

I. Eve had life at her fingertips.

She knew God face to face. She had walked with God. She never knew fear, or worry, or stress. She was innocent of the things that we think of as worldly. All she knew of the world was perfection—*she knew God.*

1. Discuss what you think it would be like to know God face to face.
2. What would Eve's 'worldly' experience have been before she sinned?
3. From the following scriptures, describe some of the benefits of 'knowing God' that Eve had.

Jeremiah 22:15b-16.

1 John 4:8

II. Temptation: Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Peter 5:8.

We don't know how long it took Satan to seduce Eve. Remember that the tempter deceived Eve, and we are warned of Satan's cunning. It seems that Eve was familiar with the serpent and had no cause to fear him. Much like a child, she was unaware of the harm that could come to her.

However, Eve was an adult, and she had the ability to reason. It's clear from the scripture that she knew God and she knew God's instructions. She also knew that the serpent was asking her to disobey them. In fact the crafty deceiver forced her to admit that what God's will was. The fruit represented more than just a tasty snack. It offered Adam and Eve a way to show loyalty to God. The serpent led Eve to admit that God was the authority and then proceeded to repudiate that authority. Eve's choice was to stand with God or agree with the serpent.

1. Read Genesis 2:16-17, note what the actual command from God was.

Was there any doubt or vagueness about God's instructions?

To whom was this command originally given?

2. From Genesis 3:1-6, note what Eve knew was the will of God.
3. Follow the reasoning that Eve used to choose disobedience over obedience: Using 1 John 2:16, list the process as Eve fell into sin, described in Genesis 3:6.
4. How is the enemy tempting you to reject God's authority in your life? Discuss what you know in your heart about the choices that are before you.

III. Disappointment: Genesis 3: 7-13; 2 Cor. 11:3.

At Christmas time a billboard in New York boasted that the story of Jesus is a myth and urged a celebration of "reason". Satan had been able to plant a false hope in Eve's heart. When she finally succumbed to human reasoning, she expected something better than she had. A lie is always about a false hope...that reality will be changed into something else. Much of what is wrong about the world is the results from hopes and dreams built on an age old lie: You can have something better if you turn away from God. But rejecting God never makes life better.

1. What was false about the hope that the serpent used to attract Eve?
2. Why did Eve think it was reasonable to reject God?
3. What was the reality that Eve should have considered?
4. Is there any reason that Eve could not have sought God's help in her search for knowledge?

5. Was there any good thing that came to Eve as a result of her sin?
6. Read descriptions of God's punishment in Job 24:4-5 and 2 Corinthians 11:3. These are the things that Adam and Eve did not know. In the garden, before the fall, did they have any need to know these things?

Job 24:4-5

2 Corinthians 11:3

IV. Hope: Genesis 3:8-24.

The new reality that Adam and Eve faced was shame, fear, and suffering. It was something they had never seen. They hid from God, something that had never occurred to them before. Yet, He understood their despair because it mirrored his own despair. The intimacy between them had been destroyed. There would be no more leisurely walks in the garden; no more open conversations, face to face—the Creator and His creation in complete harmony. No longer would there be harmony in relationships. The earth would now know death.

Adam and Eve had no idea how to solve the problem. Their only recourse was to hide. God had compassion on Adam and Eve despite the fact that they had rejected him. He understood their embarrassment and provided clothing for them. But God offered more than a wardrobe. He offered a solution. They would be punished; Satan would be cursed. The relationship between God and man would be restored...at great cost.

1. What word describes the tempter's punishment? (v. 14)
2. What part would the woman play in the tempter's ultimate demise? (v. 15)
3. What word describes what would happen to the woman's seed?
4. What is the hope that God promised to Adam and Eve? (Colossians 1:25-27)

Key Question: What is at least one thing that you already know about God that should be enough to help you resist Satan's temptations?

Because of God's infinite love and mercy, Eve carried the treasure in her physical body. As we follow THE STORY, we will become acquainted with 31 women of the Bible. We'll track how God guards the treasure until the time is right to reveal Him. But he will come—*through a woman*.

For additional Reflection.

Read John 8:34-35 and James 1:12-18.

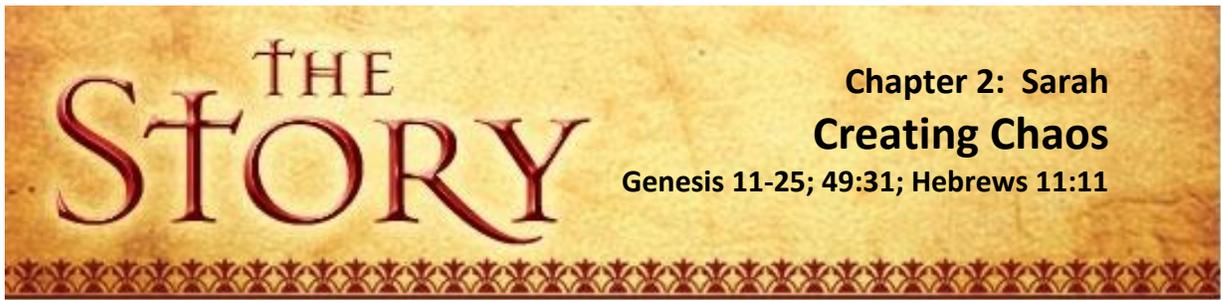
How does what God offers compares with what Satan offers?

Read I Cor. 10:11-13.

What do we have in common with Adam and Eve.

What information do we have that Eve did not have? (v.11)

What is the protection that God offers?



I. Sarah's Life of Faithfulness

Her name meant "princess". We know that Abraham and Sarah lived in the important city of Ur. They would have been educated and they were wealthy. We know Sarah as the one who laughed at God's promise and had taken matters into her own hands to bring it about. God is the creator of all good things, but when we take things into our own hands we usually create chaos. Sarah learned this lesson the hard way. Yet, God spoke to Sarah face to face and she is one of only two women mentioned in Hebrews 11:11 for her faithfulness. We know that Sarah had faith. (Ro. 4:19-22)

F.F. Bruce suggest a better translation for the difficult Hebrews text: "By faith Abraham, together with Sarah, received power to beget a child when he was past age" ...This commends the faith of both Abraham and Sarah (Lea, T.D. 210).

Note the important events from Sarah's life from Genesis.

12:1-9. Sarah _____ her home and followed Abraham.

12:10-17; 20. She _____ God and _____ Abraham.

13-14. Sarah endured difficulties with Abram's nephew, _____.

15: 4-6. God promised that Abraham would be the _____ of many nations.

16. Sarah gives _____ to Abraham so he can have an heir.

17:15-21. God promised that Sarah would _____ a child, and she would be the mother of nations.

1. What was the hope that helped Sarah remain faithful despite difficulties? (1 Peter 3:6)

2. Note some things that show Sarah's faith was human?

II. Our Faithfulness

The struggle with faithfulness in the face of our human circumstances is as grueling for us as it was for Sarah. How kind and gentle was the Lord in his encounter with Sarah as recorded in Genesis 18:9-15. Sarah's laugh has been characterized as a sign of disbelief—lack of faith, or even impertinent. Note that she laughed and kept her thoughts *to herself*. But the Lord heard those private ponderings and he recognized her feelings. He knew that to her knowledge it was a fact that she was no longer physically able to have a child, nor was her husband able to impregnate her.

She wanted to believe the promise, but now the passing of time, and her own body, denied the possibility. In fact, that was exactly what the Lord seemed to have been waiting for! He wanted her to realize it was impossible! He did not rebuke her, nor ridicule her. He simply reiterated his promise to Abraham, and then, for the first time, He spoke directly to her. The Lord addressed Sarah in a way that revealed an intimate understanding of her heart..."Yes, you did laugh."

God knows that our knowledge is limited. Our doubts and fears do not prohibit God from working. It is through those very fears and doubts that God works *with* his followers to show his infinite mercy and power. Faith is when despite what we are able to understand from a human perspective—we say, "I'm still standing with you God because You are in control."

1. Note some things that show your faith was human.
2. Share a time when, in the face of impossible obstacles, you simply put your hope in God and did the best you could.

III. God's Faithfulness

God handled Sarah's fragile faith with gentleness. He knows our weaknesses, and he knows our faith is human faith. We are confused when we think it is *our faith* that matters. It is God that matters...we don't need to have faith in *our faith*. Believers can go through times of weariness and fear, recognizing this life as a battle ground, *without rejecting God*. We must have faith in *God's faithfulness* because God's sovereignty and God's fulfilled promises prove that He is faithful.

1. What does God's faithfulness mean to you?
2. How does God's authority help us to remain faithful? (Psalm 73:28).

We have evidence that God is faithful because He has always kept his promises. We saw last week that God made a promise to Eve, and to all mankind. We have seen that he lovingly worked in Sarah's life and gave her heart's desire. As God works through individual lives, He weaves through that life, faithfulness to keep His promises, *and* blessing to that individual. Sarah's seed would bless the nations. Sarah carried the treasure.

Key Question: In what issue or need will you trust God's faithfulness?

For Additional Reflection.

- On God's fulfilled promises write "evidence".
- On the promises yet to be fulfilled, write "God is faithful."

Isaiah 7:14-Jesus will be born of a virgin.

Mic. 5:2- His birth will be in Bethlehem.

Ps. 71:10- Great persons will come to worship him.

Jer. 31:15- The children of Bethlehem would be killed.

Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1- John the Baptist would precede him.

Isa. 53:2- Jesus would have no earthly riches.

Isa. 35:5, 6- Jesus would work miracles.

Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14-He would be betrayed by a friend.

Zec. 22:12-He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver.

Ps. 22:18- His garments would be divided and gambled for.

Ex 12:46; Ps. 34:20- None of his bones would be broken.

Lk. 24:7- Jesus would be delivered to sinful men, crucified and raised on the 3rd day.

Ps. 16:10; Isa. 26:19-His resurrection

Ps. 68:18-His ascension.

Isa. 11:10; 42:1-Gentiles would be converted to him.

Is. 9:7; Da. 7:14- His kingdom will last for eternity.

Jn. 8:12- Jesus' followers will have the light of life.

Jn. 13:3- Jesus would go back to God.

Jn. 16:33- Jesus would conquer the world.

Acts 2:35-38- We will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism.

Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:6-7- The peace of God will guard our hearts.

1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thes. 4: 15-18- The dead will rise and we will be changed.

Jn. 14:2-3- He will come again and take his followers back with him to a place he has prepared.

Matt.24:30- Jesus will come again in power and glory.

Ro. 14:11- Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall praise.

Rev. 21:4- He will wipe away all the tears from our eyes.



Chapter 3 of *The Story* tells the life of Abraham's great grandson, Joseph. His life continues the story of how God guided and protected his people. God's promised people carried the treasure. They would eventually produce the Promised One who brings salvation to all. Joseph experienced life's ups and downs...literally. In Canaan, his jealous brothers threw him into a cistern to die, only to pull him out again and sell him to merchants who were passing through. He was eventually sold in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph rose to new heights as God blessed him and all those around him. Potiphar so trusted Joseph that he only worried about what he ate! In Genesis 39 we find the story of Joseph's fall from Potiphar's highly trusted aide to despised prisoner because Potiphar's wife abused her power. Whether the attacks come from jealous brothers or zealous women, "God sees to it that Joseph ends up in situations in which he will be elevated to a position of leadership" (Kissling 453).

I. Human power abused. Genesis 39:6b-20; I John 2:16; I Peter 5:8

1. What power did Potiphar's wife have?

2. List the sins that Potiphar's wife committed throughout the ordeal in Genesis 39.

v. 7a

v. 7b

v. 10

v. 12

v. 14

v. 17

v. 19

3. Read James 1:14-15.

"But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

From Genesis 39:6-20, describe how you see Potiphar's wife following the steps of the path of temptation as outlined in James.

In contrast, how did Joseph respond to temptation?

Potiphar's wife squandered her power as she roamed about seeking to devour Joseph. The woman's behavior is typical of the adulteress who calls out to her prey as described in Proverbs. Sadly this is still a true picture of some, and God is saddened by the misuse of the power he has given us. But there is another call described in Proverbs that is just as clear and just as compelling. We need a new "women's movement" that is characterized by women who are empowered, not by selfish desires, but moved by the Holy Spirit to seek and serve God. When men and women place their human power in God's hands they are wise.

II. Human power energized.

1. Examine the following Proverbs and note some of the characteristics of wisdom.

Proverbs 8:1

Proverbs 8:6-10

Proverbs 8:22

Proverbs 8:35

2. Fill in the blanks.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of _____ and the knowledge of the Holy One is _____ . Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)

(See: Ephesians 1:15-23; 2 Timothy 3:15; Proverbs 16:16; Proverbs 2:1-12; Isaiah 11:2.)

3. Mention the powers or abilities that each of these Bible women misused:

Job's wife: Job 2:9-10

Sapphira: Acts 5:1-10.

Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2-3. (Do you think there is any meaning to the fact that Paul added the thoughts in v. 5-8 here?)

The Proverbs 31 and Titus 2 passages describe the amazing abilities we have as women, and the fruitfulness that can come when we invest our lives in the Lord.

4. Read Genesis 50:19-20. Explain how this is wise.

Key Question: What abuse or misuse of your power do you need to discard redirect and place under God's wisdom?

We have seen how the Enemy of God has tempted men and women to use their power for evil. But no matter how vicious the battle would become, God's power was always at work to protect the treasure that His people carried in their bloodline. Today, we have the promise and the power living in us, if we've made Him the Lord and Master of our lives.

For additional reflection.

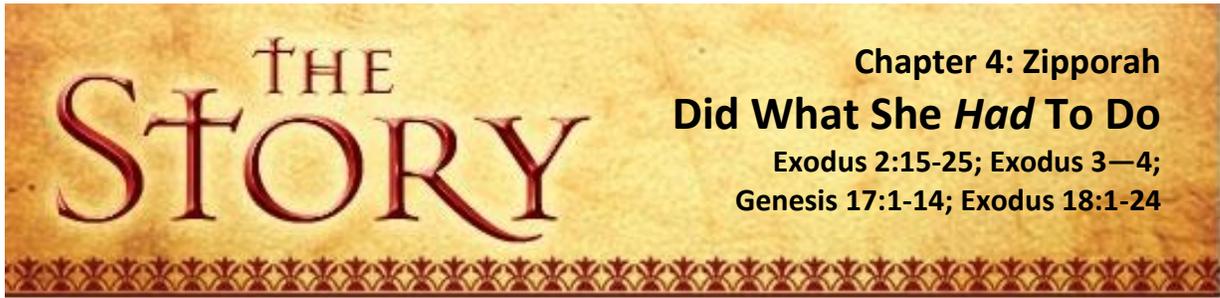
- Study 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and 7:23.

What does it mean to you that we no longer belong to ourselves?

- Study 2 Peter 2:1-3.

What kind of power is found in the false teaching that we are bombarded with in our culture?

What is the power that overcomes false teaching?



To understand the story of Zipporah, Moses's wife, we must understand the command of circumcision that God gave to Abraham. Obviously Moses had been circumcised, but he had neglected his obligation to circumcise his sons. This is even more abominable because of the nature of God's command. God intends for his people to lead *their children* into the covenant relationship with Him. If Moses couldn't do that with his own family, how would he succeed as a leader of the nation? God sees Moses' disobedience as a deal breaker. Zipporah finds herself in a life and death situation, and somehow *she knows* that *she* has to act. The heart of God has not changed. We too must be ready to do what we must to make sure every generation carries the message of salvation to the next.

I. Moses Meet's Zipporah. Exodus 2:15-22

Moses had led a charmed life in Egypt, protected by God and raised as a prince by the Pharaoh's daughter. But he made a blunder when he took justice into his own hands to avenge the death of a fellow Hebrew. He ran for his life to the land of Midian where his thirst took him to a well and in what seems like the romantic meeting place for the patriarchs, Moses met Zipporah. (Both Isaac and Jacob had each met their brides at a well.) Moses showed his sense of justice again; this time he rescued seven sisters from rowdy shepherds.

1. Who was Zipporah's father? (Genesis 25:1-5, Exodus 2:19)
2. When was Abraham circumcised? (Genesis 17:26)
3. From Genesis 17:1-14, we see what it meant to be a descendant of Abraham. Answer the following questions.
 - 17:1a- How did God describe himself to Abraham?
 - 17:1b- What were God's first two demands?
 - 17:2- What would God establish between himself and Abraham?
 - 17:4-6- What does God promise to do for Abraham?

17:9-13- What is the covenantal requirement of Abraham?

17:14- What will happen to those who do not participate in this requirement?

Circle the word covenant in these 14 verses.

Underline “descend”, “descendants” and “generations”?

Draw a box around the words “everlasting”.

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty^l; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my *covenant* between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my *covenant* with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram^l; your name will be Abraham,^l for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” Genesis 17:1-14 (NET Bible)

II. What Zipporah *had* to do. Exodus 2:25; 4:18-26; 18:2-4.

The literal translation of Exodus 2:25 is “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob, then God saw the Israelites and God knew” (Bailey 77). This key passage makes the call of Moses clear. God would use this man *to carry out his part of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants*. He had promised to be with them and he would rescue them. God also looked upon Moses and his family, and he intended for them to be a part of that covenant relationship as well. After God’s call, Moses gathered his family and headed back to Egypt. The covenant between God and Abraham is the reason Moses was disciplined by God on the way back to Egypt (Exodus 4:18-26). Moses considered himself an Israelite; he acknowledged the God of Abraham. Yet he himself had not complied with the very essence of his part of the covenant. He had not circumcised at least one of his sons. He had not maintained the covenant *from generation to generation*. At this point Zipporah had to take action.

“Now on the way, at a place where they stopped for the night, the LORD met Moses and sought to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off the foreskin of her son and touched it to Moses’ feet, and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.” So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” referring to the circumcision.)” Exodus 4:24-26.

1. What happened to Moses when they stopped for the night?
2. What action did Zipporah take?
3. Whose responsibility was it to make sure a son was circumcised?
4. Do we know which son was circumcised? (Exodus 18:2-4)

God is faithful. He intended for his people to reflect that faithfulness, but there was a purpose in it. Out of those “descendants” would come the Messiah. Moses would not only lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he would protect the treasure that was in them. It wasn’t gold or silver. It was the Savior of the world. If he couldn’t be trusted with his own sons, how could he be trusted with God’s treasure?

III. What we *have* to do. Philippians 2:12-18

Desperate times call for desperate action. Zipporah intervened to save her husband’s life and in doing so, she played a key role in God’s plan. We can look back at her life and see God’s providential preparation for Jesus (Bailey 78). We can also look forward with anticipation to Jesus’ return. Until then we are called to be “shining stars” in this world. There are people all around us who need to be rescued from sin. Christians are still in a covenant relationship with God through faith and the Holy Spirit. He is calling for action to save lives and souls. We may rationalize that it’s someone else’s responsibility, but like Zipporah, there may be some things we *know we have to do*.

- Who will lead your children to the Lord if your husband is absent or doesn’t take on the responsibility?
- Who will direct and serve in benevolence and rescue ministries?
- What crucial needs are you aware of
 - In your home?
 - In your neighborhood?
 - In your church?

- In your country?
- In the world?

Culture, as well as personal experiences and beliefs, bring men and women to various opinions about the role of women. However, an honest look at God's word will reveal that, yes, women are different, but God has not created them "less than". He has created and equipped women, as well as men, to fit into *His total plan*. No part of God's work is less important than another. All are called to serve; all are called to pray as Jesus instructed in the Lord's Prayer, "thy Kingdom come, they will be done."

Key Question: Is there something that God is calling you to do, even though you may have to do it yourself? What is the first step that you must take?

For additional reflection:

Study these verses and compare them with the God of the Old Covenant:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:19-20.

- Compare Jesus' claim in Matthew 28 with God's claim Genesis 17:1a.
- Compare Jesus' command in Matthew 28 with God's command in Exodus 3:10 and 4:12.
- Compare Jesus' promise in Matthew 28 with God's promise Exodus 3:12.



I. God will make a nation.

From Exodus 19 we learn that “In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai....and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain”. There in front of the mountain God revealed his heart to the people.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” Exodus 19:4-5

He had chosen them above all other nations and would set them apart for his own. He would work **with** them and **through** them, but even then, God desired partnership with mankind. Because of His wisdom, He could maintain that delicate balance of His divine direction, and their individual will and abilities, in order to carry out his part of the covenant. And the Israelites agreed, saying, “We will do everything the Lord has said”.

1. From the following passages, briefly mention what the Israelites should have known about God:

- Exodus 14:13-14, 26-31
- Exodus 15:23-27
- Exodus 16:11-16
- Exodus 17:6
- Exodus 17:8-15
- Exodus 19:3-8, 16-19; 20:20
- Exodus 32:25-35
- Exodus 35:30-35

2. Read Psalm 139. What does this passage tell us about God?

II. Skillful Women help construct the Tabernacle. Exodus 35:5-22, 25

There in the shadow of Mt. Sinai God instructed Moses to build a Tabernacle. He told Moses: ...receive offerings. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. (Exodus 25:8-9).

Among the workers who volunteered for this project were “wise of heart women”, who brought beautiful hand work for the Tabernacle.

This is the first time women are mentioned specifically as participants in both preparing materials to give and giving their dowry jewels. Their skill was a ‘wisdom of heart’ that made them willing to give of themselves and to give up their nest egg with abandon. And God added to the skill of each wise volunteer so that they would know how to construct the sanctuary. He would add to their abilities, but he would ***dwell in the Tabernacle***.

Word Study from Exodus 35. What do each of these expressions mean?

