

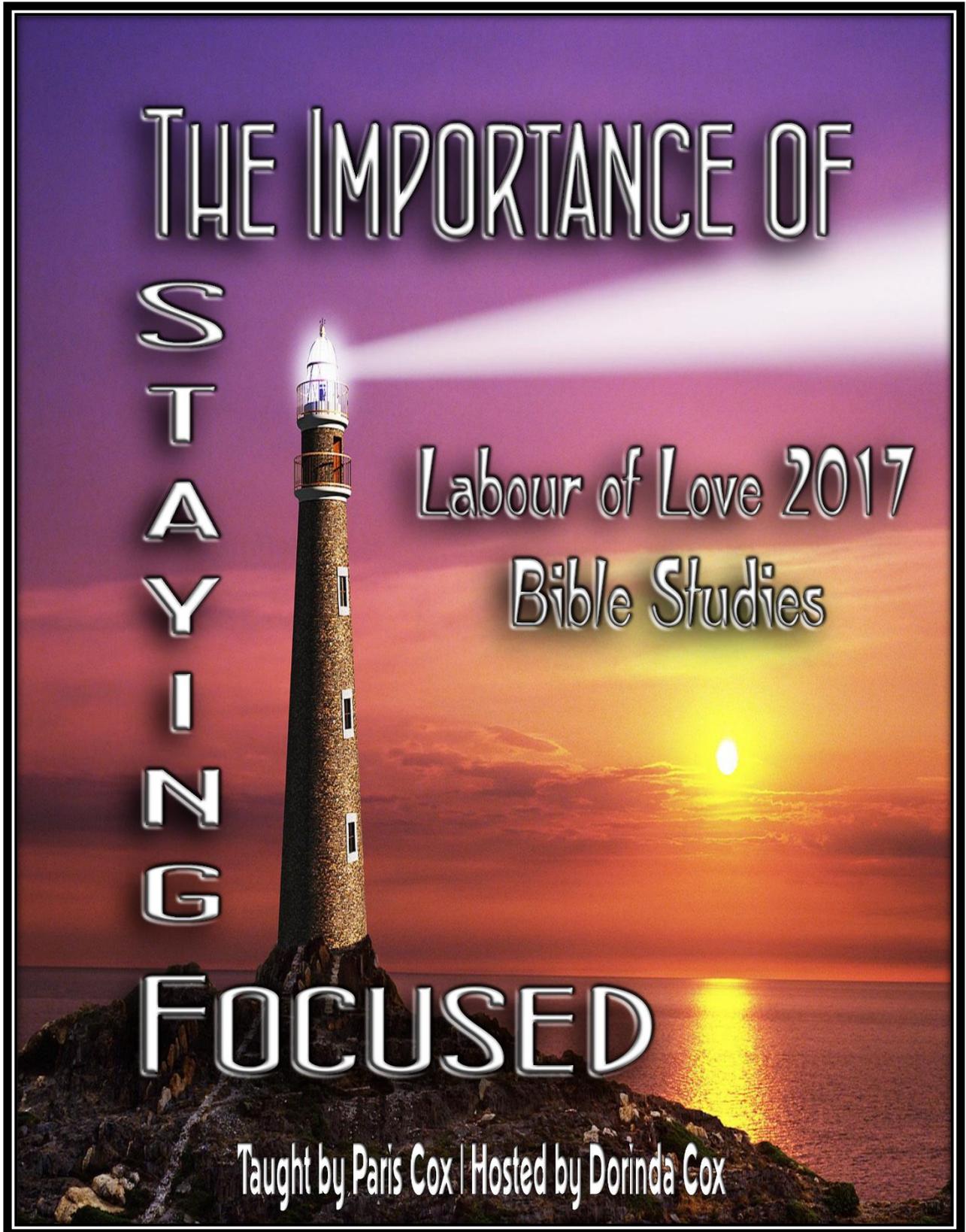
THE IMPORTANCE OF

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Labour of Love 2017
Bible Studies

FOCUSED

Taught by Paris Cox | Hosted by Dorinda Cox



Thank You!

*Dorinda and myself, would like thank you all for another great time during 2017.
Your enthusiasm really encourages us. Your heart to know God and know more about
Him through the study of His Word is a great motivation.*

*We want to again, thank you for your spirit, your support and most of all, your heart
for God.*

..... Paris and Dorinda

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The Importance of Staying Focused

Scripture Text:
1 Kings Chapter 13

Definition of Staying Focused

To abide under in the appointed place with patience, single minded; unchanging toward God. Unchanging to the instructions of God. Unable to be distracted.

