha treated him like an ordinary person. A proud man, he expected royal treatment. To wash in a great river would be one thing, but the Jordan was small and dirty. To wash in the Jordan, Naaman thought, was beneath a man of his position. But Naaman had to humble himself and obey Elisha's commands in order to be healed.

Obedience to God begins with humility. We must believe that his way is better than our own. We may not always understand his ways of working, but by humbly obeying, we will receive his blessings.

We must remember that

- (1) God's ways are best;
- (2) God wants our obedience more than anything else;

(3) God can use anything to accomplish his purposes.

Naaman left in a rage because the cure for his disease seemed too simple. He was a hero, and he expected a heroic cure. Full of pride and self-will, he could not accept the simple cure of faith. Sometimes people react to God's offer of forgiveness in the same way. Just to *believe* in Jesus Christ somehow doesn't seem significant enough to bring eternal life. To obey God's commands doesn't seem heroic. What Naaman had to do to have his leprosy washed away is similar to what we must do to have our sin washed away—humbly accept God's mercy. Don't let your reaction to the way of faith keep you from the cure you need the most.

Leprosy Inflicted Gehazi

2 Kings 5:20-27

But Gehazi, Elisha's servant, said to him, "My master should not have let this Aramean get away without accepting his gifts. As surely as the Lord lives, I will chase after him and get something from him. So Gehazi set off after him. When Naaman saw him running after him, he climbed down from his chariot and went to meet him. "Is everything all right?" Naaman asked. "Yes," Gehazi said, "but my master has sent me to tell you that two young prophets from the hill country of Ephraim have just arrived. He would like 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing to give to them."

"By all means, take 150 pounds of silver," Naaman insisted. He gave him two sets of clothing, tied up the money in two bags, and sent two of his servants to carry the gifts for Gehazi. [24] But when they arrived at the hill, Gehazi took the gifts from the servants and sent the men back. Then he hid the gifts inside the house.

When he went in to his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" "I haven't been anywhere," he replied. But Elisha asked him, "Don't you realize that I was there in spirit when Naaman stepped down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to receive money and clothing and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and servants? Because you have done this, you and your children and your children's children will suffer from Naaman's leprosy forever." When Gehazi left the room, he was leprous; his skin was as white as snow.

Gehazi saw a perfect opportunity to get rich by selfishly asking for the reward Elisha had refused.

Unfortunately, there were three problems with his plan:

- (1) he willingly accepted money that had been offered to someone else;
- (2) he wrongly implied that money could be exchanged for God's free gift of healing and mercy;

(3) he lied and tried to cover up his motives for accepting the money. Although Gehazi had been a helpful servant, personal gain had become more important to him than serving God.

This passage is not teaching that money is evil or that ministers should not get paid; instead, it is warning against greed and deceit. True service is motivated by love and devotion to God and seeks no personal gain. As you serve God, check your motives—you can't serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).

The Iron Ace-head made to swim River Jordan

II Kings 6:1-7

One day the group of prophets came to Elisha and told him, "As you can see, this place where we meet with you is too small. Let's go down to the Jordan River, where there are plenty of logs. There we can build a new place for us to meet." "All right," he told them, "go ahead." "Please come with us," someone suggested. "I will," he said.

When they arrived at the Jordan, they began cutting down trees.

But as one of them was chopping, his ax head fell into the river. "Ah, my lord!" he cried. "It was a borrowed ax!" "Where did it fall?" the man of God asked. When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it into the water. Then the ax head rose to the surface and floated. "Grab it," Elisha said to him. And the man reached out and grabbed it.

The incident of the floating ax head is recorded to show God's care and provision for those who trust him, even in the insignificant events of everyday life. God is always present. Placed in the Bible between the healing of an Aramean general and the deliverance of Israel's army, this miracle also shows Elisha's personal contact with the students in the companies of the prophets. Although he had the respect of kings, Elisha never forgot to care for the faithful. Don't let the importance of your work drive out your concern for human need.

Ben Hadad's Plans Discovered

2 Kings 6:8-12

When the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he would confer with his officers and say, "We will mobilize our forces at such and such a place."

Immediately Elisha, the man of God, would warn the king of Israel, "Do not go near that place, for the Arameans are planning to mobilize their troops there." So the king of Israel would send word to the place indicated by the man of God, warning the people there to be on their guard. This happened several times. The king of Aram became very upset over this. He called in his officers and demanded, "Which of you is the traitor? Who has been informing the king of Israel of my plans?"