35:5-“willing”

35:10-“skilled person”

35:21-“heart stirred him to action”

35:21-“heart was willing”

35:22-“men and women alike”

1. What is worth noting about the offerings the people brought for the Tabernacle?

- Exodus 25:2
- Exodus 36:6-7

2. Write the Bible description of those who helped construct the Tabernacle. Could this description be applied to the members of our congregation today?

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Exodus 35:5 | Exodus 35:22 |
| Exodus 35:10 | Exodus 35:25-26 |
| Exodus 35:21 | Exodus 35:35 |

3. What replaced the tabernacle as God's Old Covenant dwelling place?

- 1 Chronicles 22:9-10
- 1 Chronicles 23:25-26

III. Skillful women *are* God's dwelling place.

God told the Israelites that he would walk among them and be their God. But he has promised us so much more! Paul explained in Acts 17 that God does not live in temples built with hands. When we accept Jesus as our Savior we receive *his indwelling presence* (Acts 2:38). He doesn't just walk with us, he *lives in us*! Now, women with wise and willing hearts experience a partnership with God in the construction of his Eternal Kingdom, rather than an earthly building. Through his divine work in us we become a part of the Kingdom and we become Kingdom builders as well.

1. In Hebrews 8—12, Paul explains the transition from an earthly Tabernacle to faith in Christ.

- Hebrews 8:5- What does Paul call the tabernacle?
- Hebrews 8:10- What are the terms of the new covenant?
- Hebrews 9:22-27- What forgives the sin that separates us from God?

2. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the new holy temple of the Lord.

- Ephesians 2:20- What is the foundation of this temple?
- Ephesians 2:21- How is it held together?
- Ephesians 2:22- Of what "material" is this dwelling constructed?
- Ephesians 2:22- How does God live there?

3. Since Jesus dwells in us by means of the Holy Spirit, what should we who are Christians realize about our earthly bodies? I. Cor. 6:19

4. Fill in the blanks:

Philippians 1:6- "... he who _____ in you will carry it on to completion."

Philippians 2:13- "...for it is God who _____ to will and to act according to his good purpose.

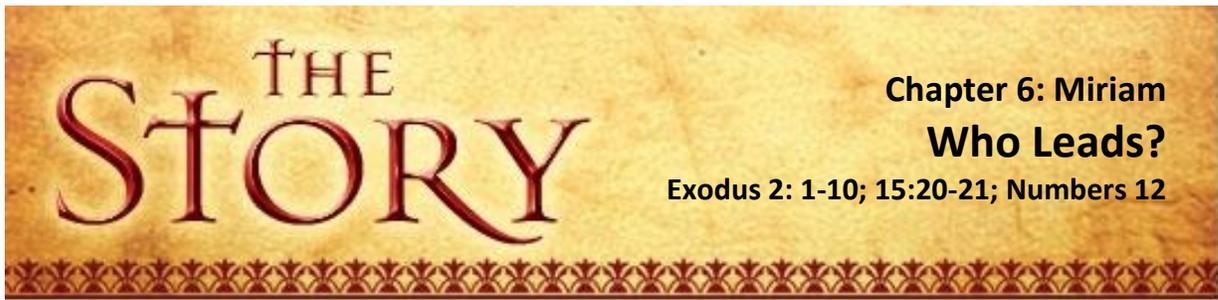
God's plan since the creation has been to have a friendship with man. Could there be any greater treasure than having Him live in our hearts through The Spirit?

Key Question: How will you be 'wise of heart' with a skill that the Lord has given you?

For additional reflection:

Study Ecclesiastes 1:3-8. Glance through the whole book and then read the end—Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Compare the attitudes toward life in the Book of Ecclesiastes with the kind of life described in the passages from Philippians in the previous question?



Chapter 6 of THE STORY reveals Miriam as a qualified leader whom God provided, along with Moses and Aaron, to deliver His people from bondage. But God showed Miriam that he was deadly serious when he taught her a most important lesson about *his* leaders. Their relationship *with Him* is what matters.

I. Miriam as a leader.

1. What do these events from Miriam's life reveal about the kind of person she was?

Exodus 2:4- She watched her baby brother in his basket in the Nile.

Exodus 2:7- She offered their own mother to Pharaoh's daughter as a nurse.

Exodus 15:20- Miriam was called a prophetess.

Exodus 15:20, 21- All the women followed her with tambourines, dancing, and singing.

Numbers 12:1- Miriam led in speaking out against Moses.

Numbers 12:15-16- The Israelites waited for 7 days when Miriam was confined outside of camp.

Numbers 20:1- Her death is recorded.

Micah 6:4- Miriam is named with Moses and Aaron as leaders that God sent to the Israelites.

2. Word Study:

Exodus 2:4- The term "*stood at a distance*" implies *taking a stand*, or *positioning oneself*. What would that imply about how the young girl, Miriam, watched her brother.

Exodus 15:20- The word *prophetess* in ancient literature refers to a woman. It can mean *a poetess*, or *an inspired woman*. How do we know that both things apply to Miriam?

Numbers 8- Levite refers to the descendants of Levi. This tribe was assigned by God with the task of caring for all the duties of the Tabernacle. As a descendant of Levi, what duties did Miriam perform that might correspond to the Tabernacle worship?

II. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses. Numbers 12

The opposition of Miriam and Aaron to Moses came at a difficult time in the life of the Israelite nation. Chapter 6 of *The Story* relates the events from Numbers 11, just preceding the challenge to Moses's authority. The constant complaints had angered God so much that he sent fire from heaven and consumed some who were positioned at the edges of the camp. Only Moses's prayer on their behalf saved the rest of them. Next they drove Moses to distraction because they were hungry for meat. God sent such a quantity of quail that measured three feet deep around them, and then he served a plague for dessert! The truth is they had replaced the respect and honor that they'd had for God during the building of the tabernacle with disrespect and scorn. Even with these images fresh in mind, Miriam and Aaron added to Moses's burdens with their personal criticism.

What did Miriam and Aaron challenge? (v. 1)

What was the real reason for the opposition? (v. 2)

How did Moses react? (v. 3)

What did God do? (v. 4-5)

What was the consequence for Miriam? (v. 9-13)

What was the consequence for the Israelites? (v. 13-16)

The friendship between Moses and God was foreign to Miriam and Aaron. They were uncomfortable with it. Describe this relationship from the following passages.

Exodus 33:17-23

Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:6-9

III. The Leadership Dance

Experienced and qualified women hold responsible positions in the public work place. We're gaining ground in compensation and advancement, yet we receive mixed messages when it comes to our role in the church. However, if we make leadership roles something to be grasped we're dancing around the real issue. Our spiritual qualifications will be revealed through our relationship with God. We need to keep in step with the lover of our soul.

Miriam and Aaron started their opposition with an excuse. But the complaint reveals the real problem.

The Complaint: Consider Miriam's grievance in Numbers 12:2:

“Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’”

- What do these words imply about how Miriam and Aaron had been used by God?
- What do these words reflect about Miriam and Aaron's attitude toward God?
- What would it mean to you if you knew that God had spoken through you?
- To what extent do we have the right to evaluate how God chooses to work with those who serve him as Lord and Master?

Both Miriam and Aaron had demonstrated great leadership. They had also shown terrible lapses of judgment. Moses too, had led well and he had made grave mistakes. Each one had an important role in God's plan. To our knowledge, God had not distinguished Miriam's nor Aaron's contribution as less meaningful than Moses's. But there was a difference.

III. Our Leadership Dance

As women we will have experiences with men who are godly, yet seemingly clumsy leaders who make what are, *in our judgment*, wrong moves. Although the reality is that someone will have the last word in various areas, and some will submit in various ways; *all* should be keeping in step with God who directs our moves. From a worldly perspective this is preposterous. Rank has certain connotations of power and worth. The one on top is 'fair game' and the rest are seeking to 'work up'. Often, like Miriam and Aaron we raise criticism and opposition inappropriately and for the wrong reasons.

1. When do we use excuses to justify our opposition of another leader?

2. Miriam and Aaron revealed their own character flaws in their attack against Moses. From the following passages, note the things that God Word warns against?

Proverbs 14:1

Proverbs 14:30

Matthew 7:1-5

Romans 12:16

Philippians 2:3

Hebrews 13:7

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

James 1:19

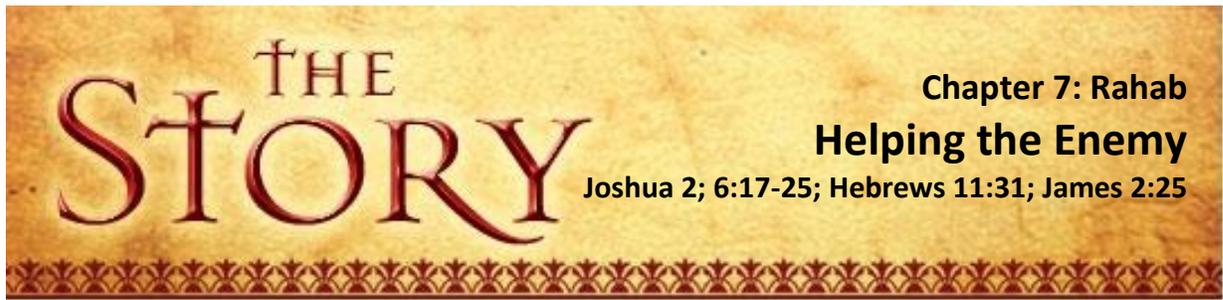
Key Question: In what areas are you prideful in your position rather than pleased to contribute in God's Kingdom.

For additional reflection:

Read Paul's defense of his ministry 2 Corinthians 10.
What are the worldly weapons?

What are the weapons of divine power?

From what are his opponents drawing their conclusions?



Rahab is included by Paul in the faithful “Hall of Fame”. He introduced the faithful ones with this thought: *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved”* Hebrews 10:30. Rahab did not ‘shrink back’, even though it meant helping the enemy army. But God knew she was a treasure; she is one of Jesus’ ancestors!

I. Rahab’s Vantage Point- Joshua 2

For the second time, God was ready to hand over the land of the Canaanites to the Israelites. Joshua was leading a whole new generation, who had not lived through the miraculous deliverance that their fathers had experienced. But the stories from their history, and their own experiences of the power of the One True God, had given courage to the Israelite soldiers. It had also “melted the hearts” of all the cultures around them. Rahab could see the coming doom. She knew that the God of the Israelites was the *“God of Heaven above and on the earth below”*. She had realized that *before* the Israelite spies appeared on her doorstep.

Discover Rahab’s vantage point from Joshua 2.

1. Why did Rahab have so much information about the Israelites and the attitude of the Canaanites?
2. What two events particularly persuaded Rahab to believe in God?
3. Describe the morale of the Caananites.
4. What actions put Rahab on the side of the Israelite invaders? (v. 4-6)

Rahab’s lie: While it is not God’s ideal that we lie “our sin in Adam has created an ethical mess from which we sometimes can’t (don’t) extricate ourselves” (Howard).

v. 11

v. 12-13

v. 15-16

5. What was the promise that the spies had made to Rahab from Joshua 2: 12-21.

6. What was their promise to her? (v. 14)

7. What was Rahab's situation now? Did she have anything to lose by making an agreement with the spies?

8. Who would ultimately have to guarantee this promise? (v. 12)

II. Joshua's Vantage Point- Joshua 1; 3—6

The spies and Joshua were relying on the information of a Canaanite prostitute. Her help was invaluable, not only because she protected them but because of her description of the poor morale among the Canaanites in Jericho. She risked her life *and the lives of her family* on her beliefs. But Rahab was not the only one who made a courageous decision. Joshua was following orders and he was under no obligation to honor the spies' verbal contract with a prostitute who belonged to 'the enemy'!

- Read God's instructions in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and 20:16-19.

1. What had God specifically commanded Joshua to do to the people they would conquer?

2. Were they allowed to make any agreements or contracts with the people of Canaan?

- Review the mission that God had given Joshua from Joshua 1.

1. What state of mind did God want Joshua and the Israelites to have?

2. What was God's repeated promise to Joshua?

- Joshua led the Israelites into battle. Joshua 3—6

1. How did the Israelites cross the Jordan river? (3:16)

2. How many soldiers approached Jericho? (4:13)

3. What was necessary before the Israelites could enter the land? Why? (5:5-8)

- Discover how Joshua viewed Rahab. Joshua 6:17-19.

1. What were Joshua's instructions about Rahab and her household?

2. Why could Joshua's order to rescue Rahab and her family be considered courageous?

3. What do you think Joshua meant when he said "But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them" Joshua 6:18.

When Rahab confessed "*for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below*" (Joshua 2:11), she effectively identified herself with the Israelites. She demonstrated through her actions that she no longer was a Canaanite *at heart*. We have no knowledge of how Joshua came to the conclusion that Rahab should be rescued and saved from destruction. We do know however, that God promised to be with Joshua. *God knew Rahab's heart*. He accepted her as one of the "treasures" that were devoted to Him. In fact, Rahab carried the most precious treasure of all; she is one of Jesus' ancestors! God wanted Rahab to be saved.

III. Our vantage point.

1. What is your unique vantage point in life?

2. Discuss how these insights that have helped you see the wisdom of following Christ.

3. What does the salvation of her family tell us about God's kindness to Rahab?

4. For women, family is usually what we treasure most. Do you think God cares about your family as much as you do? Why?

5. How can we devote ourselves and our family to God?

Key Question: How do you need to “change sides” in your life to join forces with others in God’s Kingdom?

For Additional Reflection:

Read the full account of the Fall of Jericho and the events that followed from Joshua, chapters 3—7. Note the various times and ways that Joshua and the Israelites worshipped God:

Was God intimately involved with them, or withdrawn?



The period of the Judges is the subject of The Story Chapter 8. Commentators described the period as “a time of free, unfettered development, in which the nation was to take root in the land presented to it by God” (Keil & Delitzsch, 239). The fickle Israelites repeated cycles of “doing evil in the sight of the Lord”; bearing the consequences of that evil as God allowed surrounding nations to pummel them; and finally, penitence with a humble return to faithfulness. Each time God provided a judge to rein them in; Deborah was one of the most courageous. Yet, she describes herself as “a mother in Israel” Judges 5:7.

I. Deborah as a wise judge: Judges 4:1-5; 5:6-7.

Deborah, the fourth Judge, lived approximately 140 years after Joshua’s death. She was probably middle-aged at the time of the events described in the Book of Judges. Yet she had seen and heard enough to be a wise and respected woman whom God used in an extraordinary way.

Describe Deborah’s life as a judge:

1. Israel fell into evil after Ehud’s death. From Judges 2:19, what was particularly odious to God?
2. God punished them through Jabin, a Canaanite. Why was Jabin’s army, under the command of Sisera, a lethal threat, Judges 4:2-3?
3. Describe the severity of this oppression? How long had it lasted?
4. From Deborah’s song, Judges 5:6, describe what life was like for the Israelites.
5. To whom did they finally turn for help?
6. Fill in the words to describe Deborah from Judges 4:4.

“Deborah a _____, the _____ of Lappidoth, was _____ Israel at that time.”

7. How did Deborah serve the Israelites?

II. Deborah as a strong military leader: Judges 4-5.

1. What message did God give Deborah for Barak?
2. Who would actually win the battle for the Israelites (4:7, 14)?
3. In your opinion, what did Barak's response to Deborah's message reveal?
4. The expressions translated "Go" (4:9), and "Go!" (4:14) in the NIV can carry the meaning of "Get up and go", and "Stand up and go!" or "Take your stand". Knowing that Barak refused to lead his army without Deborah, what is the implication of her use of these words?
5. Should Deborah's prediction, that a woman would have the honor for the victory, shame Barak? Why or why not?
6. In Deborah's song we have a poetic description of the battle. What does it reveal about the 10,000 man army (5:2)?
7. From Judges 4:15 and 5:4-5, why was Sisera on foot and how did God hinder his army?
8. Who was the woman who received the honor for Sisera's defeat, and how was she able to accomplish it (4:18-21; 5:24-27)?

The Kenite women had responsibility for the tents. Due to the harsh winds and the hard, sunbaked land, "she would had to have been swift and accurate in her use of the tent peg" (Robinson).

The literal translation of Deborah's prediction about Jael is "Into the hand of a woman the Lord will sell Sisera" (Fleenor, Ziese 86). Any reader of Deborah's story will notice how gender roles play against each other in the account. Even simple words are implicit. We understand "the hand that rocks the cradle..." and the gracefulness of a woman's hands. A woman's hands driving a tent peg into a man's temple just don't fit the picture. However the stereotypes about women are very different from the reality about women. My grandmother's hands were strong and rough from hard work on the farm. Yet childhood memories of my hand in hers are sweet. Her cracked, callused hands were beautiful to me.

III. Deborah as a strong mother.

Besides a judge and leader, Deborah was a homemaker. There is no record that Deborah bore children other than her own words: “...I, Deborah a mother in Israel, arose, arose a mother **in** Israel” Judges 5:7. This seems to be the simple answer, yet commentators debate about whether Deborah actually had children. It’s possible she was referring to herself figuratively as a mother *of* Israel because she was a great leader. This is not the usual description of a mother. We might come to a different conclusion as we read this story through a different lens- as women.

Let’s observe Deborah the homemaker: the wife of Lappidoth , a mother in Israel from Judges 4-5. Fill in the chart with characteristics that we can observe about Deborah in her various roles to see if any are different from those needed to be a homemaker and mother. Feel free to add details to the list or add the characteristics you see. Check the boxes where the characteristic would correspond to each role Deborah fulfilled.

| Scripture | Characteristic | Judge | Leader | Homemaker |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|
| 4:4 | Prophetess (inspired by God, poetess) | | | |
| 4:4 | Leader of Israel | | | |
| 4:5 | Settled disputes | | | |
| 4:6 | Messenger, used by God | | | |
| 4:6 | Tactical advisor | | | |
| 4:8 | Mentor | | | |
| 4:9 | Discerning | | | |
| 4:10 | Courageous | | | |
| 4:14 | Encourager | | | |
| 5:1-3 | Worshipper of God | | | |
| 5:7 | Rescuer | | | |
| 5:9 | Compassionate | | | |

IV. Deborah as an example:

Consider your own life and the challenges you face in light of Deborah’s example.

1. Deborah is described in Judges 4 and 5 as: a women, one who spoke for God, a wife, a leader, a judge, and a mother. Circle the descriptions that fit you as well.
2. What would it mean to any woman to realize that life in your village, or town, “*had ceased*”?
3. Do we face an enemy as formidable as Jabin and his army?
4. Consider 1 Peter 5:8-11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-21
 - What are the forces against us today, and what kind of equipment are they outfitted with?
 - What kind of strategies must we use, as women, to protect ourselves and our homes?

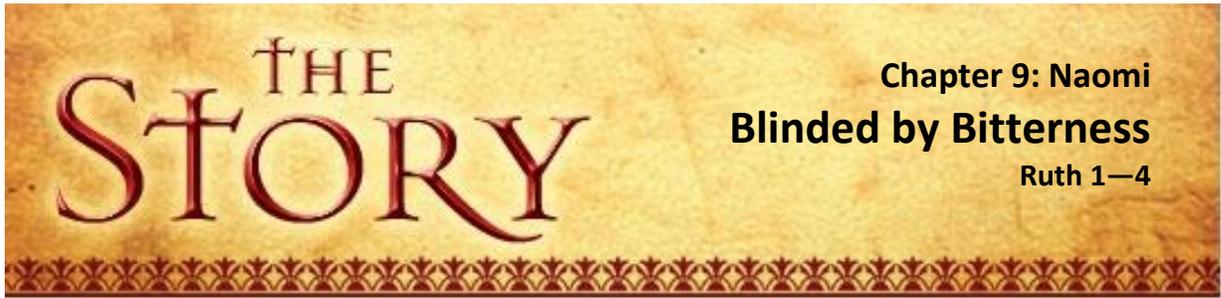
Key Question: What is happening in your community, your church, or your family that demand your courageous leadership? Will you step up to the challenge?

For additional reflection:

We, or our loved ones, may face a lethal threat. It may come through an accident, an illness, or even an attack by an enemy. But the same God who supported Deborah as a homemaker and a leader in Israel is the God who delivers us through any peril.

Note the comfort or advice found in these passages from God's word:

- In the beginning remember: **Jeremiah 10:23-**
- When you face evil remember: **Psalms 23:4-**
- In the midst of the battle, remember: **2 Corinthians 4:16-18-**
- As you endure to the end remember: **James 1:12-**



Naomi lived during the period of the Judges, probably in the time of Gideon. Her story is told in the Book of Ruth. Here in the middle of the history of God’s chosen people, we find a narrative that spotlights the real life struggles of a family in the tribe of Judah. The bitter trials Naomi and Ruth endured were tempered by God’s kindnesses. But Naomi had to get past the bitterness to see them.

I. Naomi’s hard life. Ruth 1

1. On the left side, list the trials and sorrows that Naomi experienced from Ruth 1. On the right side, list any blessings that might have been overlooked during the ordeal.

v. 1

v. 3

v. 5

v. 7

v. 8-12

v. 13-16

v. 19-20

v. 21

2. What overwhelming emotion does Naomi express from v. 13 and v. 20-21?

3. Naomi and her family lived in Moab “about 10 years”. From what you know of the living conditions during the time of the judges, how would the losses that Naomi experienced compare to the losses her peers might well have been suffering?

4. Would the fact that Naomi still had Orpha and Ruth in her life make up for her losses?

Any woman who has lost her husband and children knows that nothing can make up for such a loss. However, a wise woman will allow God to minister to her during the time of intense grief and mourning. We aren't given an exact time frame to know the duration of Naomi's mourning. But going home to the land of Judah soon changed her circumstances.