Authorship: The identity of the author of Kings is unknown, although Jewish tradition holds that its author was Jeremiah. Although there can be no final certainty in that matter, the fact that Jeremiah was not only a member of a priestly, teaching family, but as God's prophet was an eyewitness and active participant in the events surrounding Judah's demise, argues for such a possibility.

Summary: The book of Kings were originally one volume in the Hebrew text. The two books of Kings contain an account of Israel's spiritual conduct as God's covenant people. The portrayal of the deeds of Israel's people, especially its kings, priests, and prophets, is colored by the shade of spiritual faithfulness and purity they maintained toward God and His revealed standards. The people's repeated spiritual failure, particularly among its leaders, points to Israel's need of a coming One who, as the heir to David's throne, would be not only its righteous King, but its faithful Prophet and God's High Priest.

In 1 Kings 13 we read of a person called only a "man of God" who was sent by the Lord from Judah to prophesy against King Jeroboam of Israel. Jeroboam sought to seize the man, "but the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back". The king asked for the man of God to pray for him and his hand. When he healed the king's hand, the king attempted to reward him, but the man of God replied, "So was it commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came'". However, on his way home, an old prophet came to him, saying, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water'". But this old prophet was lying. No angel had visited him, and God had not spoken to him regarding the matter. But the man of God believed the old prophet and went home with him. When God speaks, the matter is settled. There is never an excuse for disobeying God's Word. Even a fellow believer—even an angel descending from heaven—cannot nullify God's Word.

NOTES

The Importance of Staying Focused

“In God We Trust”

Scripture Text:

2 Chronicles Chapter 20: 1-30

Key Verse: “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12)

Definitions

Staying Focused: To abide under in the appointed place with patience, single minded; unchanging toward God. Unchanging to the instructions of God. Unable to be distracted.

Trust: Belief in the goodness, strength, and the ability of a person; confidence; to obey; to believe.

King of Judah

Jehoshaphat became the fourth King of Judah (872-847 B.C.) at the age of 35, and reigned for 25 years. He came to the throne in the wake of a time of war at the conclusion of his father King Asa's reign. For this reason, among his first actions were border defenses, especially on the border with Israel. From the beginning, he also instituted religious reform. He never once participated in the prominent Baal cult or the other idol-based religions that had snared Israel and Judah. In his third year, Jehoshaphat established a traveling school, open to the public — a rare innovation in his day. It was staffed by 16 well trained men, and toured the land, teaching the law of the LORD to the population. Jehoshaphat's leadership was so effective, and God's blessing so rich, that internal peace and military security became the rule. Even the Philistines, longtime adversaries, became submissive to King Jehoshaphat and the nation of Judah.

Jehoshaphat's most shining moment came when his nation was under attack by an alliance of three vast armies. Recognizing his totally helpless position, the king hosted a nationwide day of prayer. When the LORD, answering the prayers, told Jehoshaphat he would defeat this enemy without fighting, he trusted the LORD so completely that he dispatched an army — not of soldiers, but of singers, singing praise to God. When this army came upon the invaders, they discovered them completely destroyed by internal fighting. The LORD answered the prayer of King Jehoshaphat by causing the opposing armies to fight amongst themselves and they destroyed each other.

“Seven Keys to Staying Focused”

1. Look to God in every situation that you face, whether it seems good or bad (2 Chronicles 20:3)
2. Remember and also believe, what God has done for others he will also do for you (2 Chronicles 20:7)
3. Admit that you don't always know what to do (2 Chronicles 20:12)
4. Remember that obedience to God brings rewards and fulfillment in life (2 Chronicles 20:25)
5. Always remember to give thanks unto God in prosperous times and the lean times (2 Chronicles 20:26)
6. Remember that obedience to God will always provide external and internal peace (2 Chronicles 20:30)
7. Continue to trust, obey, and believe that Jesus will never leave or forsake you (2 Chronicles 20:20)

NOTES

The Importance of Staying Focused *“You Can Run but You Cannot Hide”*

Scripture Text:
1 Kings Chapter 19: 1-18

Key Verse: “And he said, I have been very jealous (zealous) for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant; thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10)

Definitions

Staying Focused: To abide under in the appointed place with patience, single minded; unchanging toward God. Unchanging to the instructions of God. Unable to be distracted.

