Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature
Presents:

# Children Of Promise

*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.*

Galatians 4:28

***Adults***

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

# "Children Of Promise"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Adult
Written by Brother Clifford Hayes

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# LESSON ONE

## ISAAC: Father of a Nation

**LESSON TEXT**
**GENESIS 17:19**

**WRITTEN BY**
**BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES**

**Genesis 17:19**
And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

Children are a blessing and a gift given by God. In many places in the Bible we learn of the Father's and the Son's attitudes toward children. In the very beginning God ordained that children would be born to the first husband and wife. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...." (Gen. 1:28). In various places, God's word speaks of children as a gift given by God. When Jacob and Esau were happily reconciled in Genesis 33, "And he (Esau) lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he (Jacob) said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant."

The joys that accompany children in the family are evidenced by the following scriptures: "Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" and "thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table" (Ps. 127:3, 128:3).

This year's study is "Children of Promise." Just as the children born to parents are a gift and a blessing from God, these children of promise, ordained and purposed by God, have been a gift and a blessing to the entire human race. It cannot be disputed that Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus have had a positive impact on the lives of all who would try to follow the precepts of God.

The lives of these children of promise are unique in many ways. Not every one entirely realized the full purpose that God intended in his life, but certainly all were content to wait patiently for God's will to unfold. Some of their fathers, notably Abraham and Jacob, were not so patient, and problems resulted that still plague the world today. Also, each had an ultimate purpose in life that was predetermined by God and was inevitable in its conclusion. It must also be noted that four of these men were born to barren women and one was born to a virgin.

Webster defines a promise as "a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act." Men make promises to each other daily; therefore, we are all accustomed to promises. We are also accustomed to seeing them broken. Anyone who has lived for a number of years would certainly never claim to have kept ev-

ery promise. There are many reasons why this is true: forgetfulness, negligence, or circumstances beyond human control. A promise is of no more value than is the ability, and willingness, of the one who makes it to carry through. Therefore, man can rest assured that the promises made by God are sure, true, and will be kept. Sometimes God's promises are conditional, as seen in II Chronicles 7: 14. But even with the conditions He places on His promises, He never forgets, He is not negligent, and nothing is beyond His control.

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome concerning the promises of God to Abraham he penned these words, "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham or his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" and added, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Rom. 4:13, 16). God's promise to Abraham was first spelled out in Genesis Chapter 12. It was repeated in Chapter 22. Verse 18 reads: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Many times God spoke to His earthly agents in person as He did with Moses at the burning bush and as He did with Abraham when Isaac was promised. Other times His promises were delivered through Godly men, speaking as God gave them messages. We learn this in Hebrews 1:1 where Paul writes, "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...." These men prophesied and declared the will of God, as they were moved and inspired by the Holy Ghost. This is further proven to us by the writing of Peter in 2 Peter 1: 19-21, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

By whatever means God's messages came to man, they are a "sure word of prophecy," and are to be taken as God's own words and believed and heeded. To do otherwise would be to doubt God and His power and truthfulness. "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (Eze. 22: 14).

## ISAAC—FATHER OF A NATION

### INTRODUCTION TO THIS LESSON

When God called the already saved Abraham from his homeland of Ur of the Chaldees, He led him to an unfamiliar country. In obedience he left, "not knowing whither he went" (Heb.11:8). At this same time God made seven promises to Abraham. He told Abraham that He would make of him a great nation, would bless him, would make his name great, that he would be a blessing, would bless them that blessed him, curse them that cursed him and "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 1-3).

God was true to His word as evidenced by the events in Abraham's life when God was leading, guiding and protecting him. However, it is the last of these promises that we will be concerned within this study. God promised Abraham that in him all families of the earth would be blessed. This promised is alluded to in Genesis 13:16 in telling of the number of his descendants and is made more specific in Genesis 15: 4-5: "And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." Abraham knew the promise of God and was bemoaning that his only apparent heir was Eliezer, the steward of his house. God assured Abraham that his heir would come from his own seed.

Even with his belief in the words of God, Abraham's faith sometimes wavered. Abraham and Sarah impatiently attempted to revise God's timetable into one of their own, enlisting the aid of the handmaiden Hagar that Abraham might have a son. The birth of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, was not accomplished by the plan of God, but rather by the plan of men. It did not fulfill God's intent for a promised child. It was God's intent that this child of promise would be born to Abraham through the barren womb of Sarah.

After the birth of Ishmael, Abraham knew that God had promised him a son, yet he hesitated to believe that the promised child would be born to Sarah. Even after the events recorded in Genesis 15:1-6, Abraham laughed that God said he should father a child and the barren Sarah would be his mother. He went so far as to say to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18). Hearing this God reassured him in verse 19, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

"And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac" (Gen. 21:1-3). One of our pastors wrote, "According to nature this birth should never have taken place because of the age of the parents, but the Bible teaches that through God all things are possible! Sarah and Abraham had their doubts, but just as God shows us today that He is able to do all things, He was able to do this little thing for them. God promised to bring a great nation from the loins of Abraham. In doing so He was also promising to bless the whole world, because through this lineage Jesus Christ would be born into the world. Through Abraham's promised child, God would come into the world."

## THE FAITH AND OBEDIENCE OF ISAAC

Even in his periods of weakness, it is

a biblical fact that Abraham had great faith in the guidance of God. He was one of the most faithful people that we know of and in some places he is even referred to as the "father of the faithful." Indeed, Paul writes of his being "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11). But Abraham was not the only faithful and obedient one. The test that characterized Abraham's faith and obedience to God also involved a great amount of faith and obedience on the part of the promised son, Isaac, who willingly submitted himself as the "lamb" in what would surely have been a fulfilled sacrifice of his life. It was intended only as an ultimate test, but only God knew that. As far as Abraham was aware in the days just before, and as Isaac was aware in the minutes just before, it was reality. Isaac probably did not realize he was to be the sacrifice until his father began to bind him, preparing to lay him on the altar. At the time, Abraham was elderly, well over 100 years old and Isaac was either approaching manhood or was already a man of about 20 years in age. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says he was 25 and the Talmud, the Hebrew Bible, makes his age to be 37. Whatever his age, Isaac could have easily overpowered his father if he had chosen to resist his own impending death, but he didn't. He was clearly obedient to his father, as well as to God--honoring Abraham by trusting that what his father was doing was of God. As his father, Isaac too had faith.

God may have chosen the sacrifice of a son as the test because it was something that He would experience Himself. God knew that, centuries later, near the very same location of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, He would bring about the sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ. In the hours just before His crucifixion, Jesus may have had Isaac's near-sacrifice in mind when He asked " O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). The sacrifice of Jesus, however, could not be stopped.

**PARALLEL LIVES**

Some biblical writers call the near sacrifice of Isaac one of the most challenging, and perhaps most troublesome, parts of the Bible. It is not believable, they say, for a sane father to sacrifice his son or for that son to willingly allow himself to be laid on a sarcificial altar. Their viewpoints show a lack of understanding, taking the human approach rather than understanding the spiritual relationship between God and Abraham, Abraham and Isaac, and Isaac and God. This event is an illustration of ultimate faith and obedience on the part of Abraham and Issac.