II. Naomi heads for home. Ruth 1:6-19

The Moabite gods were Chemosh, to whom they offered human sacrifices; and Baal-Peor, for whom they practiced sexual rites of worship. In her despondence, Naomi was willing to send Orpha and Ruth back to their own people to find husbands, even though those people worshipped idols.

1. What reveals the kind of relationship that Naomi had with Orpha and Ruth? (1:8-9)
2. What words made Naomi realize that Ruth was determined to accompany her? (1:16-18)
3. Why would Ruth prefer to stay with Naomi rather than return to her own people?

III. Naomi discovers a new life. Ruth 1:19—4.

Wearing bitterness on her sleeve, Naomi arrived at Bethlehem and with Ruth, started to find a way to live. She must have had a dwelling she could return to, or she was given shelter. But here at least, she was among family, and God soon brought new blessings to the women. Ruth, determined to help her mother-in-law, went to glean in the fields of Boaz. Boaz was impressed with Ruth and in a just a few days life dramatically changed for the two women.

1. What was Naomi's response when Ruth reported Boaz's kindness to them, 2:17-20; 3:1-4?

Naomi used the word *hesed*, translated as kindness in the NIV. *Hesed* is much more than kindness. It is a rich and full term describing "God's love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty and covenant faithfulness" (Block).

2. What did Boaz do to accept his responsibility for Naomi, 4:9-13?
3. According to the women, how was Naomi blessed, 4:14-16?

Naomi's old life, with her husband and sons, was gone. But she discovered that God simply made her a new life—complete with family, rich in love. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, was proclaimed to be better than seven sons—not better than her own two beloved sons—but better than seven *more* sons. God had provided for Naomi through Ruth, better than she could have imagined, at such a time and place in her life.

IV. Nuggets of gold from Naomi's experiences.

➤ A kind and loving Father, understands human expressions of grief and sorrow. We've looked at Naomi's complaints to her daughters-in-law and to her friends in Bethlehem. Job and the Psalmist said it this way:

I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. Job 10:1

Listen, O God, to my prayer! Do not ignore my appeal for mercy! Pay attention to me and answer me! I am so upset and distressed, I am beside myself,... Psalm 55:1,2 (NET Bible)

Naomi came to some false conclusions during her time of mourning.

1. What was Naomi's false conclusion about God, 1:13, 21?

2. What was her false conclusion about herself, 1:20?

There are times when God was reviled by the complaints of his followers.

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. Numbers 11:1

3. What is the difference between an acceptable complaint and one that angers God?

➤ **Treasures from God are often hidden in the depths of sorrow. In His time, God will reveal a new life and unimagined kindness.**

1. Ruth was a treasure that Naomi didn't recognize. What treasure have you discovered through suffering?

2. Noemi had no knowledge of it, but what was the treasure from Noemi's life that blessed all mankind? Ruth 4:22; Luke 3

3. What treasure do we carry that can bless others, even while we are in the midst of our own suffering?

Grieving is natural and reparative but bitterness is not. Larry Crabb writes: "The demand to walk a path with a predictable outcome is an urge of the flesh. It needs to die." A root of bitterness threatened to take over Naomi's life. But God changed her circumstances in a most unpredictable way. In our grief we need to turn to God not bitterness.

Key Question: How will you walk toward blessing instead of bitterness when great tragedy or sorrow comes into your life?

For additional reflection:

Read and meditate on these passages that refer to our redemption in Jesus Christ:

Job 19:23-27

Isaiah 52:3

Galatians 4:4-6



Hannah's story is one of the most well-known and beloved accounts in the Bible. Chapter 10 of *The Story* introduces us to the first king of Israel, and to Samuel, who holds him accountable to God. But long before Samuel did his great, godly work, Hannah, Samuel's mother, did an equally great and godly work—she learned to delight in the Lord.

I. Hannah's Plight. 1 Samuel 1:1-8.

From our study of the women of the Bible we already know how important it was to bear children. It was a woman's desire, as well as her duty, to provide her husband with children, preferably sons. An Israelite woman also dreamed of birthing the Messiah. Hannah's plight prevented her from any of these pleasures.

1. Describe Hannah's family life.(v. 2-7)
2. How did Elkanah demonstrate his faithfulness to God? (v. 3)
3. How did Elkanah demonstrate his love for Hannah? (v. 5,8)
4. Why had Hannah remained childless? (v. 5)
5. How did it this affect her? (v. 7)

The emotional pain of barrenness, combined with the provocation of Peninnah had become unbearable for Hannah. One year, during the annual feast in Shiloh, Hannah took advantage of her proximity to the Lord's temple. Her choice was to take her plight to the Lord. This choice alone makes Hannah a worthy example for anyone who carries a burden of pain. Our pain should point us to the One who will provide perfect healing, *if we will let Him*.

II. Hannah's Petition. 1 Samuel 1:9-18.

1. At what point in the festivities did Hannah decide to take her sorrow to the Lord? (v. 9)
2. What was Hannah's emotional state as she prayed? (v. 10)
3. Besides prayer, what else did she do before God? (v. 11)
4. As Hannah prayed, what did Eli observe and what did he think she was doing? (12, 13)
5. Fill in the blanks and note three things about Hannah's prayer:

Hannah was praying in her _____ and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. 1:13

...I was _____ to the Lord. 1:15b

...I have been praying here out of my great _____ and _____. 1:16b

6. What was Eli's answer to Hannah? (v. 17)
7. How was Hannah changed after the time of prayer? (v. 18)

Eli saw Hannah's lips; God saw her heart. The result of this outpouring in prayer was a change of her very being. *Before* Eli pronounced his blessing upon her, God had already worked in Hannah's heart. When she took her pain and anguish to the Lord, He helped her realize what her true need was. She needed to be content with God *Himself*. Her vow to God revealed that she was no longer seeking her own selfish desire; instead she was offering an unselfish sacrifice. The son, whether a desire in her heart, or a flesh and blood reality, would belong to God.

"A woman was not so unimportant in Israel as to be considered incapable of communicating with God. Significantly, Yahweh was also portrayed as a deity who listened to a woman and answered her prayer" (Bergen).

III. Hannah's Praise. 1 Samuel 1:19—2:11.

Soon Hannah gave birth to a son they named Samuel. Elkanah and Hannah, with great delight, fulfilled the vow Hannah had made. The generous offering and the joyous prayer of praise gives testimony to the condition of Hannah's heart. Before she gave Samuel to the Lord, she had given her heart to the Lord.

Hannah's prayer expressed her complete delight in the Lord. The prayer is one of the longest in the Old Testament and lifts up God's name, Yahweh, 18 times. Although Hannah was not an ancestor of Jesus, the prayer, or praise song, contains the first reference to the Messiah:

He will give strength to his King and exalt the horn of his annointed. 1 Samuel 2:10b

In *The Remarkable Women of the Bible*, Elizabeth George outlines the content of Hannah's praise song.

1. From 1 Samuel 2:1-10, note the attributes of God that Hannah extols:

2:1 I rejoice in Your _____.

2:2 No one is _____ like the Lord.

2:2 There (is no) _____ like our God.

2:3 The Lord is the God of _____.

2:4 Only the Lord has the _____ to make the mighty weak....and the humble exalted.

2:9-10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be _____ in pieces.

2. How old was Samuel when Hannah took him to Eli? (1:24)

Hannah had gone "before the Lord" with her request. Samuel was presented *to the Lord* (1:24) and he remained "before the Lord" always (2:11,18,21).

3. What shows Hannah's steadfast love and care for her son, even from a distance? (2:18-19)

4. How did God further bless Elkanah and Hannah? (2:21)

Everything about Hannah's life provides inspiration and example for women today. The fact that she had deep, unmet longings was not wrong. Her story has shown us a way to handle our deepest unmet desires.

IV. Our Path from Petition to Praise.

1. Read Psalm 17:1-3.

What do you think are the deeper longings of mankind that only God can see?

Think about your own deepest longings. Have you asked God about them?

2. Read James 4:2b-3 and Matthew 6:18-21.

Why doesn't God give us what we ask for sometimes?

3. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:25-34 not to worry about earthly things because the Father knows what we need to sustain earthly life. Is it wrong to ask God about earthly things? Why or why not? (cf. Matthew 6:11)

4. Read Matthew 7:7-11.

What kind of gifts does God give?

Are the things we ask good for us?

In this scripture Jesus says to "ask". What requests would God be delighted to answer?

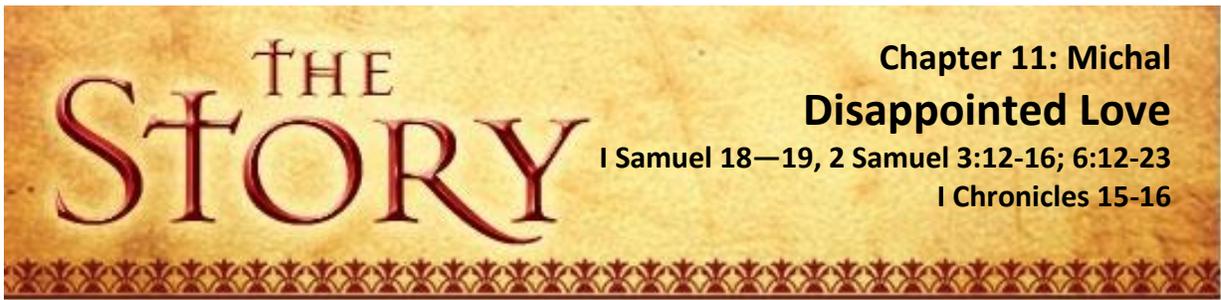
God answered Hannah's heartfelt prayer by providing for her deepest need, the need to *delight in the Lord*. If God were to personally ask you to trade in your deepest longings for a deeper relationship with Him, would you accept?

5. Hannah's story ends with a song of praise. Create your own expression of praise, or write down words from a praise song that are meaningful to you.

Key Question: What area of worry and want in your life will you exchange for delight in the Lord?

For additional reflection.

Read the first four beatitudes from Matthew 5:7-6. Compare them to Hannah's praise song in I Samuel 2:1-11. What are the common truths?



Samuel, a righteous man of God, anointed and mentored two kings of Israel, Saul and David. During his lifetime he saw both of them disappoint their families, their people and their God. In chapter 11 of The Story, we read about Saul, Michal, and David; all sought the wrong things through intrigue, passion and selfishness. A father should have loved his daughter; a husband should have loved his wife. As His representatives, the two kings should have loved God and each other. Instead, they were at war. Perhaps Michal was the biggest loser; she was their pawn, the cast-off and the trophy. But broken hearts don't have to stay broken.

To understand Michal's situation we must look at the relationships that impacted her life.

I. Saul and David.

1. What can we understand about Saul's mind and spirit from the following verses?

- 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 26
- 1 Samuel 16:14
- 1 Samuel 16:23
- 1 Samuel 18:7-9
- 1 Samuel 18:10-11

2. Describe David from the following passages:

- 1 Samuel 16:12
- 1 Samuel 16:13
- 1 Samuel 16:18
- 1 Samuel 17:34-37
- 1 Samuel 18:12

The more Saul's jealousy consumed him, the more the Lord led David through one victory after another. From 1 Samuel 18:16 we know the people of Israel were captivated by David—none more than Michal, Saul's youngest daughter.

II. Michal in the Middle.

1. From the following passages in 1 Samuel note how the actions of each man affected Michal.

14:49

18:20-29

19:1-17

25:42-44

2. Analyze the details above to discover what kind of disappointments Michal experienced.

David would have been anointed by Samuel around the age of 15-20. He was probably 18-20 when he slew Goliath. *The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time* (1 Samuel 3:1). David and Michal were probably apart for around 8 years. When David gained more power his rule as king of all Israel was imminent; he sent for Michal.

3. Read 2 Samuel 3:12-15.

- Why did David demand that Michal return to be his wife?
- What does Paltiel's reaction imply?

4. What other relationships did David have? (2 Samuel 5:13-16)

III. Broken Hearts. 2 Samuel 6.

Although David was powerful, there were still more battles to be fought before he actually became king of all Israel. Saul's death and David's lament open the book of 2 Samuel. We learn that he was 30 years old (cf. 2 Samuel 5:4). When he finally defeats the Philistines as king of Israel his great desire is to return the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Although God has brought David to victory, He teaches him an important heart lesson.

1. Read 2 Samuel 6:1-11; I Chronicles 15:1-2.

- Why was David celebrating?
- What cut the celebration short?
- How was David's heart broken through Uzzah's death?

2. Read 2 Samuel 6:12-19; I Chronicles 15-16

- Why was David celebrating?
- Verses 5 and verse 12 of I Samuel 6 describe the two times David celebrated the ark. What had David learned since the ark was at the home of Obed-Edom?

3. Read 2 Samuel 6:20-23; I Chronicles 15:28-29

- What was Michal's response to David's unrestrained worship?
- What is the condition of her heart?
- How did David react?

During David's years in exile he experienced many hardships at the hands of his enemies. David was a warrior, and he was a flawed man. He wrote many of the Psalms during these years. Michal was mistreated and disappointed; she was also a flawed person. We have no record of Michal making peace with David or with God. The last record of her life does not indicate that she and David ever shared the same view of God. But we know something of David's relationship with God. Note what the following passages reveal.

Psalms 57

Acts 13:22

IV. Love makes the difference.

1. From Psalm 63 note David's attitudes and actions that would be wise for us to imitate.

2. What can mend a broken heart?

1 John 3:1-2a

1 John 3:16-19

3. Sorrow and brokenness come through many different circumstances. Sickness, death, and financial ruin are hard to face. Abuse and betrayal from people who should protect and support us are hard to face for different reasons. Which do you feel is worse and why?

4. Is there any brokenness that God cannot heal?

Key Question: Who do you need to forgive with God's help? Will you lay the injury at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to help you live your life free of the burden of bitterness?

For additional reflection:

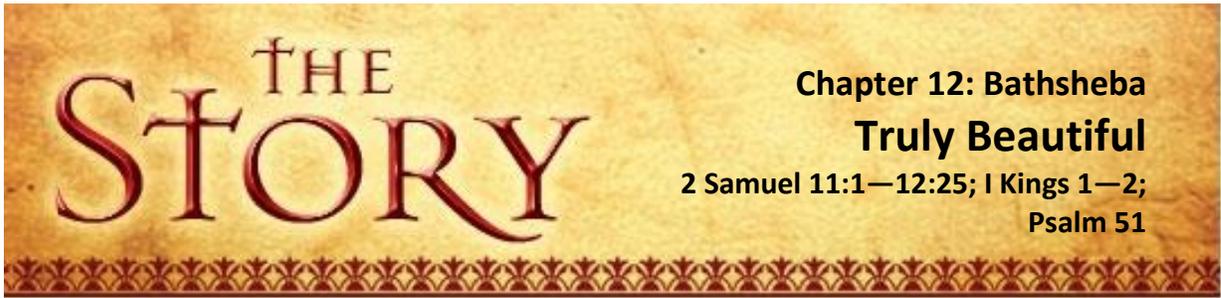
Note the betrayal and abuse that occurs in the following verses:

Luke 22:47-48

Luke 22:54-62

Luke 23:20-21

How much does Jesus really understand about betrayal and disappointment in the love of another person?



Chapter 12 of THE STORY is devoted to the story of David and Bathsheba. David’s actions set the course of the rest of his reign as king of Israel. David saw Bathsheba, and he wanted her because she was truly beautiful. In Bathsheba’s case, physical beauty was not a blessing. But as David and Bathsheba allowed God to reclaim their lives, he turned a bad mistake into something *truly beautiful*. What God did 3000 years ago in David and Bathsheba’s lives brings us this assurance today: God can turn a bad start into something beautiful.

I. A Bad Mistake Times Two. 2 Samuel 11:1—12:25

1. In the spring time what usually occupied the kings? (11:1)

2. In the space before the arrow briefly note the events that are related in 2 Samuel 11:2—5. After the arrow with each of the, note what choice Bathsheba had in the matter.

v.2 →

v.3 →

v.4 →

v.5 →

3. In your opinion, was Bathsheba a victim or a party to the sin that was committed?

One of the tallest buildings, David’s palace would have been constructed with a railing or battlement around a flat roof with openings to view the area and for protection. In fact the Israelites were to build a wall around their roofs to avoid liability for a fall (Deuteronomy 22:8).

Uriah’s home was located in close proximity to the palace for David to be able to see Bathsheba, bathing on her roof. Women were commanded by God’s law to cleanse themselves after a period. It was common practice for a woman to bath after the day’s work, at night, in the privacy of the roof top.

4. What additional atrocity did David commit after learning of Bathsheba’s pregnancy? (11:14)

5. What happened to Bathsheba next? (11:26-27)

6. What displeased God? (11:27b)

II. Truth and Consequences. 2 Samuel 12:1—23.

1. What did Nathan use to convict David of the truth of his sin? (12:1—10)

2. What is the meaning behind the heartfelt words from God that Nathan related? (12:7—9)

3. What consequences did the Lord declare? (12:11—18)

4. How did David react to God's truth and consequences? (12:13)

5. The Lord struck the child with an illness and, in spite of David's pleading and fasting, the baby died seven days later. What losses did Bathsheba endure because of her encounter with David?

6. Describe David's anguish and his reaction to the death of the son. (12:18—22)

III. A new life for Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 12:24-25; 1 Kings 1; 2:1—25)

Bathsheba's attributes go beyond beauty. David's remaining years were plagued by family turmoil and war, as God promised. But the rest of Bathsheba's story reveals a woman with strength and character. She was honored by David and Solomon. She was respected by Nathan the prophet, as well as others in the kingdom. God gave a new life to Bathsheba, and she helped bring his treasure to the world.

1. How did God Bless Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 12:24)

2. Who did God love? What does this mean to you? (2 Samuel 12:25)

3. Why did Nathan consult with Bathsheba about Adonija? (1 Kings 1:9—13)

4. What shows David and Bathsheba's relationship at this point? (1 Kings 1:16—21, 31)

Adonija was determined that as the oldest living heir of David, he should have the throne, despite David's proclamation. Knowing the Queen Mother's influence on Solomon, Adonija involved her in a plot which could actually have resulted in their deaths.

5. Describe what actions of Solomon show respect toward his mother. (1 Kings 2:19—20)

6. Was Bathsheba naïve or wise in her approach to Solomon with the request from Adonija? (1 Kings 1:21—27)

One has to wonder how David, described as someone God loves (cf. Acts 13:22) could stray so far off the path of godliness. He let his desires take over, hurting innocent people in his wake. Yet we know that God loves all of us as well. This is still the same struggle for followers of God today. Praise God, the perpetrator and the victim alike can find help and healing.

IV. A New Life for You and Me (Psalm 51)

1. Read Psalm 51:1-2. David confessed and asked God to deal with three kinds of sin. Note them:

Blot out my_____.

Wash away my _____.

Cleanse me from my_____.

2. David pled with God: " *...create a new heart within me* "(Psalm 51:10). How does this happen for you and me? (1 John 4:16; Acts 2:38, Ro. 6:1—14)

3. Why then, do Christians struggle with sin? (Romans 7:21—24)

4. In Romans 7:7—8:37 we read how Christians who love God and follow Christ can be victorious over sin. How does the writer describe those who remain faithful, despite the difficulties? (Romans 8:37-39)

5. Share how God has helped you make something truly beautiful of your life, even after a bad start.

Key Question: What do you need to let God do in your life to make it more beautiful to Him?

For additional reflection:

A chiastic outline is a way of analyzing Old Testament writings, especially Psalms. The name comes from the shape Greek letter X, *chi*, and refers to lines that go from left to right, then right to left.

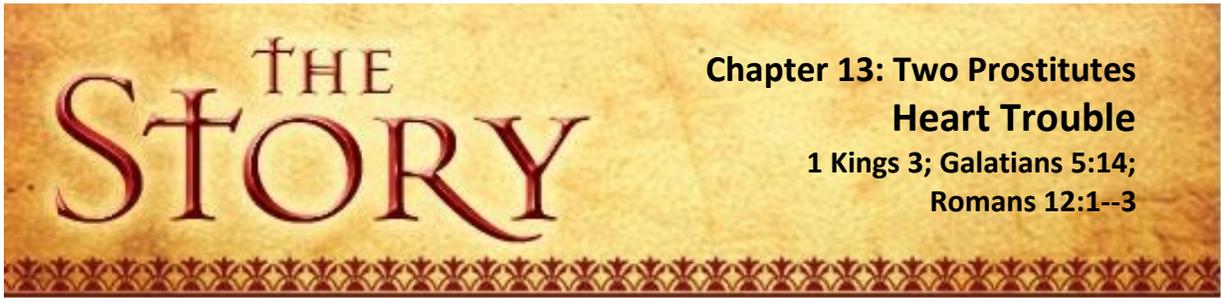
Consider this interesting outline chiastic outline of 2 Samuel 11:1—12:31 that includes this interlude in David's life. We have seen how God used Bathsheba as his instrument in history. David was God's instrument before and after his affair, despite this grievous sin.

- A. David sends Joab to besiege Rabbah (11:1).
- B. David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (11:2—5).
- C. David has Uriah killed (11:6—17).
- D. Joab sends David a message (11:18—27a).
- E. the Lord is displeased with David (11:27b).
- D'. The Lord sends David a messenger (12:1—14).
- C'. The Lord strikes David's infant son, who dies (12:15—23).
- B'. David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (12:24—25).
- A'. Joab sends for David to besiege and capture Rabbah (12:26—31).

