Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature
Presents:

Children Of Promise

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

Galatians 4:28

High School

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"Children Of Promise"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for High School
Written by Brother Danny Hayes

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Chairman:
Sister Ashley Murphy

Chairman Elect:
Brother Cory Glass

Contributing Editors:
Elder Jeff Elliott
Elder Danny Holland
Elder Jerry Miller
Elder Stephen Skinner

Proofreaders:
Sister Laura Beavers
Sister Jennifer Glass
Sister Ashley Murphy
Sister Sally Skinner

Booklet Design and Layout:
Brother Cory Glass

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Treasurer
Brother Randall Henson
10022 Woodburn-Allen Springs Rd.
Alvaton, KY 42122
270-842-4526

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LESSON ONE

ISAAC: A Nation's Father

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 17:19

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY 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 one of the great blessings that God gives to us in this life. They are at once a blessing of the flesh, heart, & spirit. Whether feeling them nuzzle against us as infants or feeling their young, strong hands holding us up in our old age, there is a comfort to our minds and bodies in knowing that our offspring love and care for us. Our hearts thrill to the first time that we hear our little ones speak adoringly to us and also swell to see children grow to be the kind of adults that we always wanted them to be. Finally, when we see the small child - who was first told of Jesus by us, the child's parents -become a saved adult and serve God, it is a spiritual blessing that words cannot describe.

While children are a special blessing to parents, family and friends, there have been those whose lives have been a special blessing to great multitudes if not to all of us. In the United States, George Washington grew to be almost universally regarded as the father of our nation. Abraham Lincoln led the way to preserve our nation and to free a great many Americans. But even with their great accomplishments, there was no foreshadowing of their coming, and while each had his part in the establishment and perpetuation of a system that allows men to worship God freely, they did little, if anything, to lead men to worship Him in spirit and in truth as they should.

There have been, however, people whose advent was not only foretold, but promised by God. These promises sometimes were made to a single individual, and sometimes to entire nations, but all these promised children were destined by God to be a blessing to many if not all people of their time and indeed to us all through their witness chronicled in God's word.

In this series of lessons, we're going to look at five of these people in some depth to explore the promises that prophesied of them and to see what those promises and their lives meant to those who awaited their coming and to us who benefit from their legacy.

Isaac

Isaac is a one of a group of people in the Bible known as the patriarchs. The meaning of the word patriarch has to do with a father, but it implies more than just a father. A patriarch is an originator, a person with authority who is looked up to for wisdom and for an example. Isaac was one of the

founders of the nation of Israel and was held in high esteem by the people of Israel. The Jewish people, being a people who treasured tradition and kindred, put Isaac on a pedestal because of his role in establishing the strong cultural traditions that they held so dear. The same nation, being a people who treasured their place as the chosen nation of God, held Isaac in their hearts because of his role in continuing and pursuing the relationship with God that brought about such a blessed situation.

The Promise of Isaac

While Isaac is the subject of our lesson, the promise of Isaac really has more to do with his father, Abraham, who was the patriarch of the patriarchs. It was from him that all the fathers of Israel came. This was not merely happenstance. It was ordered by God, and Abraham was not just chosen at random. Abraham found himself in this wonderful position of favor not because he was virtuous or heroic, but because he believed God. When God told the seventy-five-year-old Abram (his name at that time) to leave his country and go to where God would lead him, he did just that. At that same time, God also told Abram that He would make of him a great nation. This was a great promise. He didn't give many specifics, only that Abram would be blessed and that through him, all the families of the earth would also be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).
As time went by, Abram received more and more promises from God that grew more and more detailed. When Abram arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared to him there and told him that his offspring would inherit that land (Gen. 12:7). Later, God told him that not only would his progeny inherit the land, they would become as numerous as "the dust of the earth" (Gen 13:14-17).

To many, promises such as these might have seemed to have an empty ring to them since at the time Abram was childless, old, and growing older each time a promise was given. Abram did believe God, but he wanted answers. Having received promises, he wanted to know how God was going to do these things for him. Abram had great substance and he had a large household, but he had no children. The custom at that time was that a childless man's estate was passed to one of his servants who were born in his house, in Abram's case, either a man named Eliezer or his child.

In Genesis 15:1-7, Abram asked God about his situation. We should always go to God with our honest, sincere questions and desires. God is not a "because I told you so" God. He is a God of answers and will give them to us if we sincerely desire them and ask for them. Abram knew this and queried God. He said "Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?...Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

God's reply was very straightforward. He told Abram that Eliezer would not be his heir, but that his heir would be someone who came from Abram's "own bowels." This phrase meant that Abram would have a biological son.

God re-iterated His promise to Abram, saying that if Abram could number the stars, it would be an indication of how many of his descendants there would be.

A False Start and the Promise Fulfilled

After all these promises from God that Abram believed, Sarai, Abram's wife, convinced him that she was not capable of bearing him children and that he should take as another wife her handmaiden Hagar, who could give him a child. God did not tell Abram to do this, but Abram's faith in God's ability to bring about the impossible wavered and he married Hagar and had a son, Ishmael.

As with anything that we try to do ourselves, this attempt by Abram to bring God's promises to pass by himself did not turn out well. In that time, polygamy was not uncommon and in such circumstances, the wife who bore the most sons achieved a higher status among the wives of a man. In carrying Abram's child, Hagar apparently took on a haughty attitude toward her mistress Sarai, the other wife of Abram. This caused problems in the house of Abram and indeed was only the beginning of many problems for the people of Israel, even to this day. Read Genesis 17 for the events leading up to the birth of Abram's son Ishmael and how God promised Hagar that Ishmael himself would become a mighty nation. This nation would become the Arabic people, the avowed enemies of the Jewish people.