To those who make a study of the Bible, this event is sometimes viewed as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion of Jesus. Key elements from the two accounts given as symbols of this foreshadowing include:

1. Both of their births were believed to be miraculous - Isaac to a woman who was far too old to have children, and Jesus to a virgin.

2. According to scripture, Abraham was told by God that he would be the father of many nations, and in the

Christian faith, God is the seen as the father of all who believe.

3. In both stories, Jesus and Isaac had the wood laid upon their backs and were forced to carry it up the hills where they were to be sacrificed: Isaac up Moriah, and Jesus to Golgotha.

4. Although according to scripture Abraham had fathered a son previously, namely Ishmael with Hagar, Isaac was the only son of Abraham through Sarah, as Jesus was the "only begotten son" of God. Isaac is also referred to as "his (Abraham's) only begotten son" in Hebrews 11:17.

5. They both were laid on the wood alive, and it was voluntary on both their parts.

The parallel falls apart when Abraham was stopped from sacrificing his son, and God provided an alternative to Isaac. For Jesus, there was no "ram caught in the thicket" (Gen. 22:13) and the sacrifice was carried out to completion.

**GOD'S PLAN FOR ISAAC**

What would have been the effect on future generations if the sacrificing of Isaac had been completed? We read Abraham's words in Gen. 22:5, "And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Then in Hebrews 11:17-19, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

The net consequence on future generations would have been that of no change. If Abraham's actions had proceeded to completion, God would have raised Isaac from the dead. After that resurrection, God's plan of redemption would have proceeded uninterrupted. Isaac was the child of promise, and as such was the father of the nation through which the Messiah would come. This promised child was foretold several times in God's conversations with Abraham. It was through this child that the nation of Israel would be formed ("And I will make of thee a great nation," Gen. 12:2) and also through this child that the Savior of the world would come ("and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him," Gen. 18:18).

What would have been the effect on future generations if Isaac had never been born? That situation could never have happened. God ordained his birth. It was in His plan, unalterable. Again, using the words of Ezekiel, "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (Eze. 22: 14).

## LESSON TWO

# Joseph: The Deliverer of a Nation

**LESSON TEXT**
**GENESIS 45:7**

**WRITTEN BY**
**BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES**

**Genesis 45:7**
And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

**INTRODUCTION**

Joseph was the first son of Jacob and Rachel, his favorite wife. When the time came for Jacob to take a wife, his father Isaac sent him to his uncle Laban's house where he was to choose a wife. Laban had two daughters, the elder, Leah, and the younger, Rachel. Rachel was beautiful and Jacob fell in love with her and asked Laban for her hand in marriage. Laban's proposal, to which Jacob agreed, was that Jacob would work seven years and then he would be given Rachel as his bride. After the prescribed period of time the date for the wedding was set and through the treachery of Laban, Leah was substituted for Rachel. The next day when the deceitful act was discovered, Laban proposed another seven years of labor for Rachel's hand and Jacob loved Rachel enough to agree to these terms.

Soon children were born to Leah, to her handmaiden and to the handmaiden of Rachel. But as written in Genesis 29:31, "Rachel was barren." After ten sons and one daughter had been born, "God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bore a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son" (Gen. 30:22-24).

This lesson shows the difference between the acts of man and the divine will of God. In the fifteenth century, Thomas à Kempis wrote The Imitation of Christ and in that work he wrote, "Man proposes, but God disposes, neither is the way of man in his own hands." In this lesson the contrast between the actions of man and those of God is obvious. In the narrative the ten brothers are shown as sinful humanity, while in Joseph we have a picture of one consistently faithful to God. The Bible emphasizes Joseph's respect of God's judgment, the presence of God alongside Joseph in times of hardship, and Joseph's success within each station he holds. By tracing these elements within the text, one can see that Joseph possesses the wisdom to know God, while the brothers in ignorance fail to recognize God's will.

It was not according to God's purpose that Joseph's brothers dealt harshly with him and sold him into slavery, nor was it His will that he be accused of attempted rape. God never leads men into evil acts. That is the devil's mode of operation. But God does allow bad things to happen to good people and uses the acts of evil men to accomplish His purposes. Such was the case when Joseph was physically abused, cast in a pit and sold into slavery.

**JOSEPH'S EARLY YEARS**

We know nothing of Joseph's childhood but at the age of 17, Joseph was a

shepherd alongside his brothers. Jacob loved Joseph more than he loved his other sons "because he was the son of his old age" (Gen. 37:3). Joseph would report his brothers' misdeeds to his father and, as a reward and to show his favoritism, Jacob gave Joseph a "coat of many colours" (Gen. 37:3). Because of Jacob's partiality the brothers were jealous of Joseph and hated him. Joseph only further provoked this hatred when he told his brothers about two of his dreams, which showed him being an important person some day.

In Joseph's first dream, he dreamt that he and his brothers were tying together bundles of grain in their fields. Then, while they were tying these bundles, Joseph's bundle of wheat rose up and stood straight, while their bundles bowed down to his bundle (Gen. 37:6-8). In Joseph's second dream, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down and paid obedience to his star (Gen. 37:9). After he told this second dream to his brothers and his father, Joseph's father rebuked him, saying, "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (Gen. 37:10) The brothers' hatred grew and grew.

One day, Jacob sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his brothers. Joseph went to Shechem and, when his brothers were not there, followed them to Dothan. When the brothers saw him they said, "Behold the dreamer cometh" (Gen. 37:19), and they plotted to kill him and throw him into a pit. The oldest brother, Reuben, suggested that they merely throw Joseph into the pit, planning to secretly save Joseph later. When Joseph approached, the brothers took his coat and threw him into the pit. They sat down to eat and saw a caravan of Ishmaelite traders from Gilead in the distance. Judah came up with the idea to sell Joseph into slavery. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver. The brothers then dipped his coat into the blood of a slaughtered goat and brought it back to Jacob. Jacob recognized the coat and concluded that a beast had killed his son. Because of the death of his favorite son he mourned for many days and was inconsolable, even though his hypocrite sons attempted to comfort him.

**JOSEPH AS A SLAVE**

The Ishmaelites who had bought Joseph sold him to Potiphar who was an officer of the Pharaoh of Egypt, as well as the captain of the guard. The Lord blessed all that Joseph did, and the Lord's blessing passed on to the house of the Egyptian master of Joseph. Potiphar saw this and gave favor to Joseph and made Joseph the overseer of his house and all that he had. Such was the trust placed on Joseph that Potiphar had no knowledge of his own possessions, but left everything in Joseph's capable hands.

Satan is not one to leave a successful child of God alone. Just as he entered into the hearts and minds of Joseph's brothers, in Egypt he used another tactic to attempt to ruin the good name and influence of one of God's faithful servants. The Bible describes Joseph as "a goodly person and well-favoured" (Gen. 39:6). After some time Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. She approached Joseph day after day but he refused her each time, citing loyalty to Potiphar and to God. "But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all

he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:8-9)

One day, Joseph came into the house to work. Potiphar's wife grabbed his coat and he ran away. She then pretended that Joseph had tried to seduce her, and slandered him first to her servants and then to her husband. Potiphar was furious and sent Joseph to a jail for the king's prisoners. The years of service as a slave to his master, in which Joseph and his master prospered, in which Joseph gained a reputation as a faithful servant to both his master and to God, were in shambles because of a devil-possessed harlot of a married woman. But we will see God making use of Joseph's misfortune.