(From *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, by F. E. Gaebelin .Ed.)

(Note how David gets off track at point A and returns to God's work at point A'. We should beware when we are drawn away from our calling.)

Meditate on Romans 7:7—8:37 and explain the process of living out our lives in Christ, even though we still battle with our sinful nature. Read and meditate on this teaching. Make note of the various aspects God's work on our behalf from chapter 8.



The Wisdom of Solomon is the subject in chapter 13 of THE STORY. Two mothers needed wisdom to solve a grim problem. The dilemma and the decision give us insights into real-life issues. Beside marriage, the most basic human relationship is between mother and child. Women influence the world from little up. What is it that can make or break a society? Solomon knew what it was.

I. Solomon's Wisdom. 1 Kings 3:1-15

1. Why were the people worshipping at the high places? (3:2)
2. How did Solomon show his love for God? (3:3)
3. What did God offer to Solomon in a dream? (3:5)
4. Why was God pleased at Solomon's choice? (3:10-11)
5. How did God bless Solomon? (3:11-14)

II. God's Wisdom. 1 Kings 3:15-28; 1 Samuel 16:7

The Israelites witnessed the establishment of Solomon's kingdom by the military victory over Shimei (1 Kings 2:13-46). Now Solomon's reign would be characterized by wisdom as the Israelites marveled at his handling of a difficult situation. But his reign would only be characterized by wisdom *from God*, as long as he obeyed God's commands.

1. What dilemma did the two mothers put before him?
2. Solomon had no evidence with which to decide the case, but he did have God-given insight into human nature. How does God judge a person? (1 Samuel 16:7)

3. What actions gave Solomon a clue about the character of the woman whose child had died? (I Kings 3:9-20)

4. What kind of heart did those actions reveal?

5. What did Solomon know about the heart of the true mother?

6. How did he reveal which woman had a mother's heart?

III. Heart Trouble that only God can heal. Matthew 15:1-20

God's standard of judgment is different than man's standard because only God can see the heart. However, Solomon knew that the heart would be revealed by forcing the women to see what they were doing to the child. A mother who truly loved her child would never harm him. The one who was completely controlled by selfish desires would demand her rights. Selfishness is the most dangerous kind of heart trouble.

1. The Pharisees judged Jesus by his actions without knowing his heart. What did Jesus say about their hearts? (15:8)

2. According to Jesus, what reveals a man's (or a woman's) heart? (15:18)

3. When selfishness reigns in the heart, what actions result? (15:19)

Solomon used the bizarre to reveal the guilty woman. He brought out a sword and offered to split the child in two. The thought offends our sensibilities, especially as women. The quality of a society or culture is also revealed by the actions of its members. Similar deeds, that have become common in our culture, surely must cut God's heart to pieces. Sadly, we can see that broken lives that result from exactly the same self-centeredness that Solomon exposed are all around us.

4. What selfish behavior disturbs you as you consider the direction our own culture is headed?

5. What are some things that parallel the dilemma of the two prostitutes and put children at risk in our culture?

6. What kind of heart trouble is causing this heartbreak?

“The timeless story of Solomon from the First Book of Kings continues to send powerful messages for divorced parents and their children. The basic plot is reenacted hundreds and thousands of times in every city: it is the story of two adults disputing their right to a child; the dilemma of the judge attempting to determine which adult is truly more worthy to take the child; and the baby who is being destroyed in the process. Another motif is the woman—presumably the true mother—who was trying to balance her own right to the baby with the baby’s right to stay in one piece and survive the custody dispute” (Bernet and Ash, 6).

7. Think about the pressure our culture puts on women (and men) to achieve personal goals. What often makes this effort an ungodly, self-seeking pursuit? (See Philippians 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 7:3-5)

8. How can we balance whole-hearted surrender to God’s calling with the demands of family?

9. Jesus mentioned a sword in Matthew 10:32-39 to explain that self-denial can be painful. Explain how we can follow this teaching and still put our children’s needs first.

10. Hebrews 4:12 explains that the Word of God is like a sword, “*able to judge the thoughts and desires of the heart*”. What kinds of thoughts and desires on the part of parents will bless our children?

Key Question: What personal desires and pursuits might put your children at risk?

For additional reflection:

The natural characteristics of mothering are nurturing and compassionate. The Bible emphasizes that God also has this 'mothering' nature. Study the following passages where God reveals his nurturing and compassionate nature.

Psalms 145:8-9

Isaiah 49:15-

Isaiah 66:13-

Lamentations 3:22-

Mark 8:2-

Luke 13:34-

While the idea of splitting a child into two pieces to settle the dispute is repulsive, the manner in which children are sometimes treated as a result of the divorce of their parents sometimes rivals this barbarity. Parents must do everything in their power to ensure that the children aren't 'split up' even if they do.

William Bernet and Don R. Ash, authors of Children of Divorce, suggest that to help children remain intact emotionally, parents must help the child carry on with his own life in a way that is predictable, consistent, and minimally disrupted by the needs of the parents" (6).

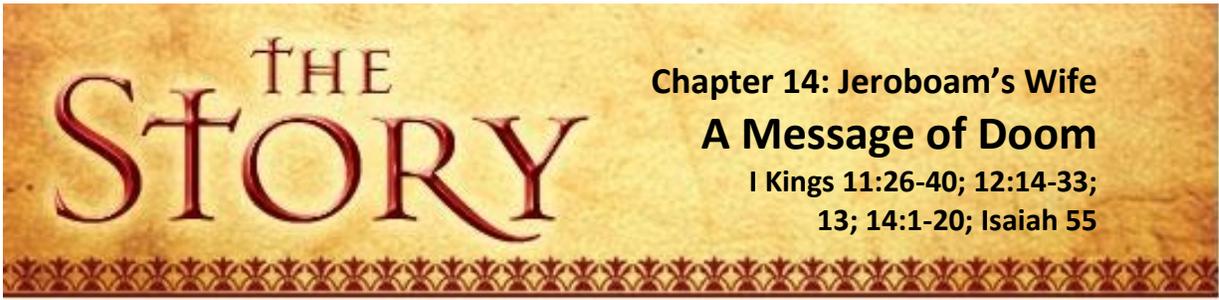
They suggest the following:

Both parents must put aside animosity concerning children in order to participate and communicate. Stick to a parenting schedule that is least stressful *for the child*, and keep it predictable.

The nonprimary residential parent should take the child 'in sickness and in health' unless it is critical or an emergency, to assure the children that both parents are involved in their lives as much as possible.

To avoid suspicions about abuse, talk directly with the other parent about any illnesses or accidents while in your care: explain Dr. appointments and diagnosis.

If the child is to be shuffled between two homes, do whatever it takes to make the transition seamless *for the child*. Have two sets of clothing, sports equipment, materials needed to do homework etc. so the child doesn't have to constantly live out of suitcases or carry these items back and forth.



Solomon was the last king of the undivided nation of Israel. His successors walked in his footsteps and took the nation down the path of destruction. THE STORY, chapter 14, relates how Jeroboam, who was not one of Solomon's sons, came into power and took all but one tribe as his kingdom. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, led the tribe of Judah. God's people would be divided, known as Israel *and* Judah from then on. Jeroboam's actions were despicable; his own family, and all Israel were doomed to suffer the consequences.

I. Jeroboam sinned in word and deed. I Kings 12:19-33.

1. What did Jeroboam want to prevent the people of Israel from doing? (12:26-27)
2. What did he say to the Israelite people? (12:28-29)
3. Outline the five changes that he made in worship:

12:29- He moved the location of worship from _____ to Dan and Bethel.

12:28- He added the symbols of golden calves to worship and claimed they brought them out of _____.

12:31a-He changed from worship of God in the temple to symbolic worship in _____.

12:31b-He appointed new _____ who were not Levites.

12:32 He established a new _____ of his own choosing.

Jeroboam set out to unify the Israelites by disguising his sinful plan as change for the better. However, when man tries to do God's things *according to his own ways*, the plan is doomed.

II. God used word and deed to give Jeroboam a chance to repent. 1 Kings 13

A man, sent from Judah by God, confronted Jeroboam in Bethel as he was ready to make an offering.

1. What did God say through the man? (13:2-3)

2. When Jeroboam tried to attack the man, what did God do to him? (13:4,5)
3. Fill in the blanks from 13:5: “Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the _____ given by the man of God by the _____ of the _____.
4. Why would Jeroboam have already known God’s will against changes that he had made in worship?

The word and deed of God that the man delivered should have been enough. But God further proved his point in 13:7-31. Disobeying the direct instruction *not* to tarry for any reason in that place, the man of God chose to stop for food and drink—to his own peril.

5. What was God’s response to this man’s disobedience? (13:20-24)
6. How did Jeroboam react to these two extraordinary occurrences? (13:33)

III. Jeroboam’s wife receives a message of doom. I Kings 14:1-19

When Jeroboam’s son became ill Jeroboam sent his wife to speak with Ahijah, the prophet. He should have faced Ahijah himself, but after the preceding events, he had reason to avoid the prophet. This was the one who had told him he would be king. This was a prophet of the same God whose ways he had rejected.

1. Why did Jeroboam suggest his wife use a disguise?
2. What did Ahijah’s greeting to the woman show? (14:6)
3. What was the key point of Ahijah’s message to Jeroboam? Whose doom was predicted? (14:9-10)
4. What information would be a staggering blow to Jeroboam’s wife? (14:12,13)
5. What happened as Jeroboam’s wife stepped over her threshold? (14:17)

6. How did the child's death show God's grace? (14:13b)

Jeroboam's evil choices caused his family to suffer, caused his child to die, and brought doom to Israel. The effects of sin cause the innocent to suffer alongside the guilty. This fact has caused men and women to doubt God as nothing else has. Yet, as mankind looks up to God with human understanding, God looks down with perfect understanding and sovereign ways.

IV. God's message of hope. Isaiah 55

The prophet Isaiah taught God's people approximately 100 years after Jeroboam. Israel was well on its way down the path of destruction that Jeroboam started on. Isaiah warned them of their doom, just as Ahijah had done. Some principles about God's ways are revealed in Isaiah 55.

1. According to 55:1-2, who is invited to come?
2. What is the general condition of those who are invited to come to the Lord?
3. What will it cost them?
4. How can this be explained? (55:6-9)

While water, wine and milk represent basic physical needs, they also represent basic spiritual needs. Water is figurative for salvation (John 4:7-26). Wine is figurative for joy and celebration (Isaiah 26:6-9). Milk is figurative for nourishment (Hebrews 5:12). Only the help and hope that the Lord offers will meet the needs of those who have suffered great loss.

5. What is the power of God's word, as described in verses 10-11?

6. What is the result when we allow God's word to accomplish what He desires? (55:12-13)

7. How would these words comfort a mother who had lost her son?

"It was not astonishing to the Jews that Jehovah would be gracious to them. What was astonishing to many was that He would grant them mercy without their having earned it. Isaiah has extended an invitation for participation in redemption through covenant relationship. Now the bond and bounds of that covenant relationship is declared to be in the word of Jehovah which is faithful and powerful" (Butler, 53-54) The message Christians have been commanded to share is one of "good tidings and joy", a message of hope instead of doom.

Key Question: With whom will you share this message of salvation?

For additional reflection.

Hope for the nations. Isaiah 55:3-5, John 6:25-40

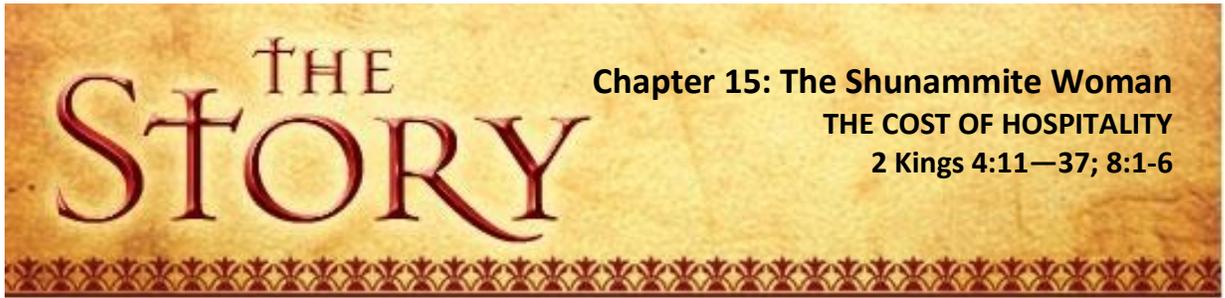
God understood the anguish Jeroboam's wife experienced at the loss of her son. Another son would be given for Israel, and for all people: His own son.

1. What hope does God offer his people? (Isaiah 55:3)

2. Who does He extend this promise to? (Isaiah 55:5)

3. What claim of Jesus reminds us of Isaiah's promise? (John 6:35)

Another son, who pleases God, would come. Another son would die, but that son would live *again*. While women of all time have mourned the death of children, there is one *real hope*. That is the hope that God offers through *his son*. That son will come again, and if we follow him, we will see our innocent ones again.



Elijah and Elisha, “God’s Messengers” are introduced in chapter 15 of THE STORY. Their efforts to warn the kings, and to herd the people toward God, were a struggle. Many miracles and acts of kindness are attributed to the prophet Elisha as he walked among the people. Whatever hospitality was shown to him must have blessed and refreshed him. Hospitality has always been an attribute of God’s followers. Before going to Shunem, where he met the gracious Shunammite woman, Elisha had experienced some stressful events.

I. Elisha experiences hospitality. 2 Kings 2:23; 3— 4:1-10

1. What kind of treatment did he receive as he went up to Bethel? (2:23-25)
2. Who did he have to contend with next? (3:9-13)
3. How did he help the widow of one of the prophets? (4:1-7)

Elisha was a servant of God who handled disrespectful young men, powerful kings, and suffering individuals. But the Shunammite woman was not asking for anything, she was offering something.

4. How is the Shunammite woman described? (4:8a)
5. Why did Elisha stop there when he was traveling through the area? (4:8b)
6. What did she offer Elisha? (4:9-10)
7. What would have been the cost of this hospitality to the Shunammite woman?
8. What did her attitude seem to be toward any burden her hospitality might have been?

II. Hospitality in the Bible.

The Old Testament examples of hospitality are plentiful; the New Testament includes examples as well as commands to be hospitable. From the following examples what kind of care and cost was required to extend hospitality? What kinds of blessings result from godly hospitality?

Genesis 18:2—8, 16.

Genesis 19:1—8.

Luke 10:7.

Hebrews 13:2.

III. The Shunammite woman experiences blessing. 2 Kings 4:11-37; 8:1-6

Of course the cost and the risk of hospitality can sometimes be burdensome. Imagine, however, what it would have cost the Shunammite woman if she *hadn't* offered hospitality to the prophet Elisha.

1. What caused Elisha offer a blessing to the woman? (4:11-13a)
2. With what kind of attitude did the woman respond? (4:13)
3. What surprising gift did Elisha give her? ((4:14-17)
4. What was the *ultimate* gift that followed? (4:18-37)
5. What warning and help did Elisha later give to the Shunammite and her family? (8:1-6)

IV. Hospitality as a picture of God.

Significant blessings come to the one who offers hospitality and to the one who receives hospitality. Hospitality is about relationship. Christians receive the gracious hospitality of God as he invites us into relationship with him. In turn, we bless God by opening our lives as the gracious invitation of a spiritual home to others who have not yet experienced God as their Father.

1. Jesus said “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). How is this a picture of hospitality?

2. Analyze these instructions about hospitality:

Matthew 25:41-46.

1 Peter 4:9.

3 John 5—8

The Shunammite woman went out of her way to show hospitality to Elisha when he needed it. Because of the friendship that developed between them, Elisha went out of his way to bless her when she needed it. This kind of godly hospitality is almost a lost art, but those who conform to the biblical model of hospitality experience much of the same kind of blessing.

3. What has happened to the custom of hospitality in our culture?

4. What are the hindrances to practicing this act of grace?

5. Share how showing hospitality has been a blessing to you or to others?

6. Whom should we consider as our guest each time we open our homes to others? (Matthew 25:45)

Key Question: How will you show Christian hospitality to a servant of God who would be blessed by your kindness?

For additional reflection:

Meditate on the following passages about the kinds of hospitality Jesus and the Apostles received. What can we learn from each of these occasions?

Luke 2:4-7

Matthew 10:8-15

Luke 7:36-35

Luke 10:25-37

Luke 14:23

Luke 19:5

Acts 10: 23, 24-48

Acts 16:13-15



The judgment of Israel is the theme of chapter 16 in THE STORY. God had had his fill of their defiant disobedience, so much so that he advised *“Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?”* (Isaiah 2:22). The Israelite women could not escape the judgment either. God described their masquerade, from head to toe, in fearful detail; what He saw behind the mask was even more chilling. The evil that controlled the hearts of individual men and women ultimately brought about their destruction as a nation.

I. Israel’s weakness. 2 Kings 17—19

For approximately 200 years God’s people had been separated into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel, which included most of the tribes; and the southern kingdom of Judah, which consisted of the tribe of Judah, the Levites, and those who had originally wanted to observe God’s laws and worship in Jerusalem. By the time Isaiah came on the scene Ahaz, King of Judah, and Hoshea, King of Israel, were weakened to the point that they had to placate a formidable enemy- Assyria. Both were headed for destruction but Israel went down first.

1. What kind of king was Hoshea? (17:2)

2. What happened to him? (17:3-4)

3. What happened to the people of Israel? (17:5-6, 23)

4. Note some specific reasons why this came to pass from chapter 17:
 - v. 7
 - v. 12
 - v. 15
 - v. 16-17

5. What was the status of The Kingdom of Judah at this point? (18b-19)

II. What Isaiah saw in Judah. Isaiah 3—4:1

1. What is the Lord about to do to Judah? (3:1)
2. Why is Judah falling? (3:8-9)
3. What is the thing that has brought God to the point of judging Judah? (3:14-15)
4. What is God's 'vineyard'? (3:14-15)
5. Isaiah puts a moving picture into our minds by way of four verbs that describe the haughty women of Zion. List them from verse 16.

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

6. What is the startling decree of verse 17?
7. From 3:18-23, list the items that you have in your jewelry chest or closet at this moment.

8. Note the predictions from verse 24:

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Fragrance to_____. | Sash to _____. |
| Well-dressed hair to_____. | Fine clothing to_____. |
| Beauty to_____. | |

9. What would the prospects be for unmarried women from Isaiah 4:1?
10. What is troubling about this picture of the destruction and destitution of women for us?

III. Behind the masquerade.

Isaiah's condemnation of the women of Zion has two aspects. Women are used as a metaphor for Judah through this picture of pride, injustice toward the poor, and self-indulgence. Eventually "she" will be struck down to the ground (v.26). But the aspect that must penetrate our hearts as women is a real-life depiction that mirrors what God may see in women today. Isaiah could be describing the women who walk the streets of our towns, and many who walk the corridors of our church buildings. Isaiah laments that *"there is no end to their treasures"* (Isaiah 2:7). We as well are rich beyond imagination, but too often we lack things that delight God.

1. What deadly beliefs are buried beneath our hair-dos? What belief leads to life? (John 12:44-50)
2. If our eyes recorded our thoughts, what would the world see? What would Jesus like to see? (Philippians 4:8-9)
3. What makes our hands dirty in God's eyes? What work of our hands would be a beautiful adornment in God's eyes? (1 Corinthians 6:4—7)
4. What steps lead us away from God? When would our feet be beautiful to God? (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7)

IV. A beautiful day. Isaiah 4:2-6

1. What will appear in "that day"? (4:2)
2. What is the branch metaphor used to describe? (4:2b-3) (cf. Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8)
3. What will God do in that day? (4:4)
4. Fill in the blanks from verse 6. The branch will be a _____, a _____ and a _____.

The church of Jesus Christ is what God planned from the beginning. The beautiful picture of the church from Isaiah 4:6 is just the opposite of what the Israelites turned out to be because they had not given their hearts to God. In The Emotionally Destructive Relationship, Leslie Vernick explains that we cannot overcome pride, and a myriad of other destructive attitudes, until we change the “internal heart themes of entitlement and self-centeredness” (86). But when His indwelling spirit controls our hearts, we can be Jesus’ eyes of love, hands of service, and feet that carry the good news to all people.

Key Question: What are you doing to change the feelings of entitlement and self-centeredness that threaten to control your heart?

For additional reflection:

God has clearly told in what He is pleased to see in His followers.

From Galatians 3:25-27, how are we to be clothed?

From Galatians 5:16, what are we supposed to live by?

From Galatian 5:23-26, note the results of living like this?

How is this polar opposite of the description of the proud women in Isaiah 3?



The Story, chapter 17 covers the last one-hundred years of the Kingdom of Judah. During that time period only one king pleased God consistently. Josiah followed two of the most destructive and bloodthirsty reigns imaginable and he became king at eight years of age! Jeremiah was his contemporary. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah probably prophesied at various times during his reign. Yet when he began to restore the temple in Jerusalem, Huldah, wife of Shallum, advised him about his discovery.

I. Josiah's surprising discovery. 2 Kings 22:1-13; 2 Chronicles 34:1-22

1. What kind of king was Josiah? 2 Kings 22:2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-3
2. How old was he when he decided to repair the temple? 2 Kings 22:3
3. How do we know Josiah had been preparing to do this work for some time? 2 Chronicles 34:3-7, 9
4. What did the priest, Hilkiah, find? 2 Kings 22:8; 2 Chronicles 34:24
5. What did the king's secretary, Shaphan, do in King Josiah's presence? 2 Kings 22:10, 2 Chronicles 34:18
6. What was the King's response? 2 Kings 22:11, 2 Chronicles 34:19
7. What did he assume about God at this point? 2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chronicles 34:20
8. Josiah was not only feared for himself, who else occupied his concerns? 2 Kings 22:13

II. Huldah's observations. 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28a

The reconstruction of the temple revealed that Josiah already had a heart for the things of God. His ability to hear, discern, and act on the Word of God shows a maturity beyond his years. Josiah asked his advisors to 'inquire of God' and they went to a woman.