Four years later, when Abram was 99 years old, God made a covenant with him and again renewed His promise with even more details (Gen 17:1-27). This time, God told Abram that he would not just be the father of multitudes, but of many nations - not just one nation, but many.

Then God changed Abram's name to Abraham. The meaning of the name Abram is "high father," but Abraham means "father of a multitude." He also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, which means "princess" or "queen." Furthermore, He let Abraham know that it was Sarah who would bear the promised child through whom the world would be blessed.

Because Abraham apparently thought the idea of Sarah bearing a child at her advanced age was ridiculously funny, God declared that the child's name would be Isaac, which means "mocking laughter." God was showing Abraham that He was almost ready to fulfill His promises. But this was more than just a promise. It was a covenant.

While a promise is where one person does something for another, a covenant is a contractual agreement that requires something from each party who enters into it. God agreed to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants and to be their God. He required Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as a token of the covenant. From this time, every male of Abraham's descendants over eight days old would be circumcised to show the nation's adherence to the terms of this covenant with God.

Finally, when Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah, by this time 90, conceived (Gen. 21). Isaac was born and the beginning of God's promise to Abraham

was fulfilled.

The Promise Tested (Genesis Chapter 22)

From being a childless man of 75 to having Isaac at 100, you might say that Abraham had done a lot of waiting to receive the fulfillment of God's promise. That's why many of us, if found in Abraham's position, might have been extremely puzzled at God's command in Chapter 25 of Genesis. God told Abraham to take Isaac, the son that Abraham had awaited for twenty-five years, and to offer him as a burnt offering upon a mountain.

Genesis does not give any indication of any hesitation on Abraham's part. Abraham rose early the next morning and left on the journey indicated by God. He even packed the wood required for the burnt offering to take with him. After traveling for three days, God showed Abraham the mountain upon which he was to make the offering.

This thing that was required of Abraham gave new meaning to the term "sacrifice." Making a sacrifice had always required giving up something of value -something that would otherwise be useful to people. But this was something more. What God required meant that Abraham would not only have to give up someone dear to him, but that he would have to cause that person excruciating pain. He would have to treat the son he loved like an object. He would have to watch, even cause, the throes of death of one for whom he would have gladly laid down his own life.

He would have to take the one promised to him by God and destroy him. He would have to sacrifice the promises that God made him of producing a nation through which all the world would be blessed. Yet even with all this, Abraham did not hesitate.

Perhaps he remembered that God certainly did promise him all these things. Perhaps he kept in mind that a promise from God is ironclad. God does not break His promises. Perhaps all of this was in his mind when arriving at the mountain, he told the men who accompanied them, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen 22:5).

Abraham knew that Isaac would come back with him from the mountain. Did Abraham never intend to sacrifice his son as God had ordered? That's not the reason for his confidence. Read Hebrews 11:17-19. Abraham knew that God had promised Isaac to be the seed of a nation and Isaac had not yet had children. One thing we've learned from our study of Abraham is that he believed God. He believed that God would make Isaac a great nation and that in order for Isaac to be a great nation, he had to be alive. Therefore, he knew that God would make sure that Isaac was alive, even if it meant raising him from the dead after Abraham sacrificed him.

This confidence therefore allowed Abraham to both obey God and to hold on to God's promises to him. He knew that Isaac would be going home with him. Sure enough, after Abraham had bound Isaac and had the knife raised to kill him, God called to him and told him not to harm the boy. Abraham had shown God that he was willing to do

anything that He asked of him, even the sacrifice of his son, and not just by his actions. Remember that God sees our thoughts and intents.

Further Promises

In doing this, Abraham was showing us the sacrifice that God would yet make when He would give His Son to be sacrificed for our sins. Abraham in obeying God gave us a wonderful picture of the sacrifice required in willingly giving up a son. Though not detailed, we can imagine from our own experience the pain of such a situation. Yet even through the pain, Abraham was concerned with his love of God. God, even through His pain in giving up Jesus, was concerned with His love for us and reconciling us to Him.

In his lack of struggle, Isaac also pointed to a Savior who would go to be sacrificed without a whimper. He became a picture of the One who sought to do God's will more than his own. Hebrews 11:19 said that Abraham received Isaac from the dead in a figure just as God received His own Son from the dead in reality.

We see God's hand further in the lives of Abraham and Isaac and all of their descendants throughout the Old Testament. Often, these events involved renewed promises from God. The very survival of Israel was insured throughout the scriptures by the mighty providence of God. But as we look through each instance of God's help to His people, behind it, we see the promise of God made to a 75-year-old man who was told that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

In our next lesson we'll study a man through whom God helped this young nation - Joseph.

LESSON TWO

Joseph: A Nation's Savior

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 45:7

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY 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.

It's a rare individual who seems to know what to do in order to take advantage of events that haven't happened yet. To be able to anticipate and even plan for things that are in the future is something that none of us can really do with any reliability. Think about it. If the folks who claim to be psychics really had a reliable gift, at least some of them would be rich. They'd know ahead of time what to buy at a low price that they'd be able to sell for a much higher price a short time later. They'd know how to avoid calamities that might leave them bankrupt or even dead. But we don't hear of psychics doing things like this. The conclusion we reach is that these sorts of powers don't really exist.

Yet we read of people in the Bible who are given messages from God that do give insight into the future. Many of us may often think of what we would do if only we could peer into the future. In our mind's eye, we see ourselves in a big house, driving a fancy car, being rich and powerful. Of course, those who were given this gift from God didn't care about those things or else they never would have been given the gift. They cared about God, His will, and doing what was right. One of these men was Joseph.

Joseph

Joseph was the grandson of Isaac, a son of Jacob, whom God had chosen to be the heir to His promise given to Abraham (Gen 28:13-14). Jacob had worked many years for the hand of his beloved Rachel. Her father tricked him into marrying her older sister and working for him for seven years longer than he had agreed to. Rachel was barren for many years and bore Jacob no children, although he loved her more than his other wives. Finally, Gen. 30:22 says that God remembered Rachel. She conceived and gave birth to a son, Joseph.