In prison, the chief jailer liked Joseph (God's providence again) and put him in charge of all the other prisoners, including Pharaoh's butler and baker, who had offended the King and had been thrown into prison. One night both the butler and the baker had strange dreams and Joseph interpreted the dreams, saying that in three days' time the butler would be recalled to his former position while the baker would be killed. As Joseph had interpreted, three days later, Pharaoh restored the butler to his job and had the baker killed. Joseph asked the butler to mention his name to Pharaoh in the hope that he would be freed, but the butler forgot about Joseph.

Two years later, Pharaoh himself had two dreams that his magicians could not interpret. The butler then remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh, who sent for Joseph. He appeared before Pharaoh and told him in the name of God that the dreams forecasted seven years of plentiful crops followed by seven years of famine. He advised Pharaoh to appoint a wise overseer to save for the years of scarcity. Joseph was very bold to be advising the King of the then-most powerful nation on the earth, but Joseph was speaking the words of God. Joseph's prediction and advice pleased Pharaoh and he made Joseph his second-in-command. He gave Joseph his ring and dressed him in robes of linen with a gold chain around his neck.

Joseph traveled throughout Egypt, gathering and storing enormous amounts of grain from each city. So seven good years passed and the seven years of famine began. The rains stopped; hot dry winds began to blow; and the crops soon began to fail. It was just as Joseph had said it would be. The famine was in all the lands, but in Egypt there was food. When the Egyptians ran out of their own food they cried out to Pharaoh to help them. The Pharaoh told them to "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do" (Gen. 41:54-55). During the seven years of famine Joseph was in charge of rationing grain to the Egyptians and to all who came to Egypt. The famine affected Canaan, and Jacob sent his ten eldest sons to Egypt to get food, keeping only Benjamin, Rachel's second son and Jacob's youngest child, at home, out of concern for his safety.

Thus far in this Bible story, we see how the devil manipulated the life of this faithful servant. If this story were to end now, one would merely think that it was a case of bad things happening to good people. But, praise God, the story doesn't end here. God's plan that began when that barren mother conceived this child of promise is coming to fruition.

## GOD'S PLAN FOR JOSEPH

Every child of God has a role in the great plan of our Almighty God. We must attempt to find what that role is and ask God for the grace that we might fulfill His expectations for us. In the Roman letter Paul wrote, " I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). These verses teach not only our responsibility to God and how we must complete those things God expects of us, but also how we must keep ourselves free from the entanglements and enticements that the world offers. Joseph, who lived hundreds of years before Paul was inspired to pen these words, did exactly as these two verses teach. It leads one to believe that God had been talking to Joseph. Paul also wrote in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The story of Joseph, this favorite son of Jacob, is a dramatic demonstration of the great truth contained in this verse.

Again, repeating from the introduction, it was not according to God's purpose that Joseph's brothers dealt harshly with him and sold him into slavery, nor was it His will that he be accused of attempted rape. God never leads men into evil acts. That is the devil's mode of operation. But God does allow bad things to happen to good people and uses the acts of evil men to accomplish His purposes. We must never forget that one of the characteristics of God is that He is omniscient and so, in the vast eons of eternity past, He foreknew how events would unfold. Even though He did not lead the brothers and Potiphar's wife in these evil acts, He allowed these events to happen that His purposes would be realized. This writer believes that even if the brothers had loved Joseph and he had never been sold into slavery, God would have found a way to place Joseph in Egypt so that his promises to Abraham would have come true. God promised to make of Abraham a great nation and bless the entire world through his seed. But He also promised that Abraham's descendants would dwell in a strange land, would be servants to the people of that land, and would serve them and be afflicted of them 400 years (Gen. 15:13-14). This again affirms the scripture used in the first lesson, "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (Eze. 22:14).

In order for God to foreknow the conclusion of His plan for Joseph, He also had to know those things that would befall His agent that he might use those misfortunes for Joseph's advantage and His glory. Another way of saying this is that God was watching over Joseph. We call this the providence of God. Consider these scriptures pertaining to God's foreknowledge and pre-arrangements. Here, in the following passage, Joseph is speaking to his brothers at the end of all the years of God's providential care: "And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall

neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:4-8). Thus in these scriptures is given a summation of the purpose of Joseph's life.

In our consideration of the Bible story of Joseph, we see God's providence at work in the life of this child of promise whom God loved and used. We also see that God's plans and arrangements can take time to come to an end result. It is also apparent that the events that are involved in providence, when viewed alone, appear to be of little significance. Many times they do not appear to have any future value, but when all of them are taken as a whole their significance becomes apparent. Many of the events in Joseph's life were undoubtedly of the ordinary variety, but there were others that were extraordinary, even miraculous. For instance, the dreams of Joseph and others and their interpretations involved the supernatural. But we see that they were visions sent from God when Joseph was able to interpret the dreams of the butler, the baker and Pharaoh, and when the brothers bowed before Joseph in Genesis 42:6.

# LESSON THREE

## SAMUEL: The Restorer of a Nation

**LESSON TEXT**
**1 Samuel 11:14**

**WRITTEN BY**
**BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES**

**1 Samuel 11:14**
Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.

### INTRODUCTION

The book of Judges tells the history of Israel from the death of Joshua to the rise of Samuel as the prophet of the Lord. Just before the death of Joshua, the people, in response to Joshua's challenge, stated, "God forbid we should forsake the Lord, and serve other gods" (Josh. 24:16). They recognized that Jehovah had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, had gone before them in battle against their enemies and preserved them through all their travels to the land God had promised them as descendants of Abraham. In violation of God's command, Israel failed to destroy all the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, but made covenants with them (Jdg. 1:27-36). God decreed that He therefore would not drive out these people but would leave them to be "thorns" in the side of Israel (Jdg. 2:3). Joshua's generation, which knew the Lord, died (Jdg. 2:6-10), and later generations intermarried with the idolatrous Gentiles in the land and served their gods (Jdg. 3:5-6). Beginning with the first judge, Othniel, a period of about 350 years passed in which Israel went through a repeated cycle of apostasy against God, servitude to their oppressors, repentance for their rebellion and salvation when God would send a judge to deliver them.

The primary characteristic of the period was, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jdg. 17:6). Every man followed his own conscience. There was no rule of law. The result was a time of chaos and inward decay. This shows the results for both individuals and nations when people simply do what they feel is right without regard for divine law.

Samuel was a prophet whose service to God spanned two important times in the history of Israel. He was the last judge of Israel before the people asked for and received a king.