1. Who was Huldah? 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22

2. Where does Huldah get the information she shares with Josiah's men? 2 Kings 22:15; 2 Chronicles 34:23

3. What does Huldah reveal about the future of Judah? 2 Kings 22:16-17; 2 Chronicles 34:23-25

4. What does Huldah reveal about Josiah's future? 2 Kings 22:19-20; 2 Chronicles 34: 26-28

5. What words show that this is a personal revelation from God to Josiah?

6. Point out Josiah's attitudes and actions in the following passage. Circle the words that indicate his heart attitude, underline the words that indicate his action.

"Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed, and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord."

2 Kings 22:19

III. Josiah cleans house. 2 Kings 23:1-30; 2 Chronicles 34:29—35:19

Huldah's words would have brought fear and comfort to the young King. His fears for his people were grounded in reality. The personal assurances from God validated Josiah's desire to reclaim Judah's religious heritage. He went about the work with such a passion that they celebrated a Passover, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of Samuel.

1. What did Josiah do in front of all the people? 2 Kings 23:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:29-30

2. Fill in the blanks from 2 Chronicles 34:32:

"Then _____ everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin _____

_____ to it: the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers."

Did this pledge cause the people of Judah to change their hearts?

3. What did Josiah do about the worship of Baal, Asherah and the pagan priests? 2 Kings 23:4-5

4. What did he do to Jeroboam's altar? 2 Kings 23:15

5. What did he do about mediums, spiritists, and household gods and idols? 2 Kings 23:24

6. How is Josiah described after all this? 2 Kings 23:25

7. What is God's verdict regarding the people of Judah after all this? 2 Kings 23:26-27

IV. Wise women impart God's Word.

As friends and daughters, wives and mothers, we have unique opportunities to share God's word. Not only that, we have a responsibility to share the story. While we can't see into hearts, priorities and allegiances are revealed by lifestyle. Like Huldah we must share the truth from God, even if the truth is convicting.

1. Note our responsibilities regarding others from the following passages:

1 Thessalonians 5:14

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15-

Hebrews 3:12-14

Hebrews 10:23-25

Many godly women are burdened with concern for loved ones and friends. Yet, when the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts through His word, we are afraid to warn, confront, or admonish. We know that some make take offense, we may be repudiated or misunderstood. Honestly, sometimes it is simple pride that stops us from acting on the Lord's promptings. Huldah knew what the Lord's verdict for her own people was. She was obliged to tell the truth. So are we.

Key Question: How will you speak God's word into the heart of another when He asks you to?

For additional reflection.

There is a fine line between speaking God's word into someone's heart and *meddling* in someone's life. Consider the following passages from scripture to mark the boundaries of appropriate involvement in someone else's life:

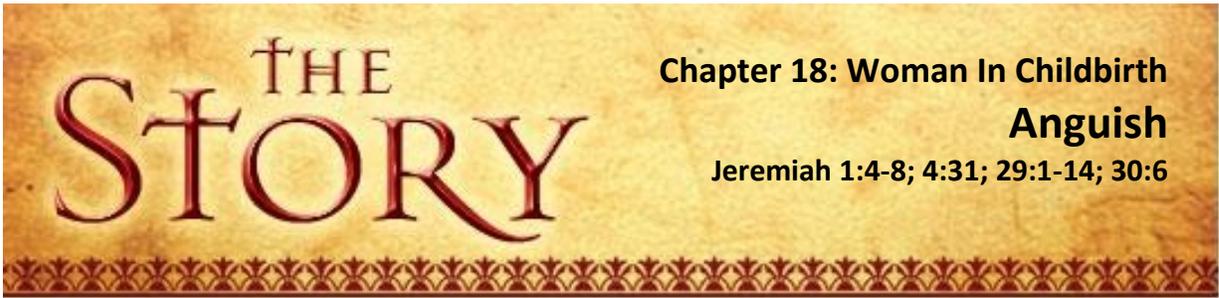
Proverbs 20:19-

2 Thessalonians 3:11-

Titus 2:1-5

Matthew 7:3-5

We often underestimate the spiritual understanding of young men and women. While they may not have the experience of their elders, they do have the ability to read, discern, and act in a godly manner. Like Josiah, many young people come to obedience.



Having children is a blessing according to God. But childbirth, from conception to delivery, is used as a metaphor in Scripture, and childbearing is a major theme throughout the Bible. The prophet Jeremiah, who warned of the coming exile that is discussed in chapter 18 of THE STORY, compared the anguish that Israel would suffer to labor pains. In the book of Matthew, Jesus expressed his concern for women who would be pregnant or nursing during the destruction of the temple which occurred in 70AD. Nevertheless, the anguish associated with childbirth is powerful whether we are speaking in real terms or metaphorically.

I. The anguish of labor. Jeremiah 4:22-31

The scriptural references and comparisons to childbearing are interesting, but they are also important for our understanding God's will and God's ways.

1. From the following passages note what the comparison or the teaching is:

Genesis 3:16

Isaiah 13:6-9

Jeremiah 4:31

Jeremiah 6:22-24

Matthew 24:3-7

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

2. God's word also uses the natural to explain the course of sin in our lives through graphic detail. We have seen this bitter truth clearly through the history of God's people, Israel. We should learn from their experiences. Note the process and result of sin from the following passages.

Psalms 7:14-15

James 1:13-15

II. Labor and delivery.

Jesus also demonstrated that he cared for women and children during his earthly ministry. He saw children as good. Childbirth is a *good thing* despite the difficulties of labor and delivery. A natural, healthy pregnancy brings the birth of a new baby. This is a joy and a blessing. This natural process of life is also used to help us understand the results of faithful living.

1. From the following passages what is the joy and blessing.

John 16:20-22

Acts 2:24-28

Romans 8:18-25

2. What do the following passages show about Jesus's understanding of women?

Matthew 19:13-15

Matthew 24:19-21

III. God coaches his people through their anguish. **Jeremiah 1:4-8; 29:1-14; Daniel 1:3-20**

Through Jeremiah, God gave warnings to Judah about their coming destruction as a nation. He promised that, as a nation, they would experience agony that could only be compared to the pain of childbirth. But he also gave interesting instructions about how they should carry on their lives *during* this time of suffering and exile in Babylon. Although they would be punished, they would not be abandoned.

1. When did God choose Jeremiah to be a prophet? Jeremiah 1:4-8
2. How were God's people instructed to live while in exile? Jeremiah 29:5
3. What was God's instruction about marriage and children? Jeremiah 29:6
4. How did God say they would be able to prosper even though they were in exile? Jeremiah 29:7
5. What does God promise about his plans for them? Jeremiah 29:11
6. How will they be able to find God? Jeremiah 29:12-14

IV. Living above the anguish.

We still go through suffering because of the consequences of sin that controls our lives. The passages above offer valuable insight to us as well as to the ancient Israelites. We don't have to be overcome by the pain and suffering of sin, even though we may experience it. The advice God gave to His people through Jeremiah is still good advice. Each of these concepts is also a strong teaching in the New Testament.

1. How do we know that God has plans for us? Acts 17:26
2. How should we live our lives? Acts 17:28; Titus 3:1-2
3. What is God's instruction about marriage and children? Titus 2:3-5

4. How does God say we will be able to prosper? Titus 3:4-8

5. What does God promise about his plans for us? Titus 2:11-14

6. Why will we be able to find God? Acts 17:27

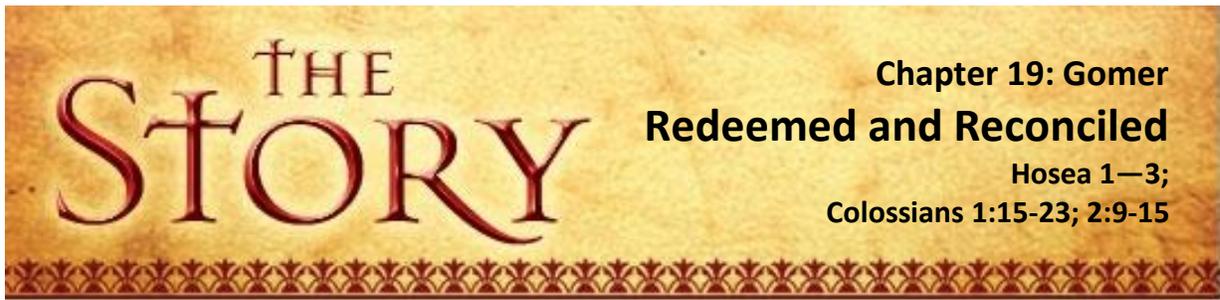
7. How do we know that there will someday be an end to all distress and anguish? Isaiah 9:1, 6-7

Key question: What steps do you need to take to have victory over the sins that bring anguish into your life and that bring anguish to God's heart?

For additional reflection: Read Romans 1:18—2:16.

Consider the parallels in this passage to the things you have learned from the history of the Israelites— from their crossing the Red Sea until their destruction. What sins still bring anguish to *God's heart*?

What will be the result for those who choose to rebel against God as the Israelites did?



The soap opera-like story of God's people takes a turn for the better as they finally rebuild the temple. God inspired two Persian kings, Cyrus and Darius to support the project that took 150 years to complete. In THE STORY, chapter 19, we read that the dedication of this new temple moved the people of Judah to weeping, mixed with shouts of joy as they were overcome with emotion (Ezra 6). Years before God had given His people a sneak preview of this scene in their scandalous story when he sent Hosea to show them His version of reality TV.

I. Hosea takes a wife. Hosea 1—2:1

God had tried to head his people away from their destructive path through the judges, the various prophets and even their own history. Apparently God knew that sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. He attempted to grab their attention through the bizarre. The prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer, publicly lived out a steamy love story, filled with all the betrayal and bad behavior that had typified the relationship between the Israelites and their God.

1. Who did God tell Hosea to marry? (Hosea 1:2-3)

2. God named each of Hosea and Gomer's children. Note the meaning of each name from the passage, and tell why you think he chose each name.

Jezreel- (1:4)

Lo-Ruhamah-(1:6)

Lo-Ammi-(1:8)

3. How do we know that Jezreel was probably Hosea's son? (1:3)

4. What indicated that the other two children were not fathered by Hosea? (1:6, 7; 2:4)

5. What was the promise that anticipates God's reconciliation with His people? (1:10-11)

6. How do we know that God had always loved his people? (2:1)

II. Gomer's downward spiral. Hosea 2:2-8

In this passage the words Hosea wrote were from his own heart as well as from God's heart. Simply put, *"A worthy woman is her husband's crown; but she who acts disgracefully is like rottenness in his bones"* (Proverbs 12:4). Study the various emotions that are expressed by the betrayed husband. Remember mankind has been created *in God's image* (Genesis 1:27). *"So this was how God felt about his own people—bitterly betrayed, cut to the heart, disgusted, outraged. His tender love, his every gift meant nothing to a people enamored with Canaanite gods"* (Spangler & Syswerda 277). God was revealing his heart through the things a man would feel. Answer the following questions with Hosea *and* God in mind.

1. Why did he want to rebuke his wife? (2:2)

2. How did he feel about the children and why? (2:4-5a)

3. What were Gomer's (Israel's) desires? (2:5b)

4. Hosea said he wanted to "block Gomer's path with thornbushes", and to "wall her in". Were these desires kind or unkind? Explain your answer. (2:6-7, consider 2:22)

5. Who actually had showered her with gifts? (2:8)

III. Redemption and reconciliation for Israel. Hosea 3:1-5

Again Hosea's story and God's story are intermingled in the account of Hosea's rescue of his adulterous wife. Although the account is succinct, the brevity of the words somehow underscores the sentiment. Take a look at the following scenes:

Redemption:

1. What was her situation at this point? Describe the Israelite's situation when they completely rejected God. (3:2)

2. What did God order Hosea to do? How does this compare to God's relationship with His people? (3:1)

Reconciliation:

3. Who invited the reconciliation between Hosea and his wife? Who invited the reconciliation between God and his people?

4. How would the Israelites come back to God? How would a broken and victimized woman react to a second chance at life and love? (3:5)

IV. Redemption and reconciliation for you and me. Colossians 1:15-23; 2:9-15

This reality show was not *just* for the Israelites. The running theme throughout God's word is the redemption and reconciliation that is available to us because of His love. God's plan was that all people would make Him the center of their lives and that He would love and care for them as a husband loves and cares for his wife (cf. Revelation 21:3-4).

1. According to Colossians 1:15-18, who is the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. What is our status without before we accept Christ, and what caused that status? (Colossians 1:21)

3. Exactly what did God have to do to make us alive with Christ? (Colossians 1:22; 2:13-15)

4. When do we "put off the old nature"? (Colossians 2:11-12)

5. We may come to the Lord with trembling, but how are we to live *after* we have received Christ's redemption and reconciliation? (Colossians 1:23)

Key question: What is your next step on the path to redemption and reconciliation? Will you take it?

For additional reflection:

Study these passages that discuss our redemption and reconciliation:

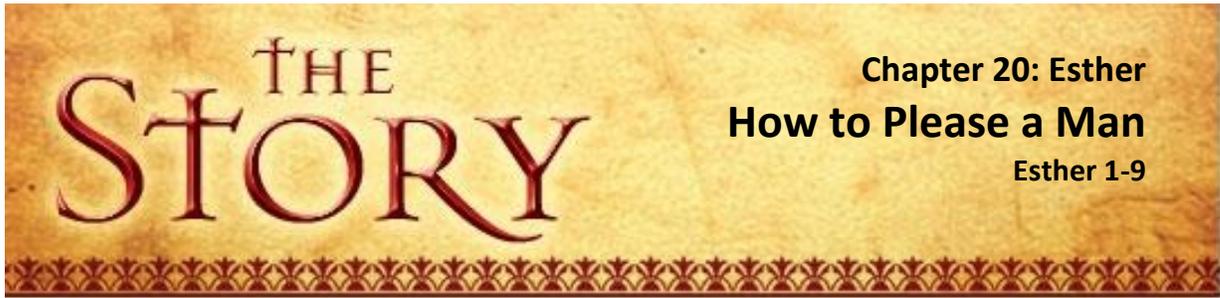
Luke 1:68

1 Corinthians 1:28-31

Ephesians 1:7

Romans 5:6-11

2 Corinthians 5:11-21



All cultures see beauty in the face and form of a woman, even though each culture and each generation sees beauty in different things. Perhaps the art of making a woman beautiful is actually the oldest profession. Women take their cues about pleasing men from their cultural traditions. But wise women want to be beautiful in God's eyes, and they place the highest importance on pleasing Him. Esther seemed to be able please the earthly king, Xerxes, *and* the King of Kings. Surprisingly, some of the same things please both God and man. These are things all women should imitate, although this advice will not appear in the beauty magazines.

I. Esther pleases Xerxes. Esther 2:5-18

The plight of Queen Vashti, Esther's predecessor, is recorded in the first chapter of Esther. Xerxes' made a completely selfish and disrespectful request of the Queen, but her reaction was not wise. Furthermore, it did nothing to help her situation; it only made matters worse. When Esther was brought to the harem she captivated her handlers and the king with her beauty, but that could not have been the only thing that fascinated them. When you answer these questions consider the normal reaction of a young girl, who had been removed from her home with no choice in the matter, and discover what made Esther different.

1. What was Esther's background? 2:7
2. Who was Hegai? 2:8-9
3. What kind of attitudes and actions on Esther's part would bring about Hegai's opinions?
4. What shows Esther's wisdom when it was her turn to visit the king? 2:9
5. What did it mean that Hegai found favor with Esther? 2:9b

6. What was the King's reaction to Esther? 2:17-18

7. Fill in the blanks and analyze the following events:

The king was _____ to Esther more than any of the other women, and she _____ and _____ more than any of the other virgins. 2:17

First the king was _____.

Then Esther gained _____.

People notice beauty, and they are almost always attracted to physical beauty. But beauty in itself does not guarantee a good impression on others. It takes more than just beauty for people to *find favor*. This implies that Esther had a manner, or qualities of character and actions, that were as pleasing as her physical attributes.

II. Esther reveals a beautiful strength. Esther 2:10, 11; 3—8

The saying goes: "Beauty is skin deep." The pursuit of physical beauty is shallow and meaningless when it comes to real life struggles. Strength of character is what counts. When Mordecai reveals an impossible problem to Esther her actions give evidence of the character that drew King Xerxes and his court to her.

1. What personal information did Mordecai insist that Esther keep to herself? 2:10

2. What did Mordecai do that proved his concern for his adopted daughter? 2:11

3. What was the crisis that caused Mordecai and Esther to be distraught? 3:8-10

4. How did Esther react to this news? 4:1-11

5. Mordecai's response was a challenge. What was it? 4:12-14

Esther decided to accept Mordecai's challenge and she quickly took action. Her decision led her to appeal to two kings. Wisely, she chose to seek the King of Kings before she sought out Xerxes.

6. Esther sought God and called upon certain people for support. 4:15-16
What did Esther want her people to do?

What did she and her maids do?

What kind of determination did Esther show?

7. Esther approached King Xerxes three times, at great risk. What was that risk? 4:10-11

8. Attitude is shown by words and actions. Fill in the chart to analyze how Esther approached the king and note the words she used each time. 5:1-8; 7:3-6; 8:3-7

| | Esther's attitude. | Esther's words and actions. | Esther's request. |
|-------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 5:1-8 | | | |
| 7:3-6 | | | |
| 8:3-7 | | | |

9. What was the outcome for Esther's people, the Jews? 8:8; 9:1

Esther was a treasure among the Jews. Her bravery, and that of Mordecai, was celebrated by their people. But more than that, God used Esther to protect the greatest treasure. Jesus' ancestors were among the Jews who were saved from Haman. Esther's actions were her most beautiful attribute.

III. What makes a woman beautiful.

Survey's and studies about what attracts men generally reveal the obvious. Men *are* attracted to physical beauty. But what usually *keeps* a man attracted to that woman is hardly ever mentioned. When a man 'finds favor' with a woman, he will be interested in a relationship. A relationship is built on personality, character and intelligence as well as physical attraction. Men like women who are fun—who make *them* feel good. Most men want a relationship with someone they can trust. Some aspects of "finding favor" are necessary whether we're talking about getting along with a husband, a male employer, or a male co-worker, in fact, with women as well.

1. Several people in the Bible were favorable in God's eyes. What do you think caused God to find favor with each one?

Moses- Exodus 33:13-17

Samuel- I Samuel 2:26, 35

Mary- Luke 1:30, 46-55

2. What might be the thing that most pleases a man? What makes him "putty in a woman's hands"? (Consider Proverbs 17:1; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5)

3. In a crisis, why would it be advisable to pull grace, beauty and charm out of our "make-up case" instead of anger, words and drama?

Key question: What attitude do you need to develop or what action do you need to take that would please a man in your life *and* that would please God?

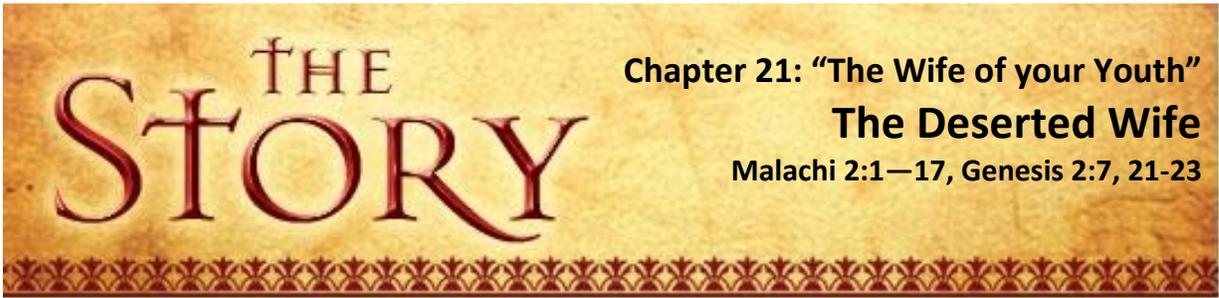
For additional reflection: Compare the attitudes and actions of Esther with those of Delilah in the following aspects. Esther 2—4; Judges 16:1-50

Sex appeal-

Trustworthiness-

Kindness-

Unselfishness-



As we come to the close of the Old Testament story of God’s love, we see that “love” is still a problem for the Jews—a misplaced love. They have seen God rescue them miraculously and restore them to their land. With God’s help they rebuilt their temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Throughout the story, their *unholy self-love* brought about destruction in two areas: in their own hearts, and in their families. Once again God raised up a prophet, Malachi, to call them out, because after all this they continued to love themselves more than they loved God.

I. The root of the problem: The Priests no longer taught God’s Will. Malachi 2:1-9

1. Why does God say he will send a curse instead of blessing upon the people? (v.2)
2. What was it about Levi, the priests’ ancestor, that God said was lacking in the priests of Malachi’s time? (v. 5-6)
3. God told Malachi two important things honorable priests should do. Note them. (v. 7)

II. God calls it Detestable: Breaking covenant breaks God’s followers. Malachi 2:10-14

The headings and verse notations in some versions interrupt the flow of thought in this passage. The logical transition in Malachi chapter two, when not interrupted, shows the reader that the problem of unfaithful priests has resulted in unfaithful people. The first nine verses of Malachi seem to be leading up to what God really hates. God has some strong language for those who break covenant.