The Promise of Joseph

The promise of Joseph is not so much surrounding his birth - although it is stated that God remembered Rachel - but his life. The first mention of this promise is also the same place that we learn that Joseph was a dreamer of dreams - not just normal dreams like we so often have. Joseph had dreams that were prophetic. That the dreams were from God becomes abundantly clear to us before we finish studying him, but even at the earliest that they are mentioned, it seems to be that Joseph knew that God had sent them from the first.

Joseph was used by God to preserve His people and this was the promise of Joseph. His entire life was being steered by Providence in order that he could be in the right place at the right

time. The journey that got him to that point, however, is a grand picture of a righteous man and how the Lord works everything to good for those who love Him. A word of caution: we're not talking about becoming rich or powerful from following God. We're talking about God using us to work *His* good, not necessarily our worldly gain.

The Journey of Joseph

We first see Joseph as a 17-year-old young man whom Jacob loved to the point of showing him favoritism. Joseph's brothers hated him and treated him as a stranger because of this.

Joseph told them of his dream that they were all sheaves of grain (bundles of harvested wheat) standing in the field. He told them that their sheaves had bowed in obedience to his sheaf. He was telling them that some day he would have power over them. Now Joseph could have been telling them this to "get their goat," since they had been treating him badly because of their contempt for him, but there is a matter-of-fact quality to the way he told it. Perhaps he knew that this dream was from God and was simply telling what he had been told.

Either way, the reaction to this and the next similar dream was unpleasant. Whatever feelings of hatred that his brothers had for him were intensified. When he came to check on them for Jacob, they plotted to kill him. In the end and at their brother Reuben's request, they did not kill him, but captured him and sold him into slavery to a passing caravan. They dipped his coat in goat's blood and took it to their father, who surmised that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Unwittingly, Joseph's brothers had sown the seeds of the salvation of their young nation.

Even as his father grieved for him, Joseph was in Egypt and being sold to Potiphar, a captain of the guard in service to the Egyptian Pharaoh. Joseph, having God with him, was blessed in everything that he did and did much to increase his master's prosperity. This fact did not escape the notice of Potiphar, who soon made Joseph the master of his house, giving him control of all of his affairs, even to the point that he did not bother to keep track of anything, trusting Joseph completely.

Joseph might have spent the rest of his life in the house of Potiphar as Potiphar had no reason to change anything, with his fortunes increasing greatly under Joseph's wise hand. But in as great and favored a position as Joseph found himself, in Potiphar's house, he was in no position to help his brethren, though he did not know that they would ever need his help. He prospered in his position and might have stayed there in relative obscurity until his death, were it not for Potiphar's wife.

Potiphar's wife is not mentioned until this time. When Joseph was at the apex of his success in the job he had been given, Genesis 39:7 says that she cast her eyes upon him. Apparently, she suddenly found him attractive, because she approached him and asked him to commit sin with her. While success in what we do is laudable and even desirable, we can be sure that Satan will use that very success, even success in God's work, to tempt us to do things that will cause our downfall. That is not to say that we should avoid success, but that we should hold to God, expect-

ing temptations to come. We should keep the perspective that the trappings of success are not as important as the work that brought it about.

Joseph kept this perspective, even with the temptation of worldly pleasures. He refused her, citing his desire to keep from sinning against God and doing his master any wrong by taking Potiphar's wife. He stayed focused on the importance of his own purity even though his master's wife tempted him day after day.

Finally, when she found that she could not have her way with him, Potiphar's wife sought revenge by catching him alone and making it look as if he tried to molest her. Potiphar, upon hearing her accusations, had Joseph put into prison.

As with every other situation in which he had found himself so far, Joseph flourished where he was. God gave him the favor of the warden of the prison. Even in prison, Joseph's honesty and integrity was recognized such that he was in charge of the other prisoners, an under-warden, so to speak. Joseph was in charge to the extent that the warden didn't supervise him at all. Once again, God gave Joseph prosperity even under the worst circumstances.

Joseph's favor with God showed, and he achieved a type of renown for interpreting dreams of others. While Joseph was still in prison, the Pharaoh had a series of dreams that greatly disturbed him. When all of his wise men and magicians could not interpret his dream, his butler, for whom Joseph had interpreted a dream during a brief stay in the prison, remembered him and spoke of him to Pharaoh, who sent for him.

When Pharaoh asked Joseph about his abilities, Joseph let him know that it was not him, but God alone who gave dreams and could tell their meanings. He then proceeded, with God's help, to tell Pharaoh that the dreams were warning him of seven years of famine that would follow seven years of plenty, which would begin immediately. He also made a suggestion that Pharaoh appoint a man to oversee a government takeover of farm land in order to store as much food as possible over the seven good years, and to oversee the distribution of the surplus during the seven years of famine.

Pharaoh saw that the wisdom of Joseph was great and so he appointed him to be this overseer and more. He raised him up to be second in command of all Egypt.

Imagine the rise from prisoner to ruling Egypt in one day! So finally we see where all the hardships and troubles had taken Joseph. Through all the trials, he had been through, Joseph had clung tightly to God, who used his troubles and the evil acts of other people to bring Joseph to this place. Even from the most repugnant conditions, a flower can bloom, and Joseph, even from the awful conditions he had been in, had blossomed to become a great and powerful man.

We should not think that Joseph had done all this himself. There are many who teach that we make our own fortune, that the power to become great is within ourselves. Joseph had no such illusions, but correctly laid his future in the hands of God, whom he knew to be true and faithful. Joseph was not put in his favored position because he de-

served it or because he engineered his rise to power. God placed him there because that was where he was needed, as we will soon see.