### THE BIRTH AND CALL OF SAMUEL

Samuel's father Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Even though he loved Hannah more than Peninnah, Hannah was not able to give her husband children. Hannah was grieved because Peninnah had children and would provoke Hannah. This went on year after year. Each year Elkanah went to Shiloh to make sacrifice, and each year, Peninnah

would flaunt her children before Hannah and Hannah would weep for her barrenness. Finally, as all of us must, in her deepest trouble, she had to take her problems to God. I Samuel 1:10 reads, "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore." In her anguish she vowed to the Lord that if He would open her womb and give her a manchild, she would in turn give the child back to the Lord. From the depth of her heart she presented to God the following petition, "And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head" (I Sam. 1:11).

Eli the priest saw Hannah mumbling, for she was praying silently, and rebuked her, thinking she was drunk. When he realized she was praying out of anguish and grief, he blessed her, saying, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him" (I Sam. 1:17). Here is the promise of the child given by a representative of God. In his comments to assist the preparation of these lessons, Brother Jerry Miller wrote, "Samuel was the product of what I consider to be one of the most beautiful examples of prayer recorded in the scriptures. Not only can we look at Samuel as a child of promise, but also as a child who was promised back to God."

So Hannah conceived and the child of promise was born. Her promise was to return the child to the Lord when he was weaned. The Jewish historian Josephus says this did not mean weaned from the breast, but weaned from his mother, in the sense of being able to get along without her care. This would have been when he was twelve years of age. It is interesting to remember that Jesus was twelve when he first presented himself at the temple in Jerusalem. Also, it is the custom of the Jews to this day to consider a twelve-year-old boy as entering the age of responsibility.

Although Hannah loved her son very deeply, she did not give him back to the Lord grudgingly and sorrowfully. We know this, because after giving him, she made a wonderful prayer of joy and praise to the Lord, which is given in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Far from expressing sadness, the opening words are: "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord!" This prayer of praise and thanksgiving bears a striking resemblance to that of Mary, mother of Jesus, given in Luke 1:46-55, the opening words of which are: "My soul doth magnify the Lord."

The third chapter of I Samuel begins the account of Samuel's call by God and how God began to communicate with Israel through this child of promise, indicating that he was to be a prophet of God. The first verse of that chapter reads, "And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." John Gill says that the latter part of that verse means that "a word from the Lord in a dream or vi-

sion, directing, informing, instructing, or reproving, this was very rarely had; of late there had been but very few instances; and which accounts for why not only the child Samuel knew not that it was the voice of the Lord that called to him, but Eli himself thought nothing of it until he had called a third time." The reading of and instruction in the scriptures were nonexistent, Eli being so old and his sons being so depraved. Verse 3 of that chapter reads, "And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep...." This writer believes that the "lamp of God" is akin to "the candlestick" found in the letter to the church at Ephesus, signifying God's authority to do His business at that place. The spiritual state of Israel had fallen so low it was in God's plan that a younger, stronger, more holy person, dedicated to His cause, would be called to be a judge and priest.

The Lord called Samuel's name and he answered and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for thou calledst me." But Eli answered that he did not call him and for him to return to his bed. The Lord called again, "Samuel," and again the boy went to Eli and again Eli sent him back to his bed. The Lord called Samuel the third time. Again he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here am I; for thou didst call me." Then Eli knew that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And for the fourth time the Lord came and called again as the other times. And this time Samuel said, "Speak; for thy servant heareth." (I Sam. 3:4-10)

How many times has the Lord spoken to us, calling us to repentance or calling us to be in His service? How much more would the work of the Lord prosper if we would be like Samuel and answer, "Speak; for thy servant heareth," after being spoken to only four times?

The first message God gave Samuel to deliver was of the fall of Eli's house. God said the sins of Eli's house could not be forgiven by sacrifice and offerings. He knew that his sons had performed evil acts in the Lord's house and Eli had done nothing but give them a verbal rebuke. The most telling scripture about this time of Samuel's life is found in I Samuel 3:19: "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." I remember when I was a young boy my aunt speaking about a certain man praying. She said, "He prayed a pretty prayer, but his words didn't rise any higher than the top of his head." How wonderful for God and His nation Israel that He had a man in the office of judge, priest, and prophet who was able to communicate with Him each time he knelt. "And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (I Sam. 3:20).

**SAMUEL, THE JUDGE AND PROPHET**

Beginning with the fourth chapter of I Samuel and continuing through

Chapter 7, we have the account of Israel's struggles with the Philistines. In I Samuel 4, we have the record of the complete failure and ruin of God's people. Israel was "smitten" before the Philistines, the Ark taken, the sons of Eli slain, and Eli himself removed by his death. Thus every outward link with God was broken.

The nation entered into a period of bondage to their enemies that lasted for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:2). During this period it is significant that the name of Samuel is not once mentioned. For twenty years the people neglected the man the Lord selected as prophet and judge. With this low spiritual condition of the people of God came the opportunity for their enemies to dominate them. Their closest enemy at this time was the Philistines within their land. Then, as in later periods of their history, Israel was surrounded by enemies, the Egyptians, Syrians and others, but they also had enemies within their borders. It is the enemy within the circle of God's people that will always attack when the people of God are in a low spiritual condition. Opposition from without is always present for God's remnant, but many times, corruption from within is the result of a low spiritual condition.

The Philistines had captured the Ark of God, but they were learning the lesson of how God deals with those who do not reverence Him. After the defeat of Israel and the capture of the Ark, no doubt the Philistines were jubilant and confident in the superiority of their god over the God of Israel. They had faced the God of Israel in battle, and believed their god Dagon had delivered them and defeated Israel. They took the Ark of the Covenant to Ashdod and placed it in the temple of their god, Dagon. The next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on his face before the Ark of the Covenant. God was more than able to glorify Himself among the Philistines and their pagan gods. God made this statue of nothing bow down in worship before Him! The next day, Dagon was not only bowed, but his head and hands were broken off. God dealt harshly with the people of Ashdod where the Ark had been taken. "But the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof" (I Sam. 5:6). The inhabitants of Ashdod were very troubled that the hand of the Lord was upon them and wanted to rid themselves of the source of their problem. It was decided to send the Ark to Gath, but when it arrived, God's judgment was on that city as it had been at Ashdod. When it was taken to Ekron, those people "cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people" (I Sam. 5: 10c). Then the Philistines decided that they had endured as much of the Lord's wrath as they could stand and they sent the Ark of the Covenant to its own place.

Space will not allow a detailed discussion of the sixth chapter, but it is an example of how God works even through the altered instinct of animals to accomplish His purposes. It also demonstrates that His rules concerning the Ark are to be observed, even

when it is His own people who transgress. The unfaithfulness and superstition of the Israelites couldn't deny God His glory. The pride and the arrogance of the Philistines could not take one bit of glory from God. The lesson to be learned is that God will be glorified even when man fails to do so.

The seventh chapter re-introduces the judge and prophet back into the lives of the children of Israel. For twenty years since the defeat of Israel and the capture of the Ark, Samuel had been missing from the scene, not by God's or Samuel's will, but by the choice of the people. Then, according to the scriptures, "And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (I Sam. 7:2). Just as when God heard the groanings and the lamentations of His people when they were in Egypt, He was not insensitive to their needs at this time. However, before the Lord brought this people back into relationship with Him, they had to learn by bitter experience their need of the Lord. They learned this during the twenty years. Then Samuel admonished the nation and led them to repentance. "And Samuel spoke unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (I Sam. 7:3). Notice that the prophet said, "return unto the Lord with all your hearts."