1. What specifically profaned the covenant God had made with the Israelites? (v.10)
2. What does God call detestable? (v. 11-12)
3. God pointed out that he knew they were disillusioned with their worship and offerings. Instead of blessing they mourned. They felt the distance from God and they felt that He did not see them. However the astonishing fact is that they were so blind to their own wickedness. Why had God rejected their worship? (v. 14)

III. The nature of the marriage covenant: two become one. Malachi 2:15-16

This short passage is the clear and consistent demand from God for faithfulness to the marriage covenant because it is based on God's nature, and upon their covenant with Him. While thousands of books have been written about the subject, the bottom line is found in these two verses.

1. God had already alluded to His right to instruct man because He is the creator. Re-read the creation of man and God's instruction to Adam and Eve regarding their union in Genesis 2:23-24.

Then fill in the following blanks from Malachi chapter two:

"Have we not all _____ Father? Did not _____ God create us?" Malachi 2:10

"Has not the Lord made them _____. In _____ and _____ they are

his. And why _____? Because he was seeking _____."

Malachi 2:15

Why does the marriage covenant reflect the nature of God?

2. What was Malachi's advice to the Jews on how to protect themselves in the spirit (the relationship with God)? (v. 15b)

3. What does God hate? (v. 16)

4. It seems that God is equating divorce with violence in verse 16. How can divorce and violence be the same thing? (Consider the meaning of the word "one".)

5. Once again God gives a reminder about how to have spiritual health. What is it? (v. 16b)

6. What was God's original complaint against Judah? (v. 11)

Once again a break is made in the train of thought by the verse notations and headings in some versions. Read Malachi 2:15-17 together. God seems to be saying this discussion was tiring. Adultery was one of the abiding sins of his people. The consequences of divorce cause a 'domino effect' of misery that simply could not be denied. God simply says "Can there be any good in a sin? No! I am a just God." In God's eyes the marriage union can't be broken any more than He can be divided against Himself.

From Genesis to Malachi, we have seen a story of true love. God remained faithful to His covenant with His people, in spite of their rebellion and rejection. God loved them first, and he always loved them.

IV. The Message for Women Today

- The marriage covenant provides for and protects women.

At this point in our lesson, one might be thinking, “of course it’s wrong for a man to leave the wife of his youth...*but I was not the one who left!*” What does God have to say to these women, who, like their sisters in the Old Testament, have been left alone? Are they mistaken to believe the marriage union is a protection?

1. According to Malachi 2:14, what are the two benefits of marriage? Are these benefits applicable only to men? (Remember to whom Malachi is speaking.)

2. What things does Paul write in Ephesians 5: 25-33 that mirror Malachi’s message? (Compare Matthew 19:1-8; and Mark 10:1-12.)

- Godly people, men *and women*, have the leadership responsibility in the home and in the church to teach God’s plan for marriage.

3. From Malachi 2:1-9, what are the important principles about marriage that any leader should teach and live?

4. We know that part of the reason God detested the unfaithfulness of the Israelite men toward the wives of their youth was because of his plan to send the Savior through the lineage of Judah. But in Malachi 2:16 He simply states that He wanted them to raise godly children. What does faithfulness in marriage teach the children?

5. Titus 2:1-5 gives a responsibility to women. How does that responsibility compare to the ministry of the priests in the Old Testament?

6. What does God hate and detest—sinful actions or sinful people?

Charles A. Kollar, in Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling, writes: “What we believe we become. (The Bible) is given to teach us to be tenacious about the things of God and to develop a mature hope in his intention (Romans 15:4).” We simply cannot separate God from his word.

- Godly women who experience desertion and divorce must trust in *God's faithfulness*.

That *some* men haven't changed since Malachi's time is proven by the fact that the term “trophy wife” is common and well-understood in our society. In Formerly A Wife, Welby Obrien says this about divorce: “Each of us is hurting over...the death of a relationship. We know first-hand why God hates divorce—not with a head knowledge of theological assent, but with the pain of personal experience. God knows what divorce does to its victims” (8-9).

9. Who testified on behalf of the deserted wife? Malachi 2:14

10. David was God's chosen king but he spent years running for his life alone, rejected, and sometimes bitter. David's Psalms are a message that God placed in his heart to share with His followers. From Psalm 73:21-28, what comfort is available to the wife who must endure desertion?

When we love God life is doable. When we love ourselves more than we love God, the first result is to turn away from The Word. However, when we love ourselves more than we love God, we destroy ourselves, and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the marriage relationship.

Key question: How do you try to separate God from His Word? What will you do to change that?

For additional reflection:

In today's culture, those who follow God and his word are ridiculed. The idea of holiness is mocked, yet the same people expect to be blessed by God when they need him. Compare Hebrews 13:1-8 to the cultural norms we live with today.

Note who is faithful and how from these passages.

Romans 1:16-17

1 Corinthians 1:9

Psalm 100

What does God reveal to those who are hurting and alone?

Hebrews 10:23

2 Thessalonians 3:3



Imagine, the Savior would be born to an insignificant young Jewess, Mary. However she was not insignificant to God. Four hundred years after Malachi urged the people to honor God through faith and obedience, God introduced the world to one who did—Mary. The difference between the Old and New Testaments is the difference between light and dark. A light was coming into the world that would lift the burden of the law and of sin from God’s people. Luke specifically connected his story to Malachi’s last prophesy about the Messiah, in which he announced that one day the people would be “prepared *for the Lord*” (Malachi 4:5; Luke 1:13-17). Soon Israel would meet this son—Mary’s son—face to face. And Mary would be required to give up her son.

I. Mary found favor with God because of her faith. Luke 1—2

Sometimes we hear about Mary’s “simple faith”, but there was nothing simple about Mary’s faith, even though she was a young teen. We get confused and make faith about *us*. The strength of faith is found in the *object* of our faith. Look at the kind of faith Mary had from the information we find in the biblical accounts.

1. What was Mary’s state of mind when the angel appeared? (1:29-30)
2. What kind of questions did Mary have? (1:34)
3. What did the angel’s comment in verse 37 reveal about Mary’s thoughts?
4. What women from Israelite history might have come to mind as the angel reassured her?
5. To whom, or what, did the angel point as the answer to Mary’s fears and questions? (Is Mary’s faith in question?)

II. Mary’s faith was built on fact. Luke 1:46-55.

Read Mary’s Song, Note the historical events that might have been referred to: (The passages given are only a suggestion).

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” (1 Samuel 2:1-2; Isaiah 61:10)

“From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.” (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:13-14; Malachi 3:12)

“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.” (Genesis 17:1-14; Exodus 15:1,2; Psalm 103:17)

“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.” (Exodus 15:3-21; Psalm 89:11-12)

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” (1 Samuel 17; Daniel 4:28-36)

“He has filled the hungry with good things but he has sent the rich away empty.” (Isaiah 11:1-5, 55:1-5; Psalm 107:9)

“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 31:3)

III. Mary was faithful to God through joy, doubt and sorrow. Matthew 27-28

1. Name the two who greeted Jesus, and note the messages that amazed Mary and Joseph when they presented Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem? What might have been troubling to Mary?

Luke 2:25-35

Luke 2:36-38

2. What would have pierced Mary’s heart, even though they had escaped to Egypt shortly after Jesus was born? (Matthew 2:7-18)

3. What worried Mary when Jesus disappeared and was later found with the teachers in the temple? (Luke 2:41-51)

4. What “things” do you think Mary hid in her heart?
5. What did Mary see Jesus do at the wedding in Cana? Who believed in Jesus? (John 2:2-11)
6. Why did Mary and her sons try to restrict Jesus? (Mark 3:20-35; Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50)
7. Did Jesus disrespect Mary in this incident? Did Mary and her sons disrespect Jesus? Explain.
8. Jesus specifically pointed out that obedience to the Word brings favor (Luke 11:27-28). Why could Mary be included as one who was blessed?

IV. Mary’s sorrow turns to belief. Matthew 27—28; Acts 1

1. From the following two passages, note where Mary was and what she saw?
Matthew 27:32-61 (see also John 19:25-17).

Matthew 28:1-10 (see also Luke 24:1-10).

God gave his only Son for you and me. But Mary also gave up her son. Mary’s faith came from the teachings she had received about God. Those teachings had to have originated from the scriptures that the Jewish people trusted as God’s Word. The messianic prophecies were hidden in the heart of every Jewess. However, the prophecies explained his suffering and death.

2. Read Psalm 22 and note what Mary must have realized on some level.
3. What do we know about Mary and Jesus’ brothers from Acts 1:12-14?

God called upon Mary because he knew her heart of faith and obedience. He was able to ask great things of her, knowing the pain and suffering that she would have to endure. The idea that faith and obedience protects us from sadness and suffering in this life is erroneous. When the angel announced God’s will to Mary, she had to give up her own personal plans and ideas about almost every area of her life. As Jesus grew into a man, she had to give up her right to control and protect him. In the end, she had to completely give her son away to suffering and sacrifice.

V. Faith that gives up.

1. Fill in the blanks:

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by _____ from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by _____" Romans 1:17.

Whoever _____ and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not _____ will be condemned Mark 16:16.

The Greek word for both faith and believe are two different forms of the same word. Faith or belief is the noun form: *pistis*. Believe is the verb form: *pisteuo*.

When faith is taught correctly, the natural progression is from belief to faith to belief to faith to belief. In other word, once we hear the gospel message and believe it is true, we have faith in the truth. Then as we mature and experience the Christian life a pattern develops where faith helps us to believe, which increases our faith, which increases our belief, which increases our faith...

2. Can faith exist without belief? James 2:14

3. Can we have questions and still have faith? How?

4. Is it wrong to consider the cost of faith? Why or why not? (Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 14:28; Acts 1:3)

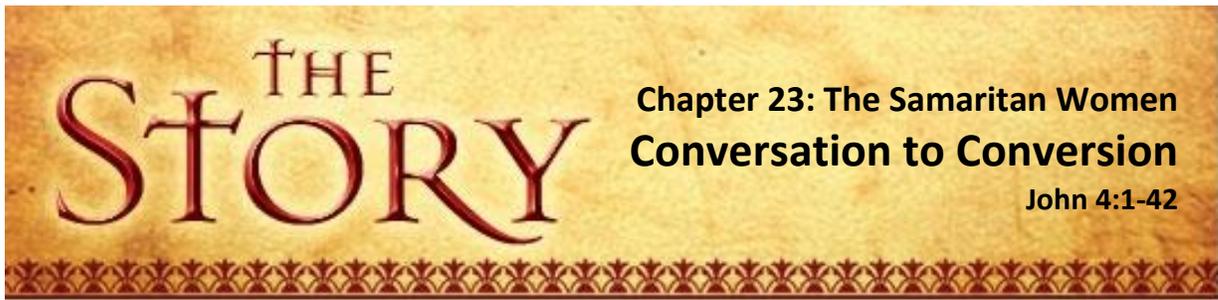
5. How did your faith increase when your belief brought you to the point of godly choices or actions?

Key Question: What is it in *your* life that the Lord is asking you to believe Him enough to give up for His sake?

For additional reflection:

Read Hebrews 11, sometimes called the "Faith Hall of Fame". Note what each faithful person had to give up, and what he or she gained in return.

Would you be able to give your child to the Lord for His service?



Jesus' ministry on earth is introduced in Chapter 23 of The Story. His words and his work revealed who he was. As he went about preaching and performing miracles people began to follow him, as well as those twelve men he had chosen to mentor and train for his ministry. They would tell his story to the world. However, men were not the only followers. In fact God's word reveals that many women were among his followers and even some of the most broken women experienced his acceptance. One day in Sychar, Jesus' own thirst brought him to satisfy her spiritual thirst. It was a tender, yet honest, conversation that led the tainted Samaritan woman to worship.

I. A Simple Drink of Water. John 4:1—9

1. Why was Jesus passing through Sychar in Samaria? (vs.1-4)
2. What was significant about the place he chose to rest? (vs. 5-6; Genesis 33:18-20; Joshua 24:32)
3. Why did it surprise the woman that Jesus initiated a conversation with her by asking for a drink of water? (vs. 7-9)
4. What does this show about Jesus' priorities?

II. More Than a Drink of Water. 4:10—18

1. What insights can we gain from the way Jesus directed the conversation to spiritual things? (v. 10-12)
2. What did the woman's response in vs. 11 and vs. 15 indicate?

3. From this passage, we know she was aware of the religious history of her people. What was she thinking about Jesus' identity at this point? (vs. 12)

4. What was Jesus really saying to the woman when he talked about living water? (See John 6:35)

5. Explain the significance of the underlined words from verse 14: "a spring of water welling up to eternal life".

Up to this point Jesus had been conversing with the woman about spiritual things, yet it seems that she was only hearing an enticing offer provide water. Perhaps she realized that he could be a prophet; she may have even heard of a teacher who was been travelling around the region doing miracles. Now Jesus made the conversation personal to make his meaning clear.

6. What did Jesus' comments about her husbands reveal to this woman? (vs. 18-19) Hint: Do you think there was more conversation than we have recorded in the passage?

7. Describe in your own words the kind of life that Jesus knew this woman had experienced.

III. From Words to Worship. 4:19—42

1. In the following passage, underline the word "worship" in any form it appears.

"'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers, must worship in spirit and in truth.'" (John 4:19-24)

2. Who brought up the subject of worship?

3. According to Jesus, what is true worship? (vs. 23)

4. What change in thought did Jesus force the woman to make? (See vs. 15 and 23)

5. What startling announcement did Jesus make? (vs. 25-26)

6. What was the woman's response? (vs. 28-30)

We know that Jesus had many more conversations with the Samaritans. In fact, he stayed with them for two more days.

7. Note the key dynamics of fruitful evangelism that we can observe from this story? (Hint: try to experience the range of emotions the Samaritan woman would have felt.)

8. Describe how the woman's worship was in 'spirit and truth' after she was convinced Jesus was the Messiah.

IV. From Conversations to Conversions.

Jesus cared about the Samaritan woman. His conversation with her resulted in the conversion of many Samaritans. This was more than just talk; Jesus touched her life in meaningful ways. Both Jesus' approach to the Samaritan woman, and her response, provide us with a powerful example.

1. Note the instructions about our conversations

Ephesians 4:29-

Colossians 4:6-

2. If you had been the woman, would you have been offended by Jesus? Why or why not?

3. What was the true solution to the woman's problems? To ours? (vs. 23-26)

True worship that is "in spirit and truth" brings blessing to the worshipper and to the world around him. Mark Moore explains worship in his book How to Dodge a Dragon: "It is not what we do, but what we are aware of...it's fair to say that you have not worshiped until you get a clear vision of God.

4. When did you really *see* God? Were you aware of who he is and what he has done?" (vs. 34, 35).

5. The Samaritan woman heard Jesus' claim, and she realized who he was. It changed everything. Soon the whole town knew. Explain how this might happen in your town to show that your worship is 'in truth'?

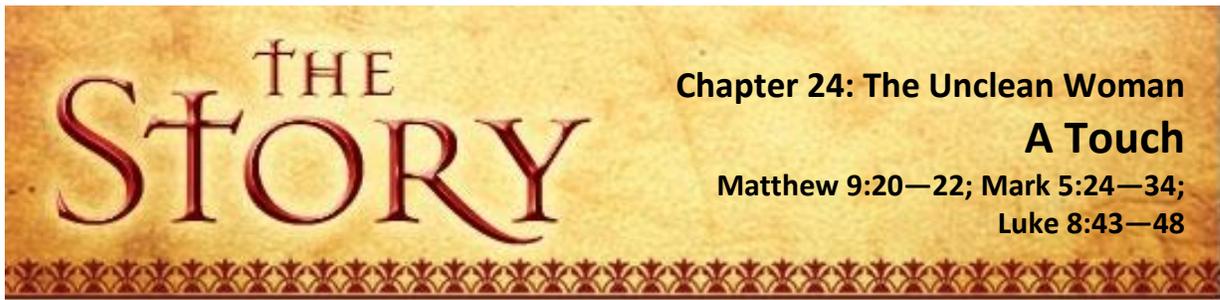
6. One of the reasons Jesus is worthy of worship is because he was the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah. Note the promises to us that are found in Revelation 22: 7, 10, and 12.

Key Question: What things will you remove from your life that block your vision of God and hinder your worship?

For additional reflection:

From Revelation 21:2—7, note what eternal blessings were available to the Samaritan woman that are still available for you and me today.

What invitation do we still have from Jesus? (Revelation 22:17)



It's still an 'untouchable' subject, even though a woman is no longer considered 'unclean' when she is menstruating. (See Leviticus 15). The words "female trouble" provide a catch-all phrase to cover various health concerns that only women have to deal with. Men will steer clear by finding an understanding woman in the congregation to minister to women who suffer from these illnesses. Chapter 24 of The Story (entitled "No Ordinary Man") describes Jesus' earthly ministry. Many women still relate to the Unclean Woman of scripture because they too experience excessive bleeding, pain, and in a word- suffering- related to ailments of the reproductive system. But Jesus wasn't ordinary; He didn't run, and He didn't hide. Real-life suffering touched Him to the core.

I. What happened?

Any investigator will talk to every witness to get to the truth. There are three different points of view in this story. We can learn much by investigating the events that took place from the viewpoint of the unclean woman, of Jesus, and of the disciples.

The Unclean Woman. Matthew 9:20—22; Mark 5:25—29, 33-34; Luke 8:43-44, 47-48

1. What was her problem and how serious was it?
2. How did she know who Jesus was?
3. What did she do to have the courage to approach him? Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:28
4. What did she do and what happened to her body?
5. How did she react when Jesus revealed that she had touched him?

6. What made her well?

Jesus. Matthew 9; Mark 5; Luke 8

The Gospel accounts give Jesus' itinerary for approximately 48 hours before the encounter with the woman. He had maintained a grueling schedule of healing and teaching, including the press of the crowds that were following him. Remember, the Apostle John wrote that "*the whole world would not have room to contain the books that would be written*" about all of Jesus' activities (John 21:23).

1. Go to the three passages that record this event and glance back at Jesus' activities just before he encountered the unclean woman; briefly list what Jesus had been doing in that short time.
2. Try to imagine the strain and pressure Jesus would have endured from this crowd. Explain what you think the toll was on Jesus.
3. What was on Jesus' mind when this incident occurred? (Where was Jesus actually heading next?)
4. What did Jesus realize *the moment* the woman was healed?
5. What question did he ask? Explain what he did as he asked the question.
6. Did Jesus pay any attention to the apostles' comments? Explain his attitude toward them.
7. What did Jesus say to the woman? Explain his attitude toward her.
8. From Matthew 9:35-38, describe how Jesus viewed the people around him.

The Disciples. Matthew 9:37; Mark 5:31; Luke 8:45-46

1. Describe the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' question, "Who touched me?"

2. What do you think the disciples thought as they observed Jesus and heard his teachings during this hectic period of time?

3. From Jesus' 'debriefing' with his disciples in Matthew 9:35-38, what could the disciples have perceived about their question in Mark 31?

In the space of a few seconds, a woman was healed; Jesus knew it; he was chided by the disciples; *and* he responded to them, as well as to the woman. No angry reaction to the stress—to the questioning—to the presumption of the woman. For Jesus it was business as usual. The biblical accounts describe a kind and compassionate man, calm in the midst of a whirlwind.

II. Conclusions.

1. What can the actions of the unclean woman teach us?

2. What can the actions of Jesus teach us?

3. What can the actions of the disciples teach us?

III. Touching Jesus.

The real-life story of the unclean woman is also a real-life story of every person who comes to Jesus. What we experience when we come to Jesus is not unlike what the woman experienced. Not only does faith lead us into a saving relationship with Christ, faith leads us to *cling to Him* in order to faithfully walk with Him every day. With the metaphor of the unclean woman in mind, meditate on the changes in our lives when we draw near to Jesus.

1. Fill in the blanks: (The first letter of each word is provided from the NIV)

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came t_____ and

f_____ at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how

she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her "Daughter your f_____ has healed you.

Luke 8:47

2. Sin brings every kind of suffering. Make a note of some of the suffering that has brought you to Jesus with fear and trembling. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

3. What is the proper response to the spiritual healing and freedom that salvation brings?

4. What knowledge do we have to base our faith upon?

5. How much faith do we need to respond to Jesus? (Luke 17:5-6)

Key Question: What courageous thing will require you to cling to Jesus in faith?

For additional reflection: The unclean woman was not the only person who summoned the courage to reach out to Jesus. In each of the examples below note what qualms they might have had to overcome in order to ask Jesus for help.

Mary- John 2:1-22

Nicodemus- John 3:1-21

The Official- John 4:43-54



We read about several events during the third year of Jesus’ ministry in chapter 25 of THE STORY. At this time Jesus was still popular with the people, but his enemies went from opposing Jesus to planning how to stop him. Meanwhile, Jesus had openly declared who he was and had openly taught the disciples about his soon coming suffering and death. After an intense period of travel, teaching, and healings, Jesus arrived at the home of his friends, Martha and Mary for some R&R. There, the two women served Jesus in their own way. However Martha discovered what kind of “help” that was not helpful.

I. Martha served Jesus. Luke 10:38-40

If we want to see a Martha, most of us need only to look in a mirror. Even though we have deep belief, sometimes we try to hide a controlling spirit with a breathtaking busyness that takes away our peace and joy. Not only that, we get irritated when others choose different path.