If we follow God, He will put us where we are needed. We may not even have to exert much effort to be there. This is not to say that where we are needed will be a position of great power and authority. The position where God wants each of us is decided by God, not by us. It may be a position of humble servitude. It may be a position that is a surprise to us. We should be sure, however, that only our submission to God's will is going to put us there. Once we have allowed ourselves to be placed by God, He can use us to accomplish His ends as He did with Joseph.

The Promise of Joseph Fulfilled

After the seven years of plenty, Joseph's work of storing food had resulted in such vast quantities of grain that he gave up trying to keep track of what he had. The known world of that time was two years into the seven-year famine that the Pharaoh's dreams had foretold. Joseph's program caused Egypt to become the center of the world as people from all countries came to buy food.

Among the people who were growing hungry was the house of Jacob, Joseph's father. When food is scarce, word gets around about places where food is plentiful and this time was no exception. Jacob, hearing that there was grain in Egypt, sent his ten eldest sons there to buy corn for their survival. His youngest son and Joseph's full brother Benjamin he kept at home. Benjamin was (so Jacob thought) his only remaining son by Rachel, which made him all the more dear to Jacob and he did not want to risk losing him also.

Everyone buying corn had to come before Joseph, and so did his brothers present themselves to him. As Joseph was dressed in the garments and makeup of Egypt, his brothers did not recognize him, but he immediately knew them, although he kept his identity hidden. As they bowed themselves to Joseph, he remembered the dreams which years before he had told to their scoffing. Now here they were bowing themselves to him.

Joseph, speaking through an interpreter, accused them of being spies. They denied the charge, explaining that they were brothers who had a father and a younger brother waiting for them in Canaan. Joseph acted as if he did not believe them and threw them into prison for three days.

After three days, he made a proposition to them. He would keep one of the brothers in Egypt as a guarantee while the others returned to Canaan with food. Then they were to return with their youngest brother as proof of their story. Of course, Joseph wanted to see his younger brother who had been dear to him as well. He then heard them talking freely amongst themselves, as they thought that he did not understand their language. He heard them lamenting what they had done to their brother Joseph which brought him to tears that he had to hide to avoid revealing himself. As they left, Joseph kept Simeon behind to insure their return.

In Canaan, Jacob would not hear of their return to Egypt with Benjamin, preferring to count Simeon as dead to risking the loss of yet another son. It took their running out of food once again before he would listen. Even then, Judah had to remind him that they would not

be able to purchase food if they did not return with Benjamin. He also told his father that he would become surety for the safety of his youngest son, that he would bear the guilt forever if he did not bring Benjamin back.

This time in Egypt, Joseph had the brothers brought to his residence to eat with him there. Although nervous at first, the brothers relaxed and began to feel as though they were safe. In the meantime, Joseph had his men prepare the sacks of food for the brothers to carry home with them, but he arranged to have a silver cup from his house put into one of Benjamin's sacks.

After the brothers were well on their way home, Joseph sent his men to search their sacks and arrest the one with the "stolen" cup. However, in their confidence that they had done nothing wrong, the brothers offered to all become servants and give the guilty person to death if any stolen property was found among them. Imagine their shock when the sack of Benjamin, the very one whom Jacob feared to send, produced the cup!

Joseph said that he would only require the servitude of the one with whom the cup was found and that the rest of them could go back to their father. Then Joseph's brother Judah did something that he should have done years earlier when the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. He told of his role as surety for Benjamin. He offered to take Benjamin's place as servant to Joseph in order to spare his father the pain of losing his beloved son.

At this point, Joseph, overcome and brought to tears with the grief and guilt of his brothers, revealed himself to them. He absolved them of guilt for what they had done to him because even through his personal struggle, he could see the hand of God guiding events through the years to bring him to a position where he could insure a great thing -the survival of Israel. In Genesis 45:7, our text for this lesson, Joseph said, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

The house of Jacob was brought to Egypt where they were preserved and given the best land in the country.

The Promise to Abraham Once More

God had promised Abraham that his descendants through Isaac would become a great nation and would be His people. If Jacob and his house had perished in the great famine, that could not have happened, so we see once again the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The promise of Joseph was simply an extension of Abraham's covenant with God.

The promise fulfilled with Joseph was also the beginning of another event of which God had told Abraham. Read Genesis 15:7-14. God had told Abraham that his descendants would be in a strange land and would be slaves for 400 years, after which they would be freed and would leave the land with great substance. The land that God was talking about was of course Egypt. We've all heard many times about the bitter bondage that Israel suffered at the hands of the Egyptians and how through Moses, God destroyed Egypt and led Israel to the land of Canaan to inherit it. But that is another story....

In our next lesson, we'll meet a man promised by God because he was promised to God - Samuel.

LESSON THREE

SAMUEL: Anointer of Kings

LESSON TEXT
1 Samuel 11:14

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY HAYES

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

Long after the Israelites had come out of Egypt and into Canaan and possessed the land, Israel was unique among nations. Most of the nations of the world at that time had a form of government called a monarchy, that is, ruled by a king. Israel had no king, however, and no real formal government. Israel was a true theocracy.

There have been a few nations that claimed to have such a government, but in reality, they were only governments run by people of some religion or the other. An example would be the Vatican, whose head of state is the Pope. This is not a true theocracy. The head of state for a true theocracy is God Himself. This is what Israel had. It had worked very well for many years. Citizens governed themselves by the law that God had given to them through Moses. Because this nation was based upon a relationship between each citizen and God, everyone was supposed to have direct contact with their ruler and therefore no formal governmental structure was needed. When an army was needed, God called them out. When a great earthly leader was needed, God raised up men called judges.

It was into this environment that a child was born as the result of a promise made to God - Samuel.