Trust: Belief in the goodness, strength, and the ability of a person; confidence; to obey; to believe.

Fear: A distressing emotion stirred by impending danger, evil, or pain. Whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid.

Elijah A Prophet of God

Elijah: A prophet of God whose name means “my God is the Lord” came from Tishbeh in Gilead, however, nothing is known of his family or birth. Elijah first appears in 1 Kings Chapter 17 during the reign of King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel. His prophecies emphasized the unconditional loyalty to God required of the nation of Israel. One of those prophecies dealt directly with King Ahab during his reign, Elijah prophesied a drought (no rain for three years) to come upon the whole land as consequence for Ahab’s evil (1 Kings 17:1–7) In another instance Elijah deals with the prophets of the false god of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18: 17-40) The prophets of Baal call upon their god all day long to rain fire from heaven to no avail. After Elijah builds an altar of his own, God sends fire down from heaven and immediately burns the sacrifice. However, in spite of victory and provisions from the LORD that he received, Elijah enters a period of fear and depression (1 Kings 19:1-18). Hearing that Ahab’s wife Jezebel has made a vow to kill him, Elijah runs and hides for his life. When Elijah stopped focusing on the fear of what men could do and his feelings of being alone, God’s voice was heard. As was true for Elijah, when we focus on the evil and the turmoil of life in this world, we can lose focus of God. However, if we listen for His still, small voice and walk in obedience to His word, we find victory and reward. Each person in the Bible has a lesson for us to learn and can aid our walk as believers. Elijah struggled with typical human weaknesses, yet he was used mightily of God.

“Seven Things That Happen When I Lose Focus Of God”

1. I begin to run away from God oppose to Him when problems arise (1 Kings 19:3)
2. I begin to only think of myself and enter into a state of depression (1 Kings 19:4)
3. I begin to come up with excuses on how or why I’m in my current situation (1 Kings 19:10)
4. I begin to look for God in the wrong places or in the wrong things. Simply confused (1 Kings 19:11-12)
5. I begin to go backwards in life oppose to moving forward and growing (1 Kings 19:15)
6. I begin the process for God to have to replace/remove me from my current role/position (1 Kings 19:16)
7. I begin to realize after the fact I’m not the only one “fighting the good fight of faith” (1 Kings 19:18)

“And loss of control is always the source of fear. It is also, however, always the source of change.” James J. Frey

NOTES

The Dynamic Duo

Scripture Text:

The Book of Esther

The Dynamic Duo: Is the story of a Jewish queen (**Esther**) and her cousin (**Mordecai**) who saved the Jews from a plot to wipe out the entire Jewish race (genocide) from the entire face of the earth.

Esther: was the Jewish queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus. She saved her people, the Jews from a plot to annihilate them. Esther was a daughter of Abihail and cousin of Mordecai. After her mother and father died. Mordecai raised her as his own daughter, Her Jewish name was Hadassah, which means “Myrtle” The story of Esther’s rise from an unknown Jewish girl to queen of a mighty empire illustrates how God uses events and people to fulfill His promise His chosen people. Ahasuerus appointed Esther to replace Queen Vashti. Esther exposed Haman’s evil plot to slay all the Jews. As a result, Ahasuerus granted the Jews the right to defend themselves and destroy their enemies. With ironic justice “they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai”

Mordecai: was a resident of Susa (Shushan), the Persian capital during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), the king of Persia (ruled 485-465b.c.). Mordecai took his orphaned cousin, Esther into his home as her adoptive father. Later, Mordecai uncovered a plot to murder the king and saved his life. This good deed was recorded in the royal chronicles of Persia. Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, and as a result, introduced a plan to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Mordecai then exhorted Queen Esther to approach the king and save her people. Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, and Mordecai became second in command, succeeding Haman.

Foreshadowings: In Esther, we are given a behind-the-scenes look at the ongoing struggle of Satan against the purposes of God and especially against His promised Messiah. The entrance of Christ into the human race was predicated upon the existence of the Jewish race. Just as Haman plotted against the Jews in order to destroy them, so has Satan set himself against Christ and God’s people. Just as Haman is defeated on the gallows he built for Mordecai, so does Christ use the very weapon that his enemy devised to destroy Him and His spiritual seed. For the cross, by which Satan planned to destroy the Messiah, was the very means through which Christ "having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:14-15). Just as Haman was hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai, so the devil was crushed by the cross he erected to destroy Christ.