1. Who “opened her home”?
2. Who else was present?
3. Use the following chart to contrast the attitudes and actions of the two women from Luke 10:39-40.

| | Mary | Martha |
|---|------|--------|
| Actions | | |
| Attitudes | | |
| Words | | |
| Effect of actions, attitudes and words. | | |

4. Considering Jesus' activities of the preceding days, describe what might have been Jesus' needs?
5. Write a one word description of the way Martha reacted to her situation.
6. Write a one word description of the way Jesus reacted to his situation.

II. Jesus ministered to Martha. Luke 10:41, 42

Jesus was surrounded by people who did not understand him, and sometimes their efforts at serving him were off-track. His mother and brother tried to 'rescue' him when they thought he was delirious or misguided in his teachings. His disciples wanted to protect him from clingy mothers and children. Martha thought that a hearty meal at her table was what would serve him best. Each of these assumptions might have been correct from an earthly perspective, but Jesus had a different perspective. That is what he tried to help Martha understand.

1. What showed that Jesus was thoughtful of Martha in his response?
2. What do you think was the "one thing" that was needed? (Was it something *he* needed or something *she* needed?)
3. What had Mary chosen?
4. How would that have helped Jesus?
5. How would that have helped Martha?
6. As Jesus took the opportunity to make something clear about Mary, what did he teach Martha? (42)

III. Martha believed without understanding. John 11:

Believing God doesn't always mean that we understand His ways. Until we see Him work in our lives, it's impossible to even begin to see things *through* His eyes. Though we will never have perfect knowledge in this life, as we walk with Him we build a bank of experiences upon which to base our understanding of His work in our present circumstances. Jesus helped his disciples, Martha, *and us* to understand how to believe Jesus.

1. Why did Jesus delay his response to the sisters' plea for help for Lazarus? (11:14)
2. Who was the first of the sisters to meet Jesus as he approached? (11:20)
3. What did Martha say that she believed *about* Jesus? (11:21-22)
4. In the next interchange Jesus pressed Martha. What was the disconnect between what Jesus said and what Martha said? (11:23-27)
5. When Jesus called for the stone to be removed what did Martha's comment reveal? (11:39)
6. Here was another teaching moment between Jesus and Martha. What was Jesus' reminder to this friend? (11:40)
7. Why was the raising of Lazarus an experience for the disciples to put in their 'spiritual bank account'?

IV. What is admirable?

Right answers and a hectic schedule of ministry will not help our belief any more than Martha's frazzled way of serving helped Jesus that day in Bethany. Martha used her service as a cover for her desire to control those around her. Mary was not the only one who had to do things her way; she even expected Jesus to see things her way. While service is admirable, another thing is more admirable. We release the control of our lives when we have allowed Jesus to possess our hearts, minds, *and our schedules*. This is admirable. Then we can begin to understand and truly believe.

1. As human beings it is impossible for us to fully understand God's ways. How are God's ways described in the following verses?

Psalm 145:17

Isaiah 55:9

Romans 11:33-36

2. When did the disciples finally understand? (Luke 24:44, 45)

3. List the ways that God provides help to understand His ways?

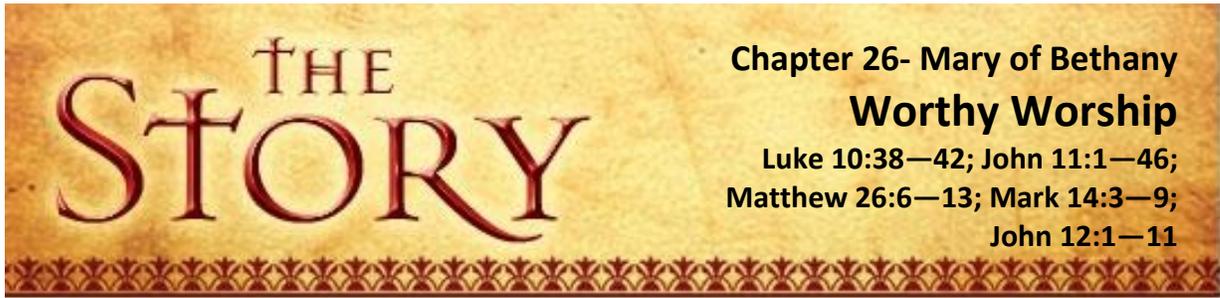
2 Timothy 3:15-17

Romans 8

James 1:5

Key Question: What are you trying to control with busyness that hinders your ability to understand and believe?

For additional reflection: John gives us Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit in chapters sixteen and seventeen. Study John 17:17-23, and note how Jesus planned for you and me to be able understand and believe?



Chapter twenty-six of THE STORY, “The Hour of Darkness”, begins with the preparation for the Passover feast which took place the night before Jesus was crucified. To give Christians everywhere a vivid reminder of His suffering and death, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. He also revealed that one of his friends would betray him. Only four days before this Jesus was at another meal during which Mary’s act blessed Him so much that he announced she would be remembered every time the Gospel is proclaimed. As we read the story of Jesus’ death, it would be good to consider how Mary acknowledged Jesus with a beautiful expression of love—*worship that was worthy*.

I. One thing. Luke 10:38—42; John 11:1—46

How can we offer worship that is worthy of One who suffered and died for us on that dark day? To understand the background we will return to the two passages of scripture from Martha’s story, but this time we will appreciate Mary’s part in them. There *was* a connection between Jesus and Mary of Bethany, but it is the same connection that we can also have with our Lord, the worship connection.

Our first introduction to Mary in Luke 10 gives us three clues about her heart of worship. Fill in the blanks to discover them:

“(Martha)...had a sister called Mary, who _____ at the Lord’s feet, _____ to what he said” Luke 10:39.

Jesus said “... only _____ is needed. Mary has _____ what is better and it will not be taken away from her” Luke 10:42.

1. What is the attitude of heart when one sits at the feet of another?
2. What does “listening” mean to you? How might the heart be involved?
(The Greek word used here is *akouo*. It is translated as hear, listen, understand, listen and respond.)
3. What choice did Mary make?

The story in John 11 of the raising of Lazarus, give us more insights into Mary's heart of worship.

4. When Martha ran to meet Jesus as he approached their home, what did Mary do? (v. 20)

5. What was Mary's response when she heard that Jesus was asking for her? (v. 32)

6. What do you think her words imply: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died"?

7. How did this experience affect Jesus? (vs. 33-38)

8. Read John 11:38-44, and put yourself in Mary's place. Remember that Mary had taken the time to listen attentively to Jesus' teaching in the past. Mary had heard Jesus' and Martha's conversation at Lazarus' tomb. Describe what Mary's faith and feelings might be at this point.

III. Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany. Matthew 26:6—13; Mark 14:3—9; John 12:1—11

As Jesus' time on earth drew to a close, we know that Mary was one of the few who understood, at least in part, what Jesus had been telling them about himself. John's account reveals what Jesus had been teaching as that dark hour approached. Only a few days before the crucifixion, when Mary anointed Jesus' head and washed his feet, she would have understood the following things about Jesus:

Luke 18:31-34

John 6:45-48

John 7:17-19

John 8:23-24

John 8:31-32

John 8:51

At the Last Supper Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Complete the chart to compare the two foot washings.

| | The Supper in Bethany Matthew 26:6; John 12:1—11 | The Last Supper John 13:1—30; Luke 22:14—38 |
|--|---|--|
| Who was present? | | |
| What happened immediately before the foot washing? | | |
| Who acted as a servant? | | |
| Whose feet were washed? | | |
| What items were used to wash the feet? | | |
| What was the reaction of the recipients of the foot washing? | | |
| What was the purpose of the act? | | |

These two beautiful acts teach us different things. From Mary we see a heart of worship. From Jesus we see the why He is *worthy of worship*.

IV. Worthy Worship

The truth is, we *must* worship. “The need for worship is as natural as the need for protection and love, (but) God does not accept pretend worship” (Benson 49,51). To worship like Mary we need to know what is acceptable to our Lord. As you answer the following questions, allow God to lead you to worthy worship through His Word.

1. Worthy worship can only happen when the worshipper is *able* to worship.

We are not *worthy to worship*. Read Hebrews 9:1-14 and fill in the blanks to note *how* we are able to worship God. (Note that the Greek word *latreuo*, translated as “serve” in the NIV, also means worship—as a *slave* worships or serves a master.)

“How much more, then, will the _____, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve (worship) the living God!” Hebrews 9:14.

How did Jesus make it possible for us to worship?

2. Worthy worship can only happen when the object of worship is worthy.

Meditate on the following passages and consider Whom we worship.

Read 1 Timothy 1:15-17 and note God’s attributes from verse 17.

“Now to the _____, immortal, invisible,

the _____, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” 1 Timothy 1:17.

“Worship _____!” Revelation 19:10 (See Psalm 46:10-11).

3. Our worship must be based on Truth, Who guides us through His Spirit and His Word.

What Jesus told the apostles that night in the upper room, about the sacrifice of his body and blood, happened in real time and in a real place. Worship is not *only* in our hearts and minds. Hear the Truth through these passages.

Jesus said, “I am the _____, the _____ and the _____. No one comes to the Father except through me” John 14:6.

“This is the one who came by water and blood, _____.

He did not come by water only, but by water and the blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies because

the _____ is the _____” 1 John 5:6.

4. To worship in a worthy manner we reflect the One we worship. Mary had understood the lesson

Jesus taught when he raised Lazarus—that *he had power over death*. She knew that Jesus would sacrifice Himself, so she sacrificed herself in the only way she knew how. Her sacrifice told Jesus that she understood what He would do, and that she would honor Him with her whole life.

Discover how our life of worship reflects Jesus’ life of sacrifice:

John 7:38-39. “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will

_____. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those

who believed in him were _____ to _____. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified”. (See Acts 2:36-39).

Romans 12:1. “Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to _____ your
_____ as _____, holy and pleasing to God—which is your
_____”.

Key Question: What is your holy and pleasing sacrifice to God?

For Additional Reflection:

The subject of worship takes a lifetime to examine. A good next step is to consider what the Word teaches in the following passages.

Deuteronomy 6:13a: “You _____ the Lord.”

Psalm 29:2: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name: _____ the LORD in the splendour of his holiness”.

Matthew 4:10: Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘_____ the Lord your God, and _____ him only’”.

Revelation 14:7b: _____ him who made the _____, the _____, the _____ and the _____ of _____”.



Mary Magdalene became one of Jesus’ disciples as his popularity reached its peak. During his last year of ministry, she and the other women who followed Jesus witnessed the opposition against him grow to a deadly force. Chapter 27 of THE STORY relates what very well could have been Mary’s testimony of what occurred three days after Jesus was unjustly crucified. Mary knew from personal experience that Jesus had the power to release one from cruel bondage; surely she also knew how Jesus had released Lazarus from the bonds of death. As she remained at Jesus’ side throughout his ordeal she might have been waiting to see if he could also release himself from those bonds of death. Jesus did not disappoint her (Luke 7:37-39).

I. The Women Disciples of Jesus. Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 27:55-56

The New Testament writers openly discuss women who had a part in Jesus’ life and in the life of the early church. Most represent excellent examples of Christian living. Mary was never mentioned in a negative light in Scripture. It is only a supposition that she is the un-named “Sinful Woman” who anointed Jesus(Luke 7:37-39).

1. From the above passages in Luke and Matthew, list each woman who is mentioned as a follower of Jesus and how she is described in the chart below.

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

2. What was their service to Jesus and what does this service imply about their resources?

3. Fill in the blanks. In Luke 8:2, Mary is described as one ‘from whom seven demons had _____.’

The Greek for ‘went’ is *exerchomai*. Another understanding of this wording is: to flow out from, to come forth, to cast out.

The Greek for ‘demons’ is *diamonian*. It is also translated as ‘devil’ or ‘god’ and refers to a spiritual being that is inferior to God, or ministers of the devil.

“The Devil, or Satan, is the chief enemy of Jesus and the establishing of the kingdom of God. In his ministry, especially in his exorcisms, Jesus engages in the first stage of the defeat of Satan in casting out his evil minions. Jesus’ complete defeat of the Devil and his demons is expected in the eschaton” (the end of history). (Green, McKnight & Marshall 163).

4. Explain the kind of oppression you think Mary Magdalene endured, and the relief that you think she would have experienced when she was released from the oppression from seven demons.

II. The Loyal Women.

We can learn who of Jesus’ followers was present at Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection from the four gospel accounts. Each report differs, not because of discrepancies because the four accounts do not conflict. They are however from different points of view and shared within the context of to whom the writer is speaking and what each writer wants to bring out through his account of Jesus’ life. There are key people and events that do not change.

1. What did the disciples do when Jesus was arrested? (Matthew 26:56)

2. We know that Judas had betrayed Jesus to the authorities, and Peter denied him when he waited with bystanders to see what would happen. To see which followers stayed with Jesus, review the four accounts and note the names that are mentioned.

At the Crucifixion and Death

| Matthew 27:27—55 | Mark 15:16—41 | Luke 23:26—49 | John 19:16b—42 |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| | | | |

At The Burial

| Matthew 27:61—28:8 | Mark 15:42-47 | Luke 23:50—24:1—11 | John 19:30—42 |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | | | |

At the Resurrection Morning

| Matthew 28:1-20 | Mark 16:1-9 | Luke 24:1-12 | John 20:1-18 |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | | |

3. How many of the 12 disciples remained at the scene until the resurrection?
4. To whom did Jesus appear first? To whom did Jesus speak first?
5. How does Jesus demonstrate his compassion for Mary Magdalene?
6. What does he commission her to do?

The outstanding loyalty of the women followers may have come from the natural caring nature of women. It may have also come from the fact that most of these women had nothing to lose in being identified as a follower of Jesus. They may have seen Jesus as a person, where the men might have seen Jesus as their leader. However the fact is, Jesus first spoke to a woman, and the good news that JESUS IS ALIVE, was first told by a woman.

III. Bondage is Our Choice. Romans 6:15-23

Freedom and slavery are used to explain the purpose of Jesus' life and death on earth. We can join Mary Magdalene in rejoicing in the resurrection because slavery and freedom are not just a metaphor, but the reality we live with as human beings. Deepen your understanding by examining the following passages.

1. How does sin enslave us? Galatians 5:18-21; Romans 8:5
2. If we sin more don't we show how much grace Jesus has? Romans 6:15
3. To what or to whom are we enslaved if we are disobedient? Romans 6:16
4. What is the end result of sin? Romans 6:16b
5. If we voluntarily present ourselves as slaves to God, what is the pay-off for us? Romans 6:17-18, 23

6. Since sin must be paid for by death, whose death covered the cost of our sin if we choose to give our lives to God? Romans 6:23

IV. Release From Bondage is Our Choice

We are created to enjoy friendship with God in His world. Our sin not only took us out of the perfect place He had created, it prevented God from enjoying His creation. Through the following passages, discover how God's solution gave us an even better relationship with Him.

1. What is set free from the bondage of decay through Jesus Christ? Romans 8:19-21

2. What did Jesus have to share in to set us free? Hebrews 2:14-15

3. Since we are no longer slaves, what is our relationship to God? Galatians 4:4-7

4. What does our freedom in Christ allow us to do? Galatians 5:13-14

“For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). Freedom isn't free; Jesus paid the price. We can use our freedom to return to bondage, or we can use our freedom to remain loyal to Jesus until He returns for us.

Key Question: How will you use your freedom in Christ?

For additional reflection:

From the following passages note what things will not set us free from sin:

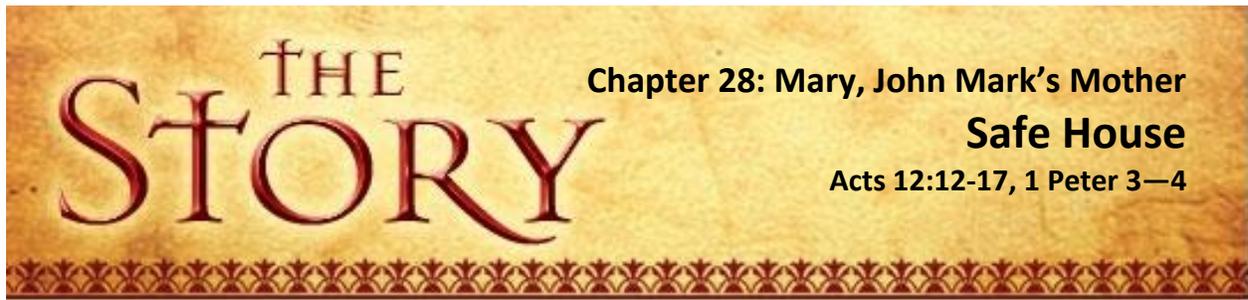
Philippians 3:9

Romans 7:18, 24

Revelation 3:17

Matthew 19: 24-28

1 John 2:15-16



Though it was not a safe time to be a Christian, the early church persevered; one of the things that helped them endure faithfully was prayer. In “New Beginnings”, chapter 28 of THE STORY we read how the Apostles taught the gospel message of salvation and how the church began. The early growth was explosive and impressive. But when the Jewish leaders saw how their whole power structure was threatened, they turned on the Christians; the enemies of Christ continue the same pattern to this very day. These believers revealed the characteristics of the victorious Church when they met together at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to pray for the safety of a brother they loved. May we follow their example in life and in prayer.

I. Best of Times, Worst of times. Acts 1—12

When He established the church using signs and wonders, God fulfilled what the prophet Joel predicted, and He did this to verify the apostles’ teaching. Peter and the Apostles explained who Jesus was and invited their listeners to become his followers. In his sermon, Peter invited them to come to Jesus and to receive the indwelling of His Spirit to guide their lives—something the Old Testament law couldn’t offer. In the beginning, the new believers “*enjoyed the favor of all people.*” But that soon changed.

1. Note the events from the Acts passages that show how the new believers were threatened as the church grew. (Dates are approximate).

AD30-37-

- 2:1-13, 41 _____
- 4:1-4 _____
- 5:17-21,29-33 _____
- 7:54-59 _____

AD 39-40

- 8:1-3 _____

AD 44

- 12:1-2 _____
- 12:3-4 _____

II. God Led Peter to Safety. Acts 12:5-17

The believers saw God demonstrate His power and protection, even in the midst of severe persecution. The Jewish (and later the Gentile) opposition used all the human power that was available—from politics to purely vicious physical attacks, including murder. These enemies were sure they were doing the right thing, but their efforts seemed to inspire growth rather than thwart Christ's church. The friends who assembled to pray for Peter when he was arrested could have told them why.

1. What was happening while Peter was in jail? (v. 5)
2. Who woke Peter up? (v. 7)
3. What was Peter's state of mind as the angel led him away from the jail? (v. 9)
4. Where was Peter when he "came to himself"? (v. 11)
5. When Peter finally realized he had been delivered from Herod by God, where did he "just happen" to go? (v. 12)
6. What was the reaction of the people when they saw Peter in person? (v.16)
7. When Peter finally gained entrance into the home, what did he tell them? (v. 17)
8. To whom did Peter send the message about his experience? (v. 17; Acts 21:17; Galatians 1:19)
9. What would this testimony mean to the people who met in Mary's home, and to the church leaders who were under persecution?

III. Mary, the mother of John. Acts 12:12-13; Mark 14:51

This Mary is only named one time in the New Testament, but studying the events and people that surrounded her gives us some important information. We can discover several reasons why Peter knew that Mary's home was a safe place. Her example will still benefit those who want to serve God in our day as well.

Mary's home: Acts 12:12-13

Though the early Christians met in homes (Acts 8:3), it was also the practice for many Jewish synagogue meetings to take place in an extra room or a home that would accommodate a group. It would actually have been the natural thing for the Christians to meet in homes especially after the persecution of Christians by the Judaizers. These people used what they had to benefit the Kingdom.

1. What does an outer entrance tell us about a home, even today?
2. How many people were gathered there?
3. What kind of people were they?

4. What does the fact that Mary had a maid imply?

Mary's influence: What we can learn about Mary's family also gives us knowledge about the kind of woman Mary was. Answer the following questions about Mark:

5. Who was her son and what did he write about? Mark 1:1; Mark 14:51,

6. Whom did he accompany in ministry? Acts 12:12, 25

7. How did the following evangelists describe Mark?

Peter- 1 Peter 5:13

Paul- 2 Timothy 4:11

8. Who was a relative of Mary and John Mark? (What was his relation to Mary?) Colossians 4:10

9. What kind of man was he?

Acts 4:36-37

Acts 11:22-26

Acts 13:2

10. What are fair conclusions that we can draw from this information about Mary's home and influence?

IV. A Safe Place | Peter 3—4

Jesus taught his followers that the world would know them by their love for one another (John 13:35). Love creates a safe place for those who would be drawn to the church. Later, Peter wrote two letters of encouragement and instruction to the churches. His good friend, Mary, had lived out many of the same characteristics that Peter wanted to see in all believers. From the selected passages in chapters three and four of 1 Peter, make a description of a brotherhood of love. (Try to imagine Mary's thoughts if she had read this letter. What memories would some of these suggestions have brought back!)

3:1-6

3:8

3:9

3:10

3:13

3:14

3:15-16

4:1-2

4:7

4:8

4:9

4:10

4:11

Key question: Which characteristics will you develop in your life to create a safe haven for your family and church?

For further reflection: Study the fellowship of the early church and note how they applied the above characteristics:

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 4:32-36

Acts 6:1-7



With little fanfare Luke describes how Paul arrived at Philippi, where he met a woman who opened her door for the first church in Europe! The Story, chapter 29, summarizes the missionary work that Paul and his teams accomplished. Upon arriving in a new area, Paul's strategy was to connect with the local synagogue where he knew he would find followers of God. He would introduce Jesus to them as the promised Messiah, through whom they would find salvation. Often the doors to the synagogue soon closed to him, as well as the minds of the synagogue leaders. However Philippi was not a Jewish region, and there was no synagogue. God led Paul straight to Lydia.