This scripture applies to us today as it did to those to whom Samuel spoke. Is he not also speaking to us? A half-hearted return will not satisfy God. It is useless for the people of God to turn to the Lord with only a partial condemnation of themselves. If we turn to the Lord there can be no compromise as to our sin and failure. Also notice that the people were required to do three things. They were to separate themselves from the strange gods they had come to worship, to prepare their hearts by self-judgment, producing a lowly and contrite spirit and by this separation and preparation to give devoted service to the Lord. It is only in this way that we may "serve him only."

Samuel had all Israel to gather at a place called Mizpeh and there they confessed that they had sinned against God. They had put away the idols they worshipped and served God only. When the Philistines learned that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpeh, they brought their army to fight against the people of God. Israel, being afraid of the Philistines, appealed to Samuel to pray to God that they would be delivered from the hand of their enemies. We know that Israel had truly repented and God had forgiven them, because God sent a mighty thunderstorm that "discomfited" the Philistines. Israel pursued them and drove them out of their land. (I Sam. 7:7-11)

From this time Samuel judged the nation until his death. He discharged his responsibility by going from place to place, much like the circuit-riding preachers in the early days of our

country. "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places"
(I Sam. 7: 15,16).

## SAMUEL—THE ANOINTER OF KINGS

When Samuel was an old man, he made his sons judges over the people of Israel. These sons, like the sons of Eli, were not dedicated to the Lord's cause and were greedy, abusing the office of judge for their own gains. The elders of the nation came to Samuel to complain about the actions of his sons and asked him to make them a king that they might be as other nations. This request made Samuel unhappy and he talked to the Lord about it (I Sam. 8: 1-6).

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7). These fickle people of God had forgotten God's providence, not only in the history of the nation dating back to Abraham, but also in their own immediate past. In their eyes the theocracy of God's government had become unsatisfactory. Jehovah was an invisible Spirit that they were commanded to obey and worship. He could not be seen, He could not be touched, and He spoke to them through His judges and prophets. They did not want a heavenly King over them, but an earthly king as the surrounding nations, one they could see, touch and hear. So God told Samuel to listen to the people, but make them understand just "what manner of the king that shall reign over them" (I Sam. 8:9).

I Samuel 8:10-18 is the account of what Samuel told them. A king would conscript their sons into his army and their daughters into his kitchens. He would take their fields, vineyards and olive trees as a reward to those who served him well. The list went on, and Samuel finally told them, "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day" (I Sam. 8:18). Despite Samuel's warnings, Israel still demanded a king, and God agreed to give them one. Chapters 9-11 describe how Saul was chosen and anointed to be king of Israel. Even though the prophet of God had anointed him to be king, the people had not yet made him their ruler. Also, it seems Saul was reluctant to be elevated to the throne and it was only after Nahash, the Ammonite, promised atrocities to the inhabitants of Jabesh that Saul became angry and gathered the army together and defeated Nahash. Then Samuel said to the people of Israel, "Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there" (I Sam. 11:14). Samuel, as well as anyone, knew that the people were not entirely behind Saul when he was proclaimed king in Gilgal (1 Sam. 10:24, 27). So Samuel wisely saw this time of victory as a strategic opportunity to renew the kingdom at Gilgal.

Saul had to prove himself before many would accept that he was the king. This was not necessarily a

bad thing. Even though God had instructed Samuel to anoint Saul, the evidence must be in action. It was understandable for some to say, "Let's see what kind of man this Saul is," but once his character was demonstrated as it was in this chapter, it would have been wrong for them to fail to support Saul. As stated in a previous lesson, God uses the acts of evil men to bring about His purposes. The Ammonites unknowingly provided just the opportunity Saul needed to take an initiative, and to prove to himself and to Israel at large that he could save his people from oppressors.

So Israel had their king, and almost from the beginning, Saul's deeds were contrary to God's will: he assumed the duties of the priest and offered a burnt offering to the Lord. When confronted by Samuel, that prophet told him that his kingdom would not continue because he had not followed the commandment of God. Saul's abilities and his relationship to God continued to deteriorate until God said in I Samuel 15:11, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments."

Even though Samuel was rock solid in delivering God's message to Saul that his kingdom would fail, he still mourned that collapse and the failure of Saul himself, because he was God's anointed king. At a later time, David had a problem with this very thing when he told the men in his army, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord" (I Sam. 24:6).

However, God had totally rejected Saul and asked Samuel how long he intended to grieve over Saul and told him, "I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons" (I Sam. 16:1) The sons of Jesse passed before Samuel and each time the Lord whispered in Samuel's ear that this was not the one. In the case of Eliab, God told Samuel and us these wonderful words of instruction: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. 16:7). The one God approved and the one Samuel anointed was, of course, David, the "man after God's own heart."

It is my opinion that David was the king that God had in His plan. However, the people wanted a king so that "our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (I Sam. 8:20). Saul was a temporary, stopgap measure to appease the demands Israel made to Samuel. David was probably not yet born when Samuel anointed Saul. But in God's foreknowledge, He knew that David was coming. The entire nation of Israel had a difficult time accepting Saul, and at his birth, the boy David would have not been received at all. In fact, after his being anointed by Samuel, about fifteen years passed before David was made king over all Israel at Hebron.

## GOD'S PLAN FOR SAMUEL

When he wrote to Timothy, Paul spoke of being a "partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:8-9). In every age since Adam was cast out of the garden, God has used man as an instrument to accomplish His purposes. In the story of the birth and life of Samuel we see the grace of God at work to bring about His purpose, in spite of the weakness and failure of man. Samuel was a great servant of God, willing to be led of God, and God through this prophet saw His plan realized for that period of time.

Samuel did many things in the service of the Lord and his devotion to God is unquestioned. The greatest achievements in Samuel's life were in following the leadership of God and in the anointing of the shepherd boy to be king of Israel. In elevating David to the throne of Israel, the house of David and his lineage was established. And it is through that lineage that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, came into this world. God's words to Abraham were made true in that through his son, Isaac, the world has truly been blessed.

God's purpose for this child of promise is realized.

# LESSON FOUR

## JOHN THE BAPTIST: The Forerunner

**LESSON TEXT**
**Luke 1:17**

**WRITTEN BY**
**BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES**

**Luke 1:17**
And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

**INTRODUCTION**

"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11). These are the words spoken by Jesus concerning John the Baptist. He was teaching a large group of people when John sent two of his disciples and asked of Jesus, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another" (Matt. 11:3). John was in prison for condemning Herod for marrying his brother's wife. Evidently while in prison, John's faith had wavered somewhat, even though he had been uncompromising in the role that God set before him. Jesus sent the following message back to John. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:4-5). These words were in reference to a prophecy of Isaiah, which John obviously knew quite well. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isa. 35: 5-6).