Practical Application: The Book of Esther shows the choice we make between seeing the hand of God in our circumstances in life and seeing things as merely coincidence. God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe and we can be assured that His plans will not be moved by the actions of mere evil men. Although His name is not mentioned in the book, His divine care for his people, both individuals and the nation, is evident throughout. Esther proved to have a godly and teachable spirit that also showed great strength and willing obedience. Esther's humility was markedly different from those around her, and this caused her to be elevated into the position of queen. She shows us that remaining respectful and humble, even in difficult if not humanly impossible circumstances, and often sets us up to be the vessel of untold blessing for both ourselves and others. We would do well to emulate her godly attitudes in all areas of life, but especially in trials. Not once is there a complaint or bad attitude exposed in the writing. Many times we read she won the "favor" of those around her. Such favor is what ultimately saved her people. We can be granted such favor as we accept even unfair persecution and follow Esther's example of maintaining a positive attitude, coupled with humility and the determination to lean on God.

NOTES

Super Woman

Scripture Text:

Joshua Chapter 2

Key Verse: “And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window” (Joshua 2: 21)

Super Woman: Is the name given to a woman name **Rahab**, a prostitute of the Canaanite city of Jericho. Ultimately, it was because of her Faith (along with her actions), that Joshua and the nation of Israel were able to concur and destroy the Canaanites and enter into the promised land.

Definition:

Super: The word super comes from Latin, where it has the meaning “above or beyond” super is also used to describe an individual or thing that surpasses customary or normal.

Rahab: It is often said that Rahab, while being a true historical person, also serves as a symbolic foreshadowing or "type" of the church and Gentile believers. She was, in fact, the first recorded Gentile convert. There are many ways in which Rahab portrays the church. First, she was part of a pagan world system, a prostitute, who by her conversion was enabled to become a legitimate bride. In like fashion, Israel was the first chosen people of God, but they were set aside temporarily so the Gentiles could be brought into the kingdom of God, and the church is now considered the bride of Christ (Romans 11; Ephesians 5:25-27). Second, Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was saved because of her faith in "God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Hebrews 11:31). Likewise, Christians are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Third, although Rahab and Christians are saved by an act of grace through faith, true faith requires and is demonstrated by action (James 2). Rahab had to put the scarlet cord out of the window. Christians must accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and then go on to live in a manner that verifies that our faith is real. Fourth, Rahab could have indicated the location of her home in any number of ways. But the only way that she could be spared was to follow the directions given to her by the Israelite spies. The world tells us that there are many ways to God and salvation, all equally valid. But the Bible tells us, concerning Jesus Christ, that "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Fifth, Rahab's faith enabled her to turn away from her culture, her people, and her religion and to the Lord. Commitment to a true faith in God may require setting priorities that are contrary to those of the world, as we are encouraged to do in Romans 12:2.

Finally, once we come to Christ, our pasts no longer matter. The slate is wiped clean for all who believe and accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross on our behalf. Rahab was no longer viewed as an unclean prostitute, but as one worthy by grace to be part of the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as she was joined into the line of Christ, so we become children of God and partakers in His inheritance (Romans 11). We find in the life of Rahab the inspiring story of all sinners who have been saved by grace. In her story, we learn of the amazing grace of God that can save even the worst of sinners and bring them into an abundant life in Christ Jesus. Rahab's actions are mentioned in [James 2:25–26](#) as an example of true, living faith: Her actions saved lives and revealed her heart of faith. Despite her background, her faith and actions worked together to reveal her as a **Super Woman** who believed in God.