I. Led by the Spirit. Acts 15:36—16:10

The second missionary journey began with what might have seemed like a step backwards-- a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Actually, hindsight gives us the advantage of seeing that the ministry was doubled as two teams were now evangelizing. Discover how God led Paul and Silas to Philippi.

1. What was Paul's desire? (15:36)
2. Who joined them in Lystra? (16:1) Who joined them in Macedonia (16:10)
3. Why didn't Paul travel into northern Asia (Bithynia) like he desired? (16:6-10)
4. Note that Paul's team was redirected two times. What door was open to them? (16:12)

Christians had been scattered all over the known world during the years of persecution in Jerusalem, yet there is no record of any churches that had been established in Macedonia before Paul arrived. Now the Lord had prepared the way, and He had opened the hearts of some who would carry on the responsibility even after Paul's team had to leave.

II. "Meet Me By the River". Acts 16:11-15, 40

For many years our family traveled between Mexico City, Mexico, and the St. Louis, Missouri area. We clocked hours on the road, and singing praise songs helped occupy four wiggly children. "Meet Me by the River" was a favorite. That song reminds us of the hope of that river of everlasting life that flows from God's throne (cf. Revelation 22:1). One day I'd love to sit by the 'Eternal River' and talk to Lydia about her life and to learn about those god-fearing women whom Paul found by the river near Philippi.

1. On the Sabbath, what were Paul and his team looking for when they headed to the river? (16:13)
2. Describe who they found there. (16:13-14)

3. How did the evangelists take advantage of this open door? (16:13)
4. What are the two distinct terms that Luke uses to explain how Lydia received the teaching? (16:14)
5. Besides the words of the evangelist, what influenced her heart? (16:14)
6. What was her response? (16:15)
7. What did she persuade Paul and his team to do? (16:15)
8. How many people do we know were travelling with Paul? (15:40, 16:10-note the pronoun “we”)
9. Where did the church of Philippi meet? (16:40)

III. The Philippian Church. Acts 16:14-40.

Lydia is the second woman mentioned in Acts who made an important contribution to the body of believers in her area. Her story is similar to the story of Mary, the mother of John, about whom we studied in the previous lesson. She was a Jewess in Jerusalem who offered her home as a meeting place for believers, even during a time of persecution. Lydia was a Gentile who opened her doors to the largely Gentile Philippian believers. The first converts to the Philippian church make up a cross-section of the culture of the day. The interesting thing is they could have come from any city in the world today!

1. The next time Paul and his team went to a place of prayer whom did they rescue? (16:16-18)
2. How did that good deed affect Paul and Silas? (16:19-24)
3. As you read the story of what happened next, note the things that only God could have done. (16:25-29)
4. How did the jailer respond when Paul taught him the Word of God? (16:30-34)
5. After the magistrates had to apologize to Paul and Silas, what did they do? (16:39b)
6. Where did they go before they left town? (16:40)

7. What did they do there? (16:40b)

There is no doubt that God orchestrated the establishment of the church in Philippi. He worked miraculously in the lives of the first three converts in Philippi.

8. Note briefly how God opened the doors to their hearts.

Lydia _____

The slave girl _____

The jailer _____

9. God also provided a benefactor for this new church plant. Note some things that we know and that we can assume about Lydia:

Her profession and resources. (16:14a)

Her character. (16:14b)

Her dedication. (16:15)

Her sacrifice. (16:40)

Her home. (16:15, 40)

10. Considering the treatment Paul and Silas received, what kind of risk would Lydia and the other believers have been exposed to?

IV. Our Open Doors.

The birth of the church in Philippi was lovingly and carefully brought into being by none other than Jesus Himself, through His Spirit. He held their hearts and, we can almost imagine, the hands of the evangelists and their first converts. But is the story any different today? Is our Lord still so vitally interested in the birth of new churches around the world? Let's analyze. Answer the following questions about churches you know:

1. Prayer was a key characteristic of both New Testament churches that we know met in the homes of godly women (Acts 12:12; 16:13). How has prayer been a key characteristic of the churches you know?

2. Describe the details and situations that you know only God could have brought about.
3. Are you acquainted with a church that started in someone's home? (Give details.)
4. Tell how God has opened doors for someone to know Christ?
5. Tell how God has moved someone's heart to *pay attention* to the teaching of the Word and to *respond*.
6. Now that you know the story of the Philippian church, read Philippians 1:3-6. In your own words, explain why Paul wrote that "*he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*".

Key Question: How is God opening the door in your heart to help you to pay attention and respond to Him in some area of your life?

For additional reflection: List the assurances that Paul shares with the Philippian believers in his letter to them:

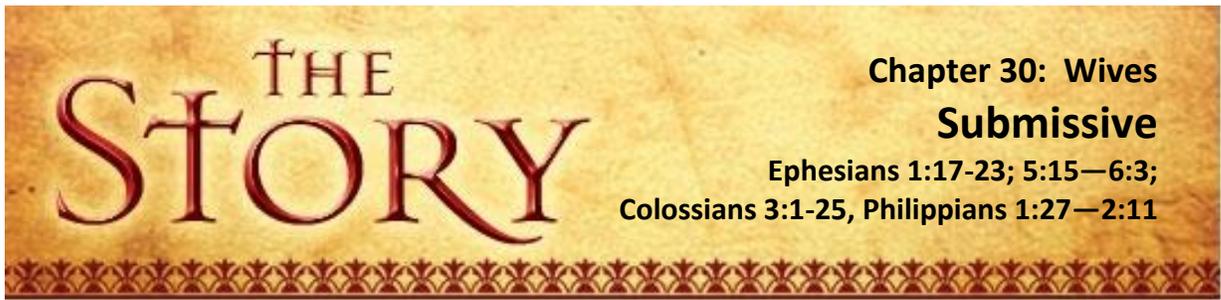
1:7

1:12-14

1:29

3:20

4:8-9



“Paul’s Final Days”, chapter 30 of the THE STORY, tells us how one of the most influential men in history “finished the race”. His conversion from a murderer of Christians, to a fervent ambassador of Christ shows the great power of Christ *in us*. The letters he wrote from prison to the churches he established give us a glimpse of what was on his mind: the unity of believers in the love of Christ and under the Lordship of Christ. The church is God’s plan to bring all people to Christ, but the family is not only supposed to illustrate that relationship, it is the real life workshop where the skills to relate to one another are learned. Submission to authority is the key. If only we would *submit*.

I. All Power and Authority. Genesis 3:1-13; Ephesians 1:17-23

As we near the end of THE STORY, we find ourselves returning full circle to the dilemma that faced Eve. Perhaps Paul was thinking, “By now, we should understand submission.” But the truth is the struggle still goes on in every life and in every relationship. Discover what God wanted women to understand through Paul: that our best choice in life is *submit to God*.

1. What was the question that Eve was forced to answer and how did it convict her? (Genesis 3:13)
2. What had she chosen *not* to do? (Genesis 3:2-3)

Many years later Paul was praying for the Ephesian Christians with thanksgiving because, in Christ, they had something Eve didn’t have. Eve didn’t have the knowledge and power of Christ dwelling within.

3. What kind of authority does Christ have in the church? Ephesians 1:22
4. Fill in the blanks: He is seated “in the heavenly realms, far above all _____, and _____, _____, and _____, and every _____

that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21). Explain what Christ’s total authority means to you in your own words. (cf. Rev. 1:8)

5. How much power is working in the lives of Christians? (Ephesians 1:19-20)

6. What does Paul pray that the Ephesian believers *would have*? What are the two things he wishes they *would know*? (Ephesians 1:17-18)

Sometimes we get confused because we try to “overthink” an issue. But we don’t have the ability to think like God does. There are some things we must accept. That God is the source of all power and authority is truth. That He has placed all power and authority in Jesus Christ is truth. That the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the Holy Spirit) dwells in Christians is also truth. When women submit their minds to the truths of *God’s* authority we will open the door to the restoration of our relationships. The letters of Paul that come toward the end of his life include instructions about personal and family relationships. Discover why our best choice regarding relationships is: *submit to God*.

II. Power and authority in the family. Colossians 3:1-25

In light of the truths about Christ’s authority, as explained in Ephesians 1:17-22, analyze the Colossians passage about the family.

1. What advice does Paul give as introduction to this passage? 3:1-2

2. According to this passage, how can we allow Christ the right to control the way we relate to each other? 3:9-11

3. List the controlling attitudes that Paul suggests for dealing with interpersonal difficulties. 3:12-17

4. Note the specific instructions about family relationships from Colossians 3:18-21.

Wives-

Husbands-

Children-

5. Paul anticipates that each individual will hold this personal reservation in his or her heart: “But what about *my needs*?” What will we receive if we obey these teachings? 3:23-24

(Note that this assurance begins the closing thought that applies to the whole passage, not just for verse 22.)

6. How does Paul classify the lack of submission to these instructions? 3:25

7. Reread Colossians 3:1-25 in its entirety and find who has the power and authority in all personal relationships?

8. Fill in the blanks: For a women to voluntarily defer to her husband is _____ to the Lord.

IV. Power, authority and the church. Philippians 1:27—2:11

Bradley Blue writes “early Christianity expanded throughout the Empire house by house,” (Marshall & Peterson 474). That was not just the early evangelist’s missionary strategy; it was *God’s* missionary strategy. God has designed just two social structures: the family and the church. The early church met in family homes. Ideally the church and home would mirror one another. The mission of each is parallel: the birth and nurturing of children. Discover what is true about submission in the church.

1. What were the Philippian Christians facing, and can we relate to the same things today? 1:29

2. How should we conduct ourselves then? 1:27a

3. How should we relate to one another in the church? 1:27b

4. What would complete Paul’s joy (as well as bring joy to Our Lord? 2:2

5. What are the results if we live this way? 2:1

6. What should our treatment of others be, and what is the motivation for it? 2:3-4

7. Paul describes the attitude of Christ in 2:6-8. Which concept is most meaningful to you? Explain.

8. What will be the final result of Jesus’ humbling of himself? 2:9-11

9. Fill in the blank: Power and authority came to Jesus through _____ to God.

V. The Mystery explained. Ephesians 5:15—6:3

Our human minds can’t understand how submission will ultimately give us power, or how humility will ultimately result in exaltation. But if we demand power and if we try to exalt ourselves we will **never understand**. Paul seems to portray the family as a working lab where Christians can test how the knowledge and power of Christ in us functions.

1. What is the family structure?

5:22-24

5:25-32

6:1-3

2. How are the children viewed? (5:1; 6:4)

3. Fill in the blanks to find the characteristics of a healthy family (and a healthy church):

“Be _____ of God...and live a life of ⁽¹⁾ _____.” Ephesians 5:1-2

“(2) _____ to one another out of _____ for _____.”

Ephesians 5:21

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be ⁽³⁾ _____ to his wife, and the two shall become _____ flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about _____ and the _____. Ephesians 5:22-33 (See “Who’s Who in the Family” by Carol Stine)

4. How do we know that Eve was a part of Adam (one flesh) at the creation? Genesis 2:18-24

5. When a man and woman are joined in marriage they are _____.

6. When we become Christians, who joins our spirit? Acts 2:38; Ephesians 3:14-21

7. To summarize then, write the three main characteristics of the church and of the family from the passages above ⁽¹⁾ _____, ⁽²⁾ _____, and ⁽³⁾ _____. (see question #3)

The biblical teaching on marriage reveals that it is a spiritual relationship, that God designed it, and that He needs to be involved in the relationship for intimacy and unity to develop. It’s easy to see why the world rejects God’s pattern for marriage, in fact, rejects marriage at all. A marriage between a believer and a non-believer presents some difficulties, although that is not to say love and unity are absent. Nor is every Christian marriage trouble free. But the Bible speaks to this issue as well.

8. How should a wife influence a non-believing husband? 1 Peter 3:1-4

9. According to Paul, should a wife divorce a non-believing husband if she accepts the Lord after she has already married? I Corinthians 7:12-13

The truth is Satan destroyed God's plan for marriage when he led Eve to rebel against God. But an even more powerful truth is that through our marriage relationship God can purify our hearts and bring out the gold in us...if we let Him.

Key question: How will you submit to the Lord in an important relationship in your life?

For additional reflection: Answer the following questions regarding the marriage relationship from Ephesians 5:25-29?

What would indicate a husband's submission to the Lord in his relationship with his wife?

What is the example he should follow regarding his wife?

Why should an unmarried Christian woman consider a prospective husband's relationship to God?

Who's Who in the Family, Ephesians 4-6
by Carol Stine

Ephesians 4—5:20:

This section explains how to achieve unity in the body of Christ. In a nutshell, *unity is* what makes a church work and *unity is* what makes a family work. The ground rules for the proper function of the church are the same for the proper function of a family. For unity to 'happen' Christians must live as *children of the light*. Once again, this is the same in the church as well as the family. But what makes us *children of light*?

Christians are given very clear and explicit instructions on how to treat one another in vss. 4:17-5:15. It would be absurd to neglect these instructions when teaching about family relationships, especially the roles of the husband and wife. In fact, there is such a natural connection between the relationships in a church and the relationships within a family that Paul segues into even more specific instructions for the family starting in vs. 22. Note that for the rest of the letter the instructions to family members and instructions for the church members mesh.

The "hinge" between the general instructions to the church and the section where specific instructions to the family begins is found in vs. 21.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Ephesians 5:22-31:

This is what children of light do. A wise and honest mentor is obligated to refer back to vs. 21 every time someone seeks to 'pull rank' over another. In every situation or problem *both husband and wife submit to the Lord* by seeking to meet the needs of , and by seeking what is best for, the other. Who has the last word? **God**. As long as this ground rule is understood and obeyed, the rest of the instructions in 5:22-6:9 will profit the church and families. At every point that an individual seeks his own best, or grasps for his own needs to be met over the needs of the other, the relationship is dysfunctional. Since even the most sincere Christians still must battle sin and selfishness, every relationship will be a training ground for learning these truths.

So, wives must submit to their husbands as they submit to the Lord. (vs. 22-23). This instruction has a built-in protection for the wife. A husband who thinks this teaching is a green light to authoritarian, overbearing, abusive behavior is rejecting the true teaching. He is head over the wife "*as Christ is the head of the church...*" How was Christ the head of the church? He loved the church. He was the *Savior* of the church. He suffered and died for the church. This is explained clearly in vs. 25-31. How interesting. Three verses are needed to tell the wife to submit to the husband, and five verses explain that husbands must love their wives. Could it be that the Spirit knew men would have a hard time with their command to submit to unselfish love?

Equally impressive is the reason behind the command that wives must submit to and respect their husbands (vs.33). This submissive spirit grows out of the fertile ground of appreciation for sacrifice that an honorable husband will make for the family. Traditionally, men were taught from little up to be strong protectors and providers. The Ephesians teachings grow men who are willing to lay down their lives for their families. A woman who chooses to rule the roost and thwart this desire of the man to be the "Knight in Shining Armor" is disappointed when she finds that her lack of submission drives a stake into her husband's hearts. Bleeding hearts don't love well. But they will often take action to

force the woman's submission. Hence the sad cycle of dysfunctional relationships which cause the ruin of almost 50% of marriages in the U.S.

Submit (*hupotasso*) in Ephesians 4-5: To defer

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. to arrange under, to subordinate | 5) to yield to one's admonition or advice |
| 2) to subject, put in subjection | 6) to obey, be subject |
| 3) to subject one's self, obey | |
| 4) to submit to one's | |



The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible; it is God's last inspired word to mankind, and concludes His message in a glorious shout of victory. A few snapshots from John's masterpiece are brought together in chapter 31 which wraps up The Story. God sent this message to encourage the Church however John uses a form of writing that is unique to the New Testament and more common to the Old Testament (Ezekiel, Daniel etc.). Layers of repeating metaphors that intertwine make interpretation of the book open to many opinions. But one thing rings clear: God's promise in Genesis—that Satan would be crushed—comes true through the work of Christ, and God will reunite with His creation. Then the victory party will begin "because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7).

I. The Bride.

Weddings, brides and grooms, and married love may resonate with women like no other. What girl doesn't dream of her wedding day and her 'prince', who will find her, rescue her, and 'live happily ever after' in love with her.

Three women are mentioned in Revelation: the mother (12:1-17), the harlot (chapters 17—19), and the Bride of Christ, (19:8 through the end of the book). The metaphor of the bride is not new in Revelation; it has been a running theme throughout God's Word, and we have followed it through The Story. Discover what we can know about the bride.

1. What does Paul use to teach about the relationship of Christ and his church? Ephesians 5:22-32
2. Ezekiel 16 describes God's love for his people in violent terms that are hard to read. What is revealed about the "bride" and what does God do about it?
3. How much does the groom love the bride? Ephesians 5:25-27; Isaiah 49:16

Psalm 45 was commissioned for the wedding of the king's son but, "he felt himself commissioned by the Spirit of God to write about the heavenly King, the Messiah, taking a bride" (Elwell).

4. How does the bride look? Psalm 45:11-14
5. What is her wedding gown made of? Revelation 19:8

6. In Revelation 21:2 and 21:9-21 we see two metaphors layered together. What is the bride and what is she compared to in John's description of the "bride and wife of the lamb"? How is she adorned in these two passages?

II. The Bridegroom. John 3:16-36; Matthew 9:14-17, Revelation

Discover the clarification about Jesus that John gave to his disciples from John 3:16-36:

1. Describe the actions and desires of God, the lover of mankind? John 3:16-17
2. What terms does John use to describe his own relationship with Jesus? John 3:27-29
3. What terms does John use to describe Jesus? John 3:28-29
4. How does he then explain Jesus' superiority? John 3:30-31
5. What is John's warning? John 3:32-36

Discover the clarification that Jesus made about himself to John's disciples from Matthew 9:14-16:

6. How does Jesus describe His followers? Matthew 9:15
7. How does Jesus describe Himself? Matthew 9:15

In weddings of our day the bride usually steals the show. But in Revelation, the groom is most important because he is the Lamb of God. What do the following passages say about the bridegroom?
Revelation 5:6, 9

Revelation 7:9-10

Revelation 7:17

Revelation 19:7

Revelation 21:23

Revelation 22:1

Why is it so important to see that the lamb and the bridegroom are one and the same? (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19)

III. The Wedding

Some familiarity with traditional Jewish wedding customs helps us understand the wedding metaphor. The marriage begins long before the wedding! There are four parts to the process. The **betrothal** is an agreement between the groom and the father of the bride that is much more serious than our engagement. When the agreement is made they are man and wife. A **waiting period** follows during which the groom pays the dowry or provides a service equal to the amount owed to the father of the bride. The bride is occupied as well; during this time she prepares herself for the wedding. After the agreed upon interval the groom, along with a **procession** of his friends, takes the bride from her home to his home, or to the home of his parents. At last the celebration begins with a **wedding feast** that may last seven to fourteen days!

Match the following scriptures that correspond to a part of the Jewish marriage:

_____ *"I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him"* 2 Corinthians 11:2; Hosea 2:19-20.

_____ *"In my Father's house are many rooms....I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"* John 14:2-3.

_____ *"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"* Matthew 25:6 (from the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13, also see 25:31-33).

_____ *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son"* Matthew 22:2ff.

It's no accident that men and women are 'wired' to need a loving relationship. God makes no apology for His desire to have a loving relationship with his creation. Jesus knew his role because the bride and groom are God's idea! It is right and good to celebrate a wedding because it is the picture of the great celebration to come, when Jesus and His church can be together, face to face, for eternity.

IV. The Bride of Christ: A Saved Church or Saved Individuals? YES!

If the church is the bride of Christ, how do we fit in as individuals? In 1910, Scottish theologian, Peter T. Forsythe explained God's love for the whole world as love "directed upon the world in such a way that it should be taken home in every individual experience". The church is the bride of Christ but we have the assurance of God's Word that Jesus is the lover of each soul.

1. Fill in the blanks to learn about the relationship between the lamb and His bride:

"God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out and find him, though he is not far from _____ of us." Acts 17:27

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has _____ into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Romans 5:5

"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to _____, just as he determines." 1 Corinthians 12:11

“You should keep your relationship with God to yourself.” Sadly, this false teaching even confuses believers. But we cannot simply be “satisfied with a personal union with Christ, securing our own future. The gospel deals with the world of men as a whole” (Forsythe).

2. Determine how the individuals who make up the “Bride of Christ” relate to one another:

I Corinthians 12: 12-31

Ephesians 5:19-21

3. Explain in your own words how the church, made up of *many* individuals, is the Bride of Christ.

William Hendriksen explains in More than Conquerors that the Bride of Christ was chosen from eternity and for eternity. “And now, after an interval which in the eyes of God is but a little while, the bridegroom returns and, ‘it has come, the wedding of the lamb’. The church on earth yearns for this moment.”

Key Question: Are you a part of the Bride of Christ, prepared to join the lamb for the wedding feast?

For additional reflection:

1. Paul explains in Romans 2:6 that “*God will give to each person according to what he has done*”. (See also, Psalm 62:11-12). From the context and from our study of the Bride of Christ, what is the most important thing for each one of us to do? (Hint: Romans 3:21-26)

2. How can you make more room in your heart and life for God’s *Treasure*?

3. What righteous deeds will make up the “fine linen” in your wedding gown?

4. What meaningful truth have you discovered in your journey through The Story?