The Promise of Samuel

In I Samuel Chapter 1, we read of a woman named Hannah. One of the first things that we learn about Hannah is that she was childless and apparently unable to have a child. We see that she traveled each year with her husband to the tabernacle of the Lord to make offerings and to pray.

At the time of which we read, Hannah was very troubled by her inability to have a child. She went into the temple to pray and made a promise to God. She told him that if He would remember her and give her a son, then she would give the child to God to serve Him all the days of his life.

Eli, the priest who had seen her praying in her grief and thought her drunk, confronted her about it. Finally realizing that she was not drunk after she said that she was only pouring her heart out to God, Eli blessed her, saying "...God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him." (I Sam. 1:17) After this, Hannah was no longer sad.

Soon after the family returned to their house, Hannah conceived, receiving

the blessing of God. When the child was born, she named him Samuel, which means "heard of God." Hannah did not return to the temple with her husband the next year, but waited until the child was weaned and then took him and gave him to Eli so that he could be raised serving in the Lord's temple. Hannah had kept her promise to God.

So we see that in the case of Samuel, while his mother's petition to God had been granted, what made him a child of promise was the promise of Hannah to give him to God. From that promise, God took him and made him a blessing to many. Samuel was given to God at a spiritually low time in Israel. I Samuel 3:1 says that "... the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision." The meaning that we get from this is that the Lord did not often manifest himself in those days, perhaps because of the sins of the people.

It was also a time when the work necessary for the worship of God was neglected. In the temple, there was a lamp that was to never cease burning and I Samuel 3:3 tells us that the lamp was allowed to go out. Additionally, Eli the priest had two sons who used their priestly offices to fulfill their own evil lusts and desires, oppressing the people who had come to worship. God had warned Eli of the coming destruction of his family because of the evil of his sons, but Eli did little if anything to stop them.

It was one night during this time that God called to Samuel as he lay in his bed. It was the first call to Samuel from God and Samuel was confused. He thought that Eli had called to him and ran to answer him. After a while, it became clear to Eli that it was God who was calling the boy. Eli instructed Samuel to submit himself to God when he next called, so the next time that he heard God calling, he said "Speak; for thy servant heareth." (I Sam. 3:10)

God responded by speaking further to him - something that Samuel had never before experienced. God told Samuel that He was going to judge Eli and his house, destroying them and removing them from the position where they oppressed the people of Israel. God had already told this to Eli, so it was no surprise to him when Samuel told him of what God had said. God had also told Eli that He would raise up a faithful priest to take Eli's place.

Samuel grew and became a spiritual man who knew God's word and spoke wisdom. He became well known all over the nation and was widely regarded as a prophet of God. During such a time when there was no open vision, a true prophet surely stood in stark contrast to the neglect of God's worship that had become the usual practice. It is certainly no wonder that Samuel became a man of renown.

With the growing recognition that Samuel was indeed a prophet, we see a new promise, this time from God, growing from the promise that was originally made and kept by Hannah. Samuel was a new hope for a land that had fallen into the doldrums of lackadaisical worship and abuse

of power by the priesthood. God, in keeping His promise to Abraham, had once again renewed that promise by beginning to use Samuel to bring His people back to Him.

The Condition of Israel

The people of Israel had a long way to go to get back to God. We've talked so far of Eli's neglect and the wickedness of his sons. We don't want to downplay the seriousness of their offenses, but these things may have only been symptomatic of the overall spiritual condition of Israel at that time. Worship of idols such as Baalim and Ashtaroth was widespread.

A further evidence of the low state of Israel is in Chapter 4 where we read that the armies of Israel were defeated in battle with the Philistines. All through the Old Testament, when Israel was in harmony with God, they did not lose battles. It makes sense. If God chose a nation to be His people and those people were always pleasing to Him, why would He, being all powerful, ever allow them to be defeated?

Yet Israel was defeated, so we know that God was not pleased with them. But why would they have even tried to enter a battle when they were not close to God? It could be that they simply didn't believe God anymore. Perhaps they were so far from Him that they were confident in their own abilities. It could be that they were so distant from God that they had forgotten that their real strength lay in His divine help. Maybe they saw God's help as their birthright, something that they were entitled to, something magic that would come about automatically.

Whatever the reasons, it did them no good. They lost and 4,000 men were killed in the process. So they decided to make a grand gesture. They knew that in their history, the armies of Israel had followed the Ark of the Covenant into battle and had been invincible. They did not stop to consider that perhaps their invincibility lay in the closeness to God of the people. They looked at the physical, ignored the spiritual, and decided to take the Ark without repenting to God for their sins, using it as some superstitious savage might use a lucky charm of some kind.

The end result was that they lost the battle and allowed the Ark to be captured by the Philistines. Among the 30,000 men of Israel killed were the sons of Eli. Additionally, Eli hearing the news of his sons' deaths and the capture of the Ark, fell in shock from his seat, dying of a broken neck.

Before we look too smugly upon the folly of Israel, we should look at ourselves and how we so often go through the motions while our hearts are not right with God. How many times have we gone to church and been surprised at the lack of God's Spirit when we have been largely ignoring Him in our day-to-day lives? We should remember that we are in a battle for men's souls. If we do not live close to God, having sermons and singing songs alone will not produce victory. Standing and testifying in church will do no good and may

even cause harm if God's Spirit is not behind it. Following our forms of worship is not worship if we have left God behind. We should be very careful to make God the central focus of our lives and realize that we are not capable of making any good thing happen. Only then can we seek His help in our endeavors and see His word do its true work.

God did finally bring the Ark back to Israel. It was painful for the Philistines and for Israel as well. For details on how the Ark came back, read I Samuel 5-6. After all those painful upheavals, Samuel spoke sense to the people. He said, "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) The people of Israel saw the errors of their ways and repented, abolishing the worship of idols and returning to God in a great way.