NOTES

52 Day Challenge

Scripture Text:
Nehemiah Chapter 1-2, 4 & 6

Key Verse: “Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me: as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)

Nehemiah: was the governor of Jerusalem who helped rebuild the city wall. Nehemiah was the personal cupbearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes (ruled 464-424 B.C.) About 445 B.C. Nehemiah received permission from Artaxerxes to go to Judah and restore his people’s fortunes. He was appointed governor of the province with authority to rebuild the city walls. The people, inspired by Nehemiah, give tithes of much money, supplies and manpower to complete the wall in a remarkable 52 days, despite much opposition. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were three enemies of the Jews who made several attempts to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were regional governors serving under the king of Persia. Sanballat, called a Horonite, was probably from Horonaim, a city of Moab. Tobiah the Ammonite was governing an area east of the Jordan River. Geshem the Arab was most likely from the region south of Judah. Generations after Israel had first possessed the Promised Land, some of their old enemies were back, seeking to keep Jerusalem in ruins. These three men in particular used various schemes in their attempt to disrupt the Jews’ work. They sought to harm Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:2); intimidate him with false reports (verses 5–6); deceive him with false prophets (verses 7–13); and influence the nobles of Judah (verses 17–19). Nehemiah adds that Eliashib the high priest was related to Tobiah (Nehemiah 13:4) and one of his grandsons was the son-in-law of Sanballat (Nehemiah 13:28).

Nehemiah was a man of prayer and he prayed passionately for his people (Nehemiah 1). His passionate intercession for God’s people foreshadows our great Intercessor, Jesus Christ, who prayed fervently for His people in His high-priestly prayer in John 17. Both Nehemiah and Jesus had a burning love for God’s people which they poured out in prayer to God, interceding for them before the throne. Nehemiah led the Israelites into a respect and love for the text of Scripture. Nehemiah, because of his love for God and his desire to see God honored and glorified, led the Israelites towards the faith and obedience God had desired for them for so long. In the same way, Christians are to love and revere the truths of Scripture, commit them to memory, meditate on them day and night, and turn to them for the fulfillment of every spiritual need.

Nehemiah stands as a testament to faithfulness and perseverance. He lived far away from his home, yet he never gave up hope that someday he would return to it. He spent most of his life in exile in a pagan land, yet he never wavered in his faith and trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was a prayer warrior, putting everything before the Lord in prayer, interceding on behalf of his people, and he was rewarded for his diligence and perseverance. Nehemiah cared so much for his people that he never gave up the hope of their restoration, not only to their homeland, but to the God that first called their forefather, Abraham, out of the same area and made a covenant with him, one which Nehemiah believed would stand forever. We can learn from the life of Nehemiah valuable lessons in restoring and maintaining a relationship with God.

NOTES

Inside Job

Scripture Text:
Job Chapter 1 & 2

Key Verses of the Book of Job:

Job 1:8 “And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect (blameless) and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth (Shuns) evil.?”

Job 42:5-6 “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor (despise) myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job 42:10 “And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

Job: was a real person, as Ezekiel 14:14-20 and James 5:11 indicate. He was a native of the land of Uz, which scholars have located either northeast of Palestine, near desert land, probably between the city of Damascus and the Euphrates River, or to the southeast, in the area of Edom. Job probably lived before or around the time of Abraham (1997-1967 B.C.) Some have suggested that Job was about 70 years old at the time of the events. He was very wealthy; he and his sons were homeowners in a large city of the region; he was a respected and popular judge, and benefactor of his fellow citizens. He was a righteous man in God’s eyes. The events related in this book were initiated by God, for God did not allow Job’s trials because of any sin in his life. Job emerged from the severe testing with a fresh appreciation of God’s sovereignty and abundance for the believer’s life.

Brief Summary: The book of Job opens with a scene in heaven where Satan comes to accuse Job before God. He insists Job only serves God because God protects him and seeks God’s permission to test Job’s faith and loyalty. God grants His permission, only within certain boundaries. Why do the righteous suffer? This is the question raised after Job loses his family, his wealth, and his health. Job’s three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, come to “comfort” him and to discuss his crushing series of tragedies. They insist his suffering is punishment for sin in his life. Job, though, remains devoted to God through all of this and contends that his life has not been one of sin. A fourth man, Elihu, tells Job he needs to humble himself and submit to God’s use of trials to purify his life. Finally, Job questions God Himself and learns valuable lessons about the sovereignty of God and his need to totally trust in the Lord. Job is then restored to health, happiness and prosperity beyond his earlier state.

Practical Application: The Book of Job reminds us that there is a "cosmic conflict" going on behind the scenes that we usually know nothing about. Often we wonder why God allows something, and we question or doubt God's goodness, without seeing the full picture. The Book of Job teaches us to trust God under all circumstances. We must trust God, not only WHEN we do not understand, but BECAUSE we do not understand. The psalmist tells us, “As for God, His way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30). If God’s ways are “perfect,” then we can trust that whatever He does—and whatever He allows—is also perfect. This may not seem possible to us, but our minds are not God’s mind. It is true that we can’t expect to understand His mind perfectly, as He reminds us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Nevertheless, our responsibility to God is to obey Him, to trust Him and to submit to His will, whether we understand it or not.