"It's not us, my lord," one of the officers replied. "Elisha, the prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in the privacy of your bedroom!"

The Syrian Army Smitten with Blindness at Dothan 2 Kings 6:13-18

The king commanded, "Go and find out where Elisha is, and we will send troops to seize him." And the report came back: "Elisha is at Dothan." So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city. When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere.

"Ah, my lord, what will we do now?" he cried out to Elisha. "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" The Lord opened his servant's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire. As the Aramean army advanced toward them, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, please make them blind." And the Lord did as Elisha asked.

Elisha's servant was no longer afraid when he saw God's mighty heavenly army. Faith reveals that God is doing more for his people than we can ever realize through sight alone. When you face difficulties that seem insurmountable, remember that spiritual resources are there even if you can't see them. Look through the eyes of faith and let God show you his resources. If you don't see God working in your life, the problem may be your spiritual eyesight, not God's power.

The Syrian Army Cured of Blindness at Samaria

2 Kings 6:18-22

As the Aramean army advanced toward them, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, please make them blind." And the Lord did as Elisha asked. Then Elisha went out and told them, "You have come the wrong way! This isn't the right city! Follow me, and I will take you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. As soon as they had entered Samaria, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, now open their eyes and let them see." And the Lord did, and they discovered that they were in Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he shouted to Elisha, "My father, should I kill them?" "Of course not!" Elisha told him. "Do we kill prisoners of war? Give them food and drink and send them home again to their master."

Elisha told the king not to kill the Arameans. The king was not to take credit for what God alone had done. In setting food and water before them, he was heaping "burning coals" on their heads (Proverbs 25:21-22)

Elisha's Bones Revive the Dead

2 King 13:20-21

Then Elisha died and was buried. Groups of Moabite raiders used to invade the land each spring. Once when some Israelites were burying a man, they spied a band of these raiders. So they hastily threw the body they were burying into the tomb of Elisha. But as soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the dead man revived and jumped to his feet!

Elisha was dead, but his good influence remained, even causing miracles. This demonstrated that Elisha was indeed a prophet of God. It also attested to God's power—no pagan idol ever raised anyone from the dead. This miracle served as one more reminder to Israel that it had rejected God's word as given through Elisha.

Sennacherib's army destroyed, Jerusalem

2 Kings 19:35

Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

[20] Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent this message to Hezekiah: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer about King Sennacherib of Assyria. [21] This is the message that the Lord has spoken against him: The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs at you. The daughter of Jerusalem scoffs and shakes her head as you flee.

'Whom do you think you have been insulting and ridiculing? Against whom did you raise your voice? At whom did you look in such proud condescension? It was the Holy One of Israel! By your messengers you have mocked the Lord.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Here is the proof that the Lord will protect this city from Assyria's king. This year you will eat only what grows up by itself, and next year you will eat what springs up from that. But in the third year you will plant crops and harvest them; you will tend vineyards and eat their fruit. And you who are left in Judah, who have escaped the ravages of the siege, will take root again in your own soil, and you will flourish and multiply. For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem, a group of survivors from Mount Zion. The passion of the Lord Almighty will make this happen! "And this is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria: His armies will not enter Jerusalem to shoot their arrows. They will not march outside its gates with their shields and build banks of earth against its walls. The king will return to his own country by the road on which he came.

He will not enter this city, says the Lord. For my own honor and for the sake of my servant David, I will defend it."

That night the angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere.

God replied to Sennacherib's taunting words (2 Kings 18:19-25), indicting him for arrogance. Sennacherib believed his kingdom had grown because of his

own efforts and strength. In reality, said God, he succeeded only because of what God had allowed and caused. It is arrogance to think we are solely responsible for our achievements. God, as Creator, rules over nations and people.

The Assyrians treated captives with cruelty. They tortured them for entertainment by blinding them, cutting them, or pulling off strips of their skin until they died. If they wished to make a captive a slave, they would often put a hook in his nose.

God was saying that the Assyrians would be treated the way they had treated others.

As long as a tiny spark remains, a fire can be rekindled and fanned into a roaring blaze. Similarly, if just the smallest remnant of true believers retains the spark of faith, God can rebuild it into a strong nation. And if only a glimmer of faith remains in a heart, God can use it to restore blazing faith in that believer.