John the Baptist was prophesied in the Old Testament, not by name, but by his office as the forerunner of the Christ and the one who was to prepare the material for the Son of God to use. Seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke of "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:3). Then in Malachi, the last book written before God closed the canon of the Old Testament, that prophet had this to say: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:1). So John the Baptist should not have been an unexpected arrival to the Jewish people, and especially to those in the religious hierarchy.

**THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

The birth of John the Baptist, as those of Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, and Jesus, is considered to be a miracle. Jesus was born of a virgin, the rest were born of barren mothers. Isaac and John the Baptist were born of mothers who were well past the age of childbearing. God miraculously caused John's conception and birth, even as He did Isaac's

and Jesus'. Jesus' conception in a virgin woman without the involvement of a human male is an exception. Isaac and John's conceptions were normally produced except that Sarah and Elisabeth were beyond childbearing age.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and John tell us nothing of the circumstances surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. Luke begins his gospel by describing an aged, devout, childless couple, the priest Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth. Again, as the other mothers in this study, Elisabeth was barren and both she and her husband were well along in years. As Zacharias served in the Temple, he saw the angel Gabriel, who told him that he and his wife would have a son whose name would be John. The angel went on to say that the child would be a great prophet, and would go before the Lord "like Elijah." This announcement from the angel is too important to paraphrase. The exact scripture is thus: " For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15-17).

After this announcement, Zacharias questioned the angel concerning his and his wife's age and didn't believe that such a thing was possible. As chastisement for his unbelief, Gabriel told him that he would be speechless until the child was born, "because thou believest not my words" (Luke 1:20) Zacharias went home, and his wife conceived. About six months later, Gabriel appeared to Mary, a kinswoman of Elisabeth, and told her that she was about to bear a son who would be called Son of the Most High, a king whose kingdom would never end. Shortly after this, Mary visited her kinswoman and when Elisabeth heard the voice of Mary, the child within Elisabeth's body leapt within her womb.

Then when the time came, Elisabeth gave birth to John. On the day of his circumcision, those present wanted to name the child after his father, but Elisabeth said that he would be called John. After disputing with the mother, they appealed to the child's father and he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." Everyone present was amazed at these things and asked, "What manner of child shall this be?" Not knowing the mind of God, they didn't know what John would become. Satan, also not knowing the mind of God, didn't know the problems this child of promise would give him.

## THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3 opens with this scripture, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John's message was: repent! because the Messiah is coming and His kingdom is coming with Him. Some of John's was a hard, unyielding, negative message. He preached that everyone was a sinner and doomed to hell. Repent or perish. To the uninformed, the most puzzling part of John's ministry was that he had any audience at all. What was it that compelled the Israelites to leave their homes to travel miles into the desert to hear John? Even though there was a negative aspect to John's message, in the same sermon there was a positive view also. John told

his listeners that they were sinners, but there was a remedy for their soul sickness. He announced the coming of the Messiah. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

So these people poured out in multitudes, traveling miles into the Jordan River valley to listen to John preach. The vast majority of these people came because they heard of the powerful nature of John's message. And they believed, "And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:6). The longevity of John's ministry and the commitment of those he pointed toward Christ is evidenced in that most of those he baptized slipped without a problem into the mainstream of the disciples of our Lord. This is as it should have been. John was a man of deep humility and even though some almost urged him to declare himself to be Elijah or even the Christ, he said, "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (John 1:27). Then, speaking of Jesus in John 3:30 he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

There were surely some who listened to John whose motives were far from pure. To the religious leaders, it was likely pride and self-preservation. After all, John was a competitor who was cutting into their territory. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jordan, he called them a generation of vipers and told them that they needed to show evidence of repentance. He further told them, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:9), meaning that God could take the stones and make children of Abraham that were just as cold and hard-hearted as they were.

John was a man of strong convictions and great courage. He did not coddle his audiences; he condemned them. When Herod married Herodias, the wife of his brother, John called it sin. The modernist preachers today are hardly willing to call immorality 'wickedness,' let alone call it sin. John was a man who spoke boldly to his times and to his audience. Even when it was Herod himself, John did not shrink from his calling. This led to his imprisonment and the events mentioned in the introduction.

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River near Bethany. John was reluctant to baptize Jesus and said, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" John knew that Jesus was the Son of God and had no need of repentance because He was sinless. Nevertheless, Jesus answered John and said, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." After being baptized, Jesus came out of the water and the triune Godhead was present. God the Son had just been baptized, God the Holy Spirit lit upon Him in the form of a dove and God the Father nodded His approval by proclaiming, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:13-17)

**GOD'S PLAN FOR JOHN THE BAPTIST**

When Gabriel made his declaration to Zacharias, the angel said that the child would be great. Looking at him from the world's view he had none of the normal qualities associated with greatness. He had no royal birth, coming from a common, simple family living in a small village somewhere, according to verse Luke 1:39, in the Judean hillsides. He certainly made no fashion statement. According to Matthew 3:4, he wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt about his waist. That was his everyday wardrobe. Nor was his diet anything exceptional. In the same verse it indicates

that he ate locusts and wild honey. So in the estimation of society there was little about this man that would qualify him as being great.

But Luke 1:15 tells us his greatness was "in the sight of the Lord," God's sight, not man's. This is a common expression in the Bible, as Zacharias and Elisabeth were "righteous before God." Paul used this term several times in his writings. And what it simply means is divine approval, divine favor. John may never have gained the approval of men, but he did have the approval of God. Since this child was to be "great in the sight of the Lord," there are certain things we need to observe about his character and about the work God set before him.

First, he would not drink alcohol and would "be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15) and being filled with the Spirit would be the pattern of his life. His life would be under the control of the Spirit and would dominate his very existence. For the rest of us who are filled with the Holy Spirit, that filling comes after our conversion. For John it came at the time of conception, which speaks volumes concerning the viability of the fetus. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception and in John was a life capable of being controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit before it ever came into this world.

Second, "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16) The power and authority of John's ministry is fully defined for us in this verse and it is as great a contribution as any human could ever make. It is a result of John's preaching accompanied by the Holy Spirit present within him. There would be a lot of conversions under his ministry. John came preaching repentance before God, urging people to answer God's call to repentance. He called Israelites back from their disobedience, back from their apostasy, rebellion, and their love of iniquity.

Thirdly, "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias (Elijah)" (Luke 1:17a). This was his privileged calling. He was to go as a forerunner before Him, Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. John was the prophet who would identify the Messiah. That was his task. When asked point blank if he was Elijah, he emphatically denied that he was that Old Testament prophet. But he did come with Elijah's power and his spirit.

Fourthly, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" (Luke 1:17b). Gill is of the opinion that this means that entire families would repent at the same time and the Gentiles (the disobedient) would understand the truth of the gospel and also come to repentance.

Finally, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17c). Here we have the culmination of God's plan for John the Baptist. All the other points lead to this. It is interesting to me that when God did His great work of creation "the earth was without form, and void" (Gen. 1:2). Before God could begin creating, He first had to make the materials with which He would build. Not so with Jesus. John 1:6-7 reads: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe." John was a witness for Christ and preached repentance to those who came to hear him. Those who heeded God's call to repentance were a people made ready and prepared for Jesus to use in the building of His Kingdom and the establishment of His Church.