NOTES

Smoke and Mirrors

Scripture Text:
Genesis Chapter 3

Key Verses: And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:4-5)

Origin of the phrase “Smoke and Mirrors”

This expression refers to the performances of stage magicians who use actual smoke and mirrors to deceive the audience. The figurative use that is now more common today refers to the disguising or exaggerating of the truth that is employed by politicians in order to deceive the general public. Smoke and mirrors is a phrase for a deceiving, fraudulent or slight explanation or description. It is someone that intentionally provides misleading information or distorts the truth.

Who was this original person to use “Smoke and Mirrors?”

Lucifer: In Latin means morning star “light bearer” In Hebrew it means “bright one” now name Satan, is an angelic being who fell from his position in heaven due to sin and is now completely opposed to God, doing all in his power to stop God's purposes. Satan was created as a holy angel. Isaiah 14:12 gives Satan’s pre-fall name as Lucifer. Ezekiel 28:13-18 describes Satan as having been created an anointed cherub, apparently the highest created angel. He became arrogant in his beauty and status and decided he wanted to sit on a throne above that of God (Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:15). Satan’s pride led to his fall. Notice the many “I will” statements in Isaiah 14:12-15. Because of his sin, God permanently removed Satan from his exalted position and role.

Satan became the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). He is an accuser (Revelation 12:10), a tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5), and a deceiver (Genesis 3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:3). His very name means “adversary” or “one who opposes.” Another of his titles, the devil, means “slanderer.” Even though he was cast out of heaven, he still seeks to elevate his throne above God. He counterfeits all that God does, hoping to gain the worship of the world and encourage opposition to God's kingdom. Satan is the ultimate source behind every false cult and world religion. Satan will do anything and everything in his power to oppose God and those who follow God. However, Satan’s destiny is sealed an eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

Satan's influence in worldly affairs is also clearly revealed (John 12:31). Satan is also extremely intelligent. Through his intelligence he deceived Eve (Adam Sinned) and took over their rule of the world for himself (Genesis 1:26; 3:1-7; 2 Corinthians 11:3). His cleverness enables him to carry out his deceiving work almost at will, although his power is subject to God's restrictions. Satan's nature is malicious. His efforts in opposing God, His people, and His truth are tireless (Job 1:7; 2:2; Matthew 13:28). He is always opposed to man's best interests (1 Chronicles 21:1; Zechariah 3:1-2). Through his role in introducing sin into the human family (Genesis 3), Satan has gained the power of death—a power which Christ has broken through His crucifixion and resurrection and has given us eternal life!

NOTES

God Makes No Sense

Scripture Text:
Genesis Chapter 22: 1-19

Key Verse: “And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Genesis 22:2)

Why did God command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

Abraham had obeyed God many times in his walk with Him, but no test could have been more severe than the one in Genesis 22. This was a shocking command because Isaac was the son of promise. God had promised several times that from Abraham’s own body would come a nation as countless as the stars in heaven. Later, Abraham was specifically told that the promise would be through Isaac. The Verb *tempt* is better rendered as “proved” or “tested.” God does not *tempt* anyone with evil (James 1:13) but in certain instances He does test, try or prove us (James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6-7). Therefore we must believe that the command to sacrifice Isaac was not evil. God knew what He would do in the end. He had no intention to permit the murder of Isaac. Abraham’s faith was being tried. This was the entire purpose of this episode to trust and obey God even when it makes no sense.

What should we learn from the life of Abraham?