As the people were repenting and making offerings to God, the Philistines attacked once more. Samuel admonished the people to keep crying out to God for his forgiveness and help and they did. This time, Israel did not even have to fight their way to victory. God caused a great thunder to confuse and frighten the Philistines and the armies of Israel defeated them once and for all. They never invaded Israel again. By turning to God, Israel had been saved from the onslaught of a powerful and dangerous enemy.

Samuel had been the faithful priest that God had told Eli that He would raise up to lead the people of God back to God.

Anointer of Kings

There came a time when Samuel's own sons were made judges in Israel and used their positions for their own selfish ends much as Eli's sons had corrupted the priests' office. Rather than demanding the removal of these men from their office and replacing them with righteous men, the people of Israel went to Samuel and demanded that they be given a king. It's obvious that this was something spurred by more than the injustice of Samuel's sons because their reasoning was that they wanted Israel to be "like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:5).

They didn't want to be different from everyone else. Remember that Israel's government that we talked about in our introduction was unique in the world. Israel was led by God. But they didn't want that. They wanted a man who they could see standing before them. They wanted to have a leader that they could crown with glory and honor and be proud of. They wanted a powerful leader who would be respected among the kings of other nations thereby earning respect for them.

It's a sad thing that they didn't see that they already had all of these things in abundance. If they had had spiritual vision, they could well have seen God in all of the blessings that He had bestowed upon them. They should have seen that God is the cre-

ator of all things. Whether other kings respected God or not, He was the one who placed them in their royal positions. Yet Israel wanted a king as other nations had.

God, knowing that the people had rejected Him as their sovereign, told Samuel to give them what they wanted, but to warn them of what they were asking for. So Samuel told them that a king would take their sons and daughters to serve him in agriculture and industry as well as in battle. He told them that a king would take their land, crops, and cattle to use for his own purposes. He said that a king would levy taxes and that they would cease to be free. He warned them that when they were oppressed by the king and cried out to God, that God would not hear them, but the people insisted that they wanted a king.

Samuel was led to Saul by God and he anointed him king of Israel and presented him to the people. The spirit of God was upon Saul and he even prophesied, but all too soon, he proved the warnings of Samuel to be true. When the Amorites besieged a city of Israel, he conscripted men into an army with threats of killing their oxen. The Amorites were defeated and Saul gave credit to God. Indeed, Saul was a man of God. Even though the people had rejected God, He gave them a king who was a just man.

Samuel told the people that although they had rejected God, if they would fear God and serve Him, God would not reject them. At the same time, they were warned that if they were wicked, God would consume both them and their king.

It was not long before there was a change in Saul. Two years into his reign as king, Samuel came up against the Philistines who had gathered an immense army. The men of Israel lost their nerve and hid in caves. Saul waited for Samuel who was late in getting there. Seeing that Samuel was late, Saul decided that, though not a priest, he would make offering to God. When Samuel arrived and saw what Saul had done, he challenged him about his actions. Saul rationalized what he had done, but Samuel told him that he had done a foolish thing in usurping the priest's office and that God would take his kingdom away from him because of it.

From this point, Saul's life became a downward spiral. He floundered and tried to hold on to his kingdom, but to no avail. He moved in and out of madness. He pursued and tried to kill those he perceived as his rivals. Nothing worked for him. God had rejected him and would soon choose a man after His own heart.

Soon after, God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to show him who would be the next king of Israel. Once there, each of Jesse's sons was presented to Samuel. One by one, they passed before him, some making a favorable impression with him. God, however, rejected all that were there, causing Samuel to ask Jesse if he had any more sons. Jesse said that the youngest was in the field keeping sheep and brought him in. When this

ruddy, beautiful youth was brought before Samuel, God immediately said "Arise, anoint him: for this is he." (I Sam. 16:12)

David was anointed king of Israel on that day. He did not actually ascend to the throne for some time as Saul was hanging on to his throne with all his might. He even tried many times to kill David. But the Spirit of God was with David and had departed from Saul. Israel now had a king who was a man after God's own heart.

Again - The Promise to Abraham

The influence that the reign of David had over Israel can still be seen today. On the flag of modern Israel is a six pointed star known as the "Star of David." How many ancient rulers are still held in such high esteem? God truly blessed him and his reign, establishing his throne forever. How could an earthly throne be established forever? By placing Jesus upon the throne established by David, the throne became an eternal one.

Of course David, being Hebrew, was a descendant of Abraham and a beneficiary of the promise made to him by God. But David was also an ancestor of Jesus, making him a direct participant in God's promise that through Abraham's seed all the world would be blessed.

So we see how the promise of what would otherwise be an obscure barren woman is tied to the promise made by God to Abraham. The son that she pledged to God became the prophet of God who anointed the king whose line would produce He who was promised to bless the entire world. Can there be any doubt that God can bring great and wonderful things out of nothing?

In our next lesson, we'll study about a man who helped usher in a new era – John the Baptist.

LESSON FOUR

JOHN THE BAPTIST: Harbinger of the Messiah

LESSON TEXT
Luke 1:17

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY 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.

About 1,000 years after the time of David, the state of Israel was much different. Politically, Israel was no longer an independent nation. The Roman Empire now ruled most of the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and Israel was among those having become a semi self-ruled province. The greatness that Israel once knew under David and Solomon had been squandered by wicked, self-serving monarchs and their subjects who had wandered away from God. Left in its place was an arrogant, self-righteous, nationalistic pride based more upon a sense of birthright than anything else.

Religiously, Israel no longer had the idolatry that it had been plagued with for centuries. But true worship as God had always desired from Israel was also in short supply. The Jewish religion had become sectarian with this group and that proclaiming its own "truth." The Pharisees, who self-righteously believed that their salvation lay in their own virtue, were probably the dominant sect of the day. The Sadducees were concerned with the law of Moses, but did not believe in life after death. The Essenes, who were probably the most like the ancient Jews, roundly rejected the Pharisees and Sadducees and lived in communes much like monasteries.