Again, a child of promise fulfilled the plan God had made for him in eternity past.

# LESSON FIVE

## JESUS: The Savior of the World

**LESSON TEXT**
**GENESIS 3:15**

**WRITTEN BY**
**BROTHER CLIFFORD HAYES**

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

**INTRODUCTION**

Of all the "Children of Promise" studied in these lessons and indeed in the entire Bible, there is none that is as unique or is prophesied more than Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. From the above scripture in the first book of God's word, to the foretelling of the coming of the Savior of the world in the book of Micah, the old scriptures are filled with words, and symbols of this promised child. "Jesus is promised through many shadows and types in the Word of God. We can see the promised Messiah in the skins that covered Adam and Eve. Also we see Him as the ark of safety in Noah's day. He is visible to us as the Hebrew children struck the blood on the door posts of their houses. He is symbolized in the mercy seat that was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. His blood was offered for us as the only perfect sacrifice for sin. These are but a very few examples." (Elder Danny Holland)

"Of all the great promises of God, none are greater than the promise of what people were shown through these prophecies. God's greatest promise was that he would send his Son into the world. That even though man, through his own disobedience, had brought sin into the world, and death by sin, God, through his great love, promised to send the one who would save us from our sins. We can see that God's only begotten Son was indeed a very special child of promise in that he was born of a virgin. Without God intervening, such a thing would be an absolute impossibility. The Lord Jesus is the ultimate child of promise." (Elder Jerry Miller) This ultimate child of promise is He whom God promised when He told Abraham, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

Of the religions of the world, Christianity is unique because it stems from the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. No other religion has God the Son, born of a virgin through the workings of God the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the law given to His ancestors, dying for the sins of His creation, rising from the grave and ascending back to God the Father to make intercession for those who choose to answer the call to salvation. In this Savior, Jesus, we have the one who has the ability to virtually change every facet of human life, but most people are completely unaware of how He has so completely affected the world. How dreadfully tragic it is

that people have forgotten Him to whom they owe so very much.

**THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS BIRTH**

His birth was, of course, unique in all of human history. Though ancient mythology was filled with tales of lesser gods who were supposed to be the offspring of unions between humans and major gods, there is nothing that even closely resembles this in the narrative of the birth of Jesus Christ. Those offspring were merely in the minds of the people who believed those fairy tales. Jesus is real, all God and at the same time all man. Christ's birth stands alone in history; there has been no other like it: conception without an earthly father. We know that the beginning of Mary's pregnancy was of God, else why would the angel have appeared to her to explain the conception of her Son? Clearly, from the text in Luke 1:26-35, we can see that the angel had come not only to set her mind at rest about the pregnancy she was about to experience, but to explain that this unique event was simply the effect of God's desire to make this Son the culmination of the covenant He made with Abraham. She was to conceive Him in a very special way because there was to be something very special about her son.

The finite mind of man can only speculate concerning the process by which God caused Mary to become the future mother of His Son. We only know that the child would be of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) and "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Faith dictates that no further explanation is needed. The speculations of so-called theology experts are of no avail. Discount them. The above is all that God has told us and that is all we need to know.

This amazing, miraculous birth was prophesied in Isaiah when that man of God wrote, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). What an amazingly extraordinary thing, a virgin to conceive. Not only was she to be a virgin just before conception, she was virtuous after the Holy, promised child was placed in her body.

No other interpretation can be derived from the words "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34) These words show clearly that Mary was a virgin when the child was conceived. As a result of this unique birth, Christ was able to bypass the curse of the sin of Adam so that He was uniquely qualified as the sinless One to go to the cross to die as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Another part of the uniqueness of His birth was the location and the circumstances that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Except for two events, this small town had an uneventful existence. It was the birthplace of David, King of Israel, and is called the city of David in Luke 2:4. Approximately 1,000 years after this birth, another King was born. This

was Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. This small town had nothing in itself to be worthy to have this honor placed upon it, but here God chose, as He had in other instances, to "exalt them of low degree" (Luke 1:52).

About 700 years before Christ was born, the prophet Micah penned the following words, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). This statement foretold that Jesus would not only be born in insignificant Bethlehem, but also that the Messiah had been in existence in eternity past. This was the scripture the priests and scribes quoted when they told Herod where Jesus would be born (Matt. 2:5). It must be observed that after the birth of our Lord, He was visited by wealthy wise men from the east and humble shepherds from the fields surrounding the town. The gathering of these two widely divergent socio-economic classes signified that Jesus was to be Savior to all men, making true Jesus' words in John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

The place of His nativity has been established. In order for the birthplace of our Lord to fit the prophecy in Micah, it would be necessary for Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of about 70 miles. With today's methods of transportation this is but a short drive. However, in the birth of Jesus, this distance was a major journey on foot or riding a donkey and particularly so if a woman was about to deliver a child. The point is that no person would make this trip under these circumstances unless forced to.

When the time drew near that the child would be born, The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, issued a decree that every one in his empire would be taxed (counted) and that every one would be counted in his own city. That which Augustus decreed was either done to satisfy his vanity in knowing how many people he controlled or it was the policy of Rome to make the government seem more formidable by making everything more troublesome and inconvenient.

Many years ago a noted Baptist writer stated, "Observe how the ruler of the civilized world is unconsciously bringing it about that the Messiah, the son of David, shall be born in Bethlehem, though the mother's home was Nazareth." Although this statement is true, we must not limit God in His work. While Augustus was certainly unconscious of the events he was about to set in motion, God had a greater purpose when He consciously planted the idea of the decree in the mind of this pagan emperor.

In an earlier lesson it was said that man proposes but God disposes. This proverb of man has never been truer than in this lesson. The scriptures demanded that Mary make the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem so that the prophecy of God might be fulfilled.

Now here is an awesome thought. The entire world was put to the trouble, hardship and expense in order for Mary to be in Bethlehem when the child Jesus was born.

## THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS' MESSAGE

After His baptism by John and His being temped by the devil, Jesus went to Nazareth and there proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah. After reading from the book of Isaiah, He told those present, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). If space permitted, much could be said about the words He read from Isaiah, but a few comments are necessary. Jesus read, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me..." (Luke 4:18) and continues to state the obligations and responsibilities that God had given Him. The operative word here is "anointed." All the gifts and graces of the Spirit were conferred upon Him without measure. These gifts and graces gave Him the authority and made Him imminently qualified to do the work as was outlined in Isaiah's writings. His being "anointed" signified both his being fitted for the undertaking before Him and being called to it. Then in Luke 4:19, "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." This was the time that He determined and willed that His people might be redeemed through the gift of His Son. It was the accepted time; it was the time of salvation.

The methods of Jesus' teachings were mixed. He taught in long discourses as in the Sermon on the Mount and He taught with few words as when He calmed the wind and the sea and remarked to those in the ship with Him, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26) He taught by miracles in that He healed the sick and maimed, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. Much of His teachings were in parables, using stories and examples that the people could understand; mostly, the parables taught them to think for themselves. And all of His teachings were effective in bring the desired message to His listeners because the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him.