We don’t know how Abraham reacted internally to this command. All we see is Abraham faithfully obeying the God who was his shield (Genesis 15:1) and who had been extraordinarily gracious and good to him up to this point. As with the earlier command to leave his home and family (Genesis 12: 1-9), Abraham obeyed (Genesis 22:3). We know the story ends with God holding back Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, but imagine how Abraham must have felt. He had been waiting decades for a son of his own, and the God who promised this child to him was about to take him away. The point is that Abraham’s faith in God was greater than his love for his son, and he trusted that even if he sacrificed Isaac, God was able to bring him back from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham had his moments of failure and sin (as we all do), We know of at least two occasions in which Abraham lied regarding his relationship to Sarah in order to protect himself in potentially hostile lands (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18). In both these incidents, God protects and blesses Abraham despite his lack of faith. We also know that the frustration of not having a child got to Abraham and Sarah as they came up with a plan to take matters into their own hands with Sarah’s servant, Hagar (Genesis 16:1-15). The birth of Ishmael not only demonstrates the futility of Abraham’s folly and lack of faith, but also the grace of God (in allowing the birth to take place and even blessing Ishmael). Abraham definitely had his moments of doubt and disbelief, yet he is still exalted among men as an example of the faithful life. Finally, we see that James uses the life of Abraham as an illustration that faith without works is dead (James 2:21). The example he uses is the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Simple acceptance to the truths of the gospel is not enough to save. Faith must result in good works of obedience that show a living faith. The faith that was enough to justify Abraham and count him as righteous in God’s eyes (Genesis 15) was the very same faith that moved him into action as he obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham was justified by his faith, and his faith was “tested” or proved by his works. And so should ours!!!

NOTES

Altar Call

Scripture Text:
Isaiah Chapter 6

Key Verses: “Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.” (Isaiah 6: 6-7)

Isaiah: Isaiah, whose name means “Yahweh is salvation,” is best known for writing the book that bears his name in the Old Testament. His writings are especially significant for the prophecies he made about the coming Messiah, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Little is written about Isaiah the man. We know that his father name was Amoz. Married to “the prophetess” (Is. 8:3) and they had two sons. He was probably born in Jerusalem to a family related to the royal house of Judah. He spent his early years as an official of King Uzziah of Judah (2 Chr. 26:22). When Uzziah died (c. 740 B.C.), Isaiah received his prophetic calling in a stirring vision of God. Isaiah’s primary work was that of preaching judgment (Is. 6:10; Matt. 13:14, 15). Judah would ultimately experience devastation at the hands of Babylonians in 586 B.C. Isaiah was a writer of considerable skill who was steadfast in his devotion to the Lord. According to popular Jewish tradition, Isaiah met his death by being sawn in two during the reign of the evil King Manasseh of Judah. (cf. Heb. 11:37)

What is an altar?

An altar is any structure upon which offerings such as sacrifices are made for religious purposes. It was usually a raised platform with a flat surface. There are over four hundred references to altars in the Bible. The word *altaris* first used in Genesis 8:20 when Noah built an altar to the Lord after leaving the ark. However, the idea was present as early as Genesis 4:3–4 when Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to the Lord. An altar always represented a place of consecration. Before God gave His Law to Moses, men made altars out of whatever material was available. An altar was often built to commemorate an encounter with God that had a profound impact upon someone. Abram (Genesis 12:7), Isaac (Genesis 26:24–25), Jacob (Genesis 35:3) all built altars and worshiped after having a unique encounter with God. An altar usually represented a person’s desire to consecrate himself fully to the Lord. God had worked in a person’s life in such a way that the person desired to create something tangible to memorialize it. Sometimes God Himself commanded that an altar be built after He had delivered someone in a miraculous way (Deuteronomy 27:4–7; Exodus 30:1). Such an altar would be a memorial to help future generations remember the mighty works of the Lord. In the broadest sense, an altar is merely a designated place where a person consecrates himself to someone or something. Many church buildings have “altars” for prayer, communion, weddings, and other sacred purposes. Some Christians create their own “altars” for personal worship as visible reminders of Romans 12:1, which says to “present yourself as a living sacrifice.”

Every human heart has an invisible altar where the war between the flesh and the spirit rages. When we surrender areas of our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit, we are in effect laying that area on the altar before God. It can help to visualize Abraham’s altar where he offered his son Isaac to the Lord (Genesis 22:9). We can ask the Lord what areas of our lives He is requiring that we offer to Him. We can symbolically lay that on the altar and let go. We don’t need a flat-topped surface; we can surrender our lives to God on the altar of our hearts at any time.

NOTES

The Heart of the Matter

Scripture Text:

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 & Ezekiel 36: 26-28

What is the Heart? A muscular organ in humans and many animals that receives blood from veins and pumps it through the arteries to other parts of the body. The heart especially in Bible could often be translated to mean “mind.” Since the Hebrews had no separate word for “mind” the word ‘heart’ often served to represent the mind. Both Testament also see the heart figuratively as the center of the personality or spiritual life. The heart or mind is the seat of the intellect, emotions, and desire with the will being in control.