The uncertainty of the times and the unsatisfying religions of the day probably left many looking for something that would give meaning to their lives. It was at this time that John the Baptist was born.

The Promise of John the Baptist

At this time in history, there was a priest in Israel named Zacharias. His priestly occupation was to burn incense in God's temple. Zacharias had a wife named Elisabeth and if you have followed the pattern of our previous lessons well, then you could probably guess that Elisabeth was unable to bear children. It's true. Zacharias and Elisabeth were childless, though they had prayed that God would give them a child. The book of Luke, where we read about the elderly couple, says that they were "righteous before God" (Lk. 1:5).

As Zacharias was performing his duties during a time of ceremony, an angel appeared before him and told him that his prayer had been heard and that Elisabeth would bear him a son. The angel even told Zacharias to name his son John. God had promised a wonderful thing to Zacharias and Elisabeth. But as wonderful as this promise from God was to Zacharias, the angel gave further promises that would prove to be wonderful to everyone.

He said "...many shall rejoice at his birth. 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 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." (Lk. 1:14-17)

There were some startling statements in this great promise. That many would rejoice at his birth speaks to the greatness that this son of Zacharias would have. It speaks to the blessing that he would be to many just by doing the work that God had for him to do. That he would be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb is something that is said of no one else in the Bible. What exactly this means is much debated, but suffice it to say that John would be a remarkable man with a unique mission from God. In such a time as he would come with all of the false religion and widely divergent beliefs, that he would unite many of the people in a return to God is a great thing. Finally, that he would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" suggests that God was about to do something, and nothing God does is a small thing.

In Isaiah 40:3, Isaiah prophesied of someone who would come out of the wilderness to help prepare a way for the Lord. John was to be that man.

John the Baptist

We are only told one incident involving the actions of John before he was a man and that happened before he was born. It does, however, lend weight to the promise that he would be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. Mary had just been told by the angel that she would bear the Messiah and traveled to see her cousin, Elisabeth.

Mary, arriving at the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth, greeted her cousin whereupon John, six months in the womb, "leaped." This suggests more than just a random kick like most unborn babies do. A leap involves the entire body and would be quite pronounced to an expecting mother. Furthermore, as soon as the baby leaped, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, so she knew by direct revelation from God the cause of the baby's joyous leap. No one had told Elisabeth that Mary was carrying a child since Mary herself was probably the only one who knew, and her unmarried position was such that she probably was keeping this news to herself.

Elisabeth, however, not only knew that Mary was with child, but that the child was the Son of God. But even before Elisabeth knew, John did. The Holy Ghost that revealed it to Elisabeth had already revealed it to John. How many unborn babies are so spiritually aware?

Three months later John was born. There was some small controversy at the time that he was to be named because Zacharias had been struck dumb for his unbelief at the angel's promise and everyone present tried to name him after his father. Elisabeth dissented and said that his name would be John. Apparently the custom of that time was to name a child after a relative because the people present protested that there were no family members with that name. Zacharias couldn't speak, but he wrote a note that he agreed with Elisabeth that the boy's name would be John.

Zacharias immediately began not only talking, but prophesying as the Spirit of God came upon him. But his prophesy was not about John. He said that God had "raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Lk. 1:69). He also spoke of this in relation to the promise that God made to Abraham. Isn't it amazing how that keeps popping up? For Zacharias to be filled with God's Spirit and prophesy of God's salvation at his own child's circumcision speaks volumes as to what a great part that child would play in God's rapidly unfolding promise.

John stayed in the desert until the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. He was about thirty years of age when the word of God came to him and he came out of the desert and began preaching to the entire country. His message was of the importance of repentance and that the Kingdom of Heaven was approaching rapidly. According to Matthew 3:4, his appearance and lifestyle was evidently very meager, wearing primitive clothing and living off the land. But his message, and the Lord's Spirit with him, were apparently something the people were very hungry for as they came to him in droves and were baptized in great numbers.

John was not just indiscriminately baptizing people, however. We're told in Matthew 3:7-12 of many of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to be baptized without first repenting to God. Of course, being who they were, they did not believe that they needed to repent as they believed that they perfectly kept God's law. John let them know that everyone must repent to God for salvation and that their position as children of Abraham gained them nothing.

John then told of one who was yet to come forth. He spoke of Him in superlatives. He pointed to this man who was greater than himself. John said that he wasn't even worthy to carry this man's shoes. He spoke of this man bringing with Him the Holy Ghost and a purging fire. John was pointing to and preparing the way for the Messiah, as the wheels of God's wonderful plan were turning ever faster.

Then we read of Jesus coming to John. There is nothing to indicate that the two had met since their mothers were together before they were born. Yet John saw Jesus coming and proclaimed Him strongly. He said "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (Jn. 1:29) John baptized Jesus there, joining Him to His followers as the founder of the Church that He would soon establish.

John, coming before Jesus and declaring His day, was preparing a people who would become disciples of Jesus. He was gathering the material for a new nation. This new nation would inherit the promise of Abraham, but it would not be a geographic or political nation as the world knows. This nation would be a spiritual one with which God would enter into a covenant spoken of in the book of Jeremiah. God said "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:33-34)

In order for a person to be a citizen of this new nation, he must have this law of God in his inward parts and the only

way to get it there is for God to put it there. God's law will not dwell in an imperfect place, so a man's inward parts must be perfect. The only way for imperfect man to have perfect inward parts is to have them made new. The only way for them to be made new is for man to repudiate his sinful imperfections, repenting of them to God, who, seeing this repentance, will make man a new creature and a suitable candidate to be a citizen of this new country.