If you were to survey a group of average people as to the content of Jesus' preaching you'd no doubt hear something about love. Jesus did talk quite a bit about love. In fact He said that loving God is the greatest commandment and loving our neighbors is next to it (Mark 12:29-31). So, to be sure, love figured prominently in the message of Jesus. But we must realize his preaching about love didn't get Jesus crucified. Neither the Romans nor the Jewish authorities would have been particularly bothered by a Jewish prophet who told people to love God and each other. To be sure, the Pharisees would have been upset over the thought of having to love their enemies, but the Romans, who were the obvious enemies of the Jews, wouldn't have crucified someone whose main crime was telling Jews to love them and turn the other cheek. But love was not the core of His gospel. The concept of loving one's enemies was unique enough, but the core of Jesus' message must have been more controversial than a call to love.

When John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness, his message was, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). After being tempted of the devil, Jesus began His ministry and His first message was the same as John's: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt.4:17). This was the core that was the center of the gospel that Jesus brought with Him from heaven. Repentance we understand. All who have tasted God's goodness have gone through the process of conviction, repentance and salvation, but what did Jesus mean when He spoke of the kingdom of heaven? This term is used in Matthew, but the other synoptic writers use "kingdom of God." Is there a difference? The terms are synonymous and their usage depends upon the writer. For instance Mark and Luke used "kingdom of God" where Matthew used "kingdom of heaven" quite frequently. In the same parable, the authors used different words, (heaven or God) indicating that the two are referring to the same thing.

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand," meant that it was near; it was approaching. God's Holy Kingdom was soon to be established and the people were admonished to repent and get ready for it. Jesus was speaking of a spiritual kingdom. It was not what the Jews were looking for. The people of Judah were languishing under the Roman oppression and they eagerly waited for God to send them a leader who would reestablish the throne of David, throw off Roman rule and make Judah an independent kingdom again, —a kingdom of righteousness, glory and blessings, and a kingdom to which everyone would be attracted. But this type of kingdom was not to be. Galatians 4:4 reads, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." This ultimate Child of Promise was Jesus, the Son of God, who preached repentance and peace and love and forgiveness. Instead of a kingdom that would defeat and drive out the Romans, He gave them the Church, -- a Kingdom of righteousness, glory and blessing, and a Kingdom to which everyone would be attracted.

Everyone should know the prophecy in Daniel 2 that spoke of the stone that was cut out without hands and smote the heathen image and broke it into pieces. That stone, "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Later in verse 44 of that same chapter, Daniel prophesied that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed; it would be left to the saints of God, it would override all the kingdoms of the world, and it would last forever. This is the Church in prophecy. Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed that when planted grew into a great tree where the birds could nest in its branches.

Great multitudes followed Jesus, expecting at any time for Him to assert Himself and assume the throne of David. As time went on they began to become more disenchanted, and when He declared Himself to be the Son of God and they learned that to follow Him would require sacrifice on

their part, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66).

**THE UNIQUENESS OF HIS DEATH**

Jesus died on Calvary's hill in Jerusalem while hanging on a cross. A chosen apostle had betrayed Him to the ruling religious leaders of the day and His disciples, including His apostles, had forsaken Him. Judgment was pronounced against Him by the religious leaders. He carried His instrument of death to the top of the hill and there His hands and feet were nailed to that piece of wood. The Roman soldiers gambled for His clothes and beat Him. He was crucified between two thieves, one of which was saved while on the cross, and He asked forgiveness for those who put Him to death. While He was on the cross, darkness covered the land and when the soldiers came to break the legs of those crucified, Jesus was already dead. A soldier stabbed Him in the side and blood and water issued forth. He was buried in a borrowed grave, and the burial chamber was sealed with a great stone, but three days later He returned to life, and the stone was rolled away. Jesus had been put to death, but He is now alive, to be alive forevermore. Praise God for the life of this Child of Promise. Praise God for His sacrifice.

The major prophecies surrounding His death were predicted in the Old Testament. Perhaps the most descriptive passages foretelling of Christ's sufferings are found in Isaiah 53. To those not of faith, it seems amazing that the actual events concerning Christ's death in the New Testament match precisely the prophecies made in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53:7 prophesies, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." When Jesus was before the high priest and Pilate, He was practically mute. He did not deny being the Son of God, but He said nothing to defend Himself against the accusations of the false witnesses the Jews had assembled.

A prophecy of our Lord's suffering is found in Psalm22:16. It reads, "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet." It is easy to visualize the dogs and the wicked among those Jews that were demanding His death, but the most amazing thing about that prophecy is the latter part. David wrote this Psalm sometime before he died about 970 B.C. Rome did not adopt crucifixion as the official form of execution until sometime in the sixth century B.C. So David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned these words about 1000 years before Jesus was put to death and about 300 years before Rome began to execute by crucifixion.

Also in Psalm 22:18 it was said, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." This was fulfilled in Matthew 27:35.

Because the day after Jesus' death was a high Sabbath day, the Jews did not want His body to remain on the

cross. They received permission to break His legs in order to hasten His death. When the soldiers went to accomplish this, the Savior was already dead, validating Him as the antitype of the Paschal lamb, "In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof" (Ex. 12:46).

Many more prophecies and their fulfillment could be cited. True to His nature as God's Son and as the promised redeemer, He fulfilled completely the saying in Isaiah 53:12,"He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Jesus was indeed crucified between two malefactors and while in His last hours of His life He pled with God, forever the intercessor, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Another aspect of the death of Jesus that renders it unique is that He overcame death and the grave and is alive forevermore. It is true there had been others that were raised from the dead. Jesus accomplished this with some, notably His beloved friend Lazarus and also the daughter of Jairus and the only son of a widow from Nain. These that Jesus raised were brought back to life only to die again at a later time. But God raised His Son from the dead, never to die again. Our Savior is alive today, at the right hand of God the Father, asking God to forgive us of our trespasses. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

## GOD'S PLAN FOR JESUS

This ultimate Child of Promise was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). In the annals of heaven, before God began creation, it was known that man would fall from that close relationship he enjoyed with God. In order for man to return to that same rapport with his maker and to escape spiritual death, a substitute would be needed as a sacrifice for man's sins. This substitute was Jesus, the Son of God, the Rock of our salvation, the Truth and the Way.

When Jesus was born of a virgin, He brought with Him God's plan of salvation. Jesus taught by words and demonstrated by miracles many things related to the worship of God, but His primary message was "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." While preaching the Sermon on the Mount, and speaking of the impossibility of serving two masters and having a spiritual life, Jesus told His listeners, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"
(Matt. 6:33).

He also brought with Him authority from His Father to set up and establish His Church, which would be the instrument by which the gospel would be spread into the entire world. In Matthew 28:18-20, He passed that authority to and empowered the Church to carry that gospel to the

world and told them that He would be with them always.

While on the cross Jesus said, "It is finished: and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30). What did He mean, "finished"? His life? Yes, that, but more importantly, the work that God had sent Him to do. Surely, the words that Paul wrote concerning himself can be applied to this most Holy Child of Promise, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."