**Shadow of Sun goes back Ten degrees
on the Sun-dial of Ahaz, Jerusalem
Joshua 10:10-13**

The Lord threw them into a panic, and the Israelites slaughtered them in great numbers at Gibeon. Then the Israelites chased the enemy along the road to Beth-horon and attacked them at Azekah and Makkedah, killing them along the way. As the Amorites retreated down the road from Beth-horon, the Lord destroyed them with a terrible hailstorm that continued until they reached Azekah. The hail killed more of the enemy than the Israelites killed with the sword. On the day the Lord gave the Israelites victory over the Amorites, Joshua prayed to the Lord in front of all the people of Israel. He said, "Let the sun stand still over Gibeon, and the moon over the valley of Aijalon."

So the sun and moon stood still until the Israelites had defeated their enemies. Is this event not recorded in The Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and it did not set as on a normal day.

How did the sun stand still? Of course, in relation to the earth the sun always stands still—it is the earth that travels around the sun. But the terminology used in Joshua should not cause us to doubt the miracle. After all, we are not confused when someone tells us that the sun rises or sets. The point is that the day was prolonged, not that God used a particular method to prolong it.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego delivered from the Fiery Furnace, Daniel 3:10-27

The King issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the musical instruments. That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They have defied Your Majesty by refusing to serve your gods or to worship the gold statue you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought before him. When they were brought in, Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance. If you bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments, all will be well. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. What god will be able to rescue you from my power then?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. but even if he doesn't, Your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully clothed. And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames leaped out and killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in! So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell down into the roaring flames.

But suddenly, as he was watching, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"

"Yes," they said, "we did indeed, Your Majesty." Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire. They aren't even hurt by the flames! And the fourth looks like a divine being!" Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. Then the princes, prefects, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke!

Daniel Saved in the Lions' Den

Dan. 6:10-23

But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.

The officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. So they went back to the king and reminded him about his law. "Did you not sign a law that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to Your Majesty—will be thrown to the lions?"

"Yes," the king replied, "that decision stands; it is a law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is paying no attention to you or your law. He still prays to his God three times a day."

Hearing this, the king was very angry with himself for signing the law, and he tried to find a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament. [15] In the evening the men went together to the king and said, "Your Majesty knows that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed."

So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you worship continually, rescue you." A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel from the lions. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn't sleep at all that night.

Very early the next morning, the king hurried out to the lions' den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you worship continually, able to rescue you from the lions?"

Daniel answered, "Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty." The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him because he had trusted in his God.

Lions roamed the countryside and forests in Mesopotamia, and the people feared them and greatly respected their power. Some kings hunted lions for sport. The Persians captured lions, keeping them in large parks where they were fed and attended. Lions were also used for executing people. But God has ways of delivering his people (Daniel 6:22) that none of us can imagine. It is always premature to give up and give in to the pressure of unbelievers, because God has power they know nothing about. God can even shut the lions' mouths.

Even unbelievers witnessed to Daniel's consistency. By his continual service, Daniel had demonstrated his faithful devotion to God. What can unbelievers determine about your life?

The man or woman who trusts in God and obeys his will is untouchable until God takes him or her. To trust God is to have immeasurable peace. God, who delivered Daniel, will deliver you. Do you trust him with your life?

Jonah in the Whale's Belly. Safely landed

Jonah 2:1-10

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish. He said, "I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the world of the dead, and Lord, you heard me! You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves. Then I said, 'O Lord, you have driven me from your presence. How will I ever again see your holy Temple?'"

"I sank beneath the waves, and death was very near. The waters closed in around me, and seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was locked out of life and imprisoned in the land of the dead. But you, O Lord my God, have snatched me from the yawning jaws of death!"

"When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone." Then the Lord ordered the fish to spit up Jonah on the beach, and it did.

God told Jonah to preach to Nineveh, the most important city in Assyria, the rising world power of Jonah's day. Within 50 years, Nineveh would become the capital of the vast Assyrian empire. Jonah doesn't say much about Nineveh's wickedness, but the prophet Nahum gives us more insight.

Nahum says that Nineveh was guilty of

- (1) evil plots against God (Nahum 1:9),
- (2) exploitation of the helpless (Nahum 2:12),
- (3) cruelty in war (Nahum 2:12-13),
- (4) idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft (Nahum 3:4).

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, about 500 miles northeast of Israel, to warn of

judgment and to declare that the people could receive mercy and forgiveness if they repented.

References

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