What is the New Covenant? The New Covenant (or New Testament) is the promise that God makes with humanity that He will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those whose hearts are turned toward Him. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, and His death on the cross is the basis of the promise (Luke 22:20). The New Covenant was predicted while the Old Covenant was still in effect—the prophets Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all allude to the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant that God had established with His people required strict obedience to the Mosaic Law. Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), the Law required that Israel perform daily sacrifices in order to atone for sin. But Moses, through whom God established the Old Covenant, also anticipated the New Covenant. In one of his final addresses to the nation of Israel, Moses looks forward to a time when Israel would be given “a heart to understand” (Deuteronomy 29:4, ESV). Moses predicts that Israel would fail in keeping the Old Covenant (verses 22–28), but he then sees a time of restoration (30:1–5). At that time, Moses says, “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (verse 6). The New Covenant involves a total change of heart so that God’s people are naturally pleasing to Him.

The prophet Jeremiah also predicted the New Covenant. “‘The day will come,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. . . . But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,’ says the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (Jeremiah 31:31, 33). Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17) and to establish the New Covenant between God and His people. The Old Covenant was written in stone, but the New Covenant is written on our hearts. Entering the New Covenant is made possible only by faith in Christ, who shed His blood to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

The New Covenant is also mentioned in Ezekiel 36:26–27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Under the New Covenant, we are given the opportunity to receive salvation as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8–9). Our responsibility is to exercise faith in Christ, the One who fulfilled the Law on our behalf and brought an end to the Law’s sacrifices through His own sacrificial death. Through the life-giving Holy Spirit who lives in all believers (Romans 8:9–11), we share in the inheritance of Christ and enjoy a permanent, unbroken relationship with God (Hebrews 9:15).

NOTES

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Scripture Text:
Isaiah Chapter 55 Verses 1-7

What is the definition of a Gift? A gift is something given to another freely and without payment in return. Something bestowed or acquired without any particular effort by the recipient or without being earned.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 55 1-7 Isaiah talks about this free gift called **Salvation**. The definition of the word salvation is deliverance from danger or suffering. The word carries the idea of victory, health, or preservation. A definition of the Christian doctrine of salvation would be "The deliverance, by the grace of God, from eternal punishment for sin which is granted to those who accept by faith God's conditions of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus." Salvation is available in Jesus alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) and is dependent on God alone for provision, assurance, and security.

How do we receive salvation? We are saved by *faith*. First, we must *hear* the gospel" the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection (Ephesians 1:13). Then, we must *believe*" fully trust the Lord Jesus (Romans 1:16). This involves repentance, a changing of mind about sin and Christ (Acts 3:19), and calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

How does God save? In the Christian doctrine of salvation, God has rescued us through Christ (John 3:17). Specifically, it was Jesus' death on the cross and subsequent resurrection that achieved our salvation (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 1:7). Scripture is clear that salvation is the gracious, undeserved gift of God (Ephesians 2:5, 8) and is only available through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

The word **Gift** is an important one in the Bible. In the New Testament there are several Greek words translated "gift." However, when it comes to the matter of our salvation, the New Testament writers use different Greek words" words that emphasize the gracious and absolutely free quality of the gift. Here are the two words most commonly used for the gift of salvation:

Dorea, meaning "a free gift." This word lays particular stress on the cost-free nature of the gift" it is something given above and beyond what is expected or deserved. Every New Testament occurrence of this word is related to a spiritual gift from God. It is what Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:10). It is called the "free gift" in Romans 5:15. It is the "unspeakable [or indescribable] gift" in 2 Corinthians 9:15.

Charisma, meaning "a gift of grace." This word is used to define salvation in Romans 5:15-16. Also, in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the GIFT [charisma] of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Obviously, if something is a "gift of grace," it cannot be earned. To work for something is to deserve it, and that would produce an obligation" a gift of debt, as it were. That is why works destroy grace (Romans 4:1-5; 11:5-6).

When presenting salvation, the New Testament writers carefully chose words that emphasize grace and freedom. As a result, the Bible could not be more clear' salvation is absolutely free, the true gift of God in Christ, and our only responsibility is to receive the gift by faith (John 1:12; 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

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