John, with his tough talk to the Pharisees and Sadducees, was merely doing his job. If he was to prepare material for this new nation, - Jesus' Church - then he needed to carefully warn the people of what was required for citizenship.

The Continuing Promise of Abraham

We've seen many great things done for Abraham and his descendants. God had promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and by the time of John, there could be not doubt of that. Israel's greatest days as a nation may have been past, but the Jewish people were great in number and had been for centuries. They had been given a land of their own after God had destroyed Egypt, who had nurtured and then oppressed them. They had been given many men who helped and persuaded them to turn back to God when their adherence to Him had wavered. Still, Israel waited, for there was yet more to come.

John, in his promise to the people of a Messiah soon to follow him, was pointing to a very important part of the promise that God made to Abraham. God promised Abraham "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) How could an annexed nation produce something that would bless the entire world? It could because from the lineage of Abraham would come one who would be the only hope for not just the Jewish people, but for all of humanity.

In our next lesson, the One who would completely fulfill the promise made to Abraham - Jesus.

LESSON FIVE

JESUS: Savior of Mankind

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 3:15

WRITTEN BY
BROTHER DANNY 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.

From the time that Adam fell from his pure state while in the garden of Eden until the very moment that you are reading these words, the entire existence of mankind has been plagued by sin. There may have been moments when people, led by the Spirit of God, may have risen to display godly deeds for a short time, but any time this happened, those people had to fight their way through sin-wracked flesh in order to do such deeds. Such is our nature. When Adam sinned by choice, he laid the consequences of that choice upon us all simply by begetting us (not to say that we would have done any better had we been in his place). This sinful nature is an integral part of each of us and is the true bane of our existence.

If you have a statue made of an alloy that is radioactive, how do you have the statue without the radioactivity? Since the radioactivity is actually a part of the metal, the only way would be to remake the statue out of different stuff. If being born as a descendant of Adam has condemned us to have sin permeate our being, then what would be required to have that sin removed? Since sin is actually part of every fiber of our being, the only way would be to have ourselves re-made of un-sinful stuff- to be reborn as a descendant of another who chose not to sin.

This would require first that we find such a man. This man would also have to be powerful enough to effect our re-birth. It's not an easy thing to do. How many people have you heard of who have had anything like this even said about them, much less who are able to do it?

In this lesson, we're going to look at Jesus, who did not sin and who has the power to re-make us. It's natural that such a person would be widely noted, since He is unique in the entire human race and holds the key to take away the sin that is the basis for all of our trouble and sorrow. It stands to reason that if any man had prior knowledge of the impending approach of such a man, he would tell of it as great news. Our focus is going to be on the promise of the coming of the man to save mankind from its terrible sinful condition.

Jesus

Jesus is God. He participated in the creation of the universe and will preside over its destruction. He is

everywhere and in all times. He is completely without limits. His power knows no bounds and is inconceivable to our feeble minds. As God, everything about Him is the very definition of righteousness.

At the same time that Jesus is God, however, He is also a man. He knows the weakness of the flesh because He has experienced it. He knows the pain of the human condition because He has felt it. He knows the comfort of friendship because He has friends. But there is a difference between our humanity and that of Jesus.

Jesus was not born of the family of Adam, but of God. He was not born with sin coursing through His veins as were we. Whereas we did not have the choice as to whether we would become sinful or not, He did, just like Adam. But Jesus, unlike Adam, made the correct choice. When presented with temptations vastly greater than that one given to Adam, Jesus remained righteous and did not sin.

Jesus - The Promises

The Coming of a Perfect Man

The first promise we see of Jesus was immediately after God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin and is the scripture text for our lesson. We all know what happened in Genesis chapter 3, but a review would be a good idea.

Of course, we cannot blame the serpent (Satan) for what Adam did, but he certainly played his part in the entire affair. God knew that Adam had given in to the temptation with which Satan had presented him.

God also knew that if He was to save mankind from the sin into which they had fallen, He would have Satan opposing Him. He recognized this warfare and told Satan of the outcome. In Genesis 3:15, God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel." God said that from the descendants of the woman, God would raise up someone who would not only fight Satan, but win. Satan would injure Him, but He would win the war.

Why would God talk of the seed of the woman? In the Bible, family lineages are defined by men. It was Abraham the man who begat Isaac the man who begat Jacob the man and so on. So why the woman and her seed? Remember that Adam sinned and according to the word of God, that sinfulness that he took to himself is what passed from generation to generation. It appears that sin is passed through the father. Of course, this means that all women are sinful too, but the Bible suggests that they do not pass this sinful condition to their children.

Now, what if a woman had a child whose father was sinless? If a child does not inherit sinfulness from his mother, there would be no sinfulness for him in this case to inherit. This is how Jesus came to this world as a human being. His father was God, the very definition of righteousness. Jesus came into the world without the

nature of sin that has plagued every other person since Adam. He had the same start as did Adam, and He did not fail (Heb. 4:14-15). God promised us a perfect human being and that is what we received.

The Coming of a Preacher of Righteousness

In Isaiah 61:1-2, we read the very words that Jesus read when He began His ministry, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD...." He told the people at the synagogue that heard Him, that this passage had at that time been fulfilled, so we know that the passage is about Jesus.

The preaching of Jesus is the stuff of legend. He did not just preach what the scriptures said. He told what they mean. His words were startling to the people who heard them, especially among those who had only been exposed to the false religions of the day. He didn't say, "I think this" or "I believe that." His message was one of "this is the way that it is." His words were declarative and definitive. He didn't beat around the bush.

Read Matthew 5-7 for His best known sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. In this, He took the legalistic thinking that dominated religion in Israel and peeled away what men had added, exposing what God was really saying in His word. He pointed out that the outward sins of mankind began in their hearts and that even if an outward sin were never committed, God would hold us accountable for the sins that are within.

Jesus began this sermon, however, with great words of hope. What are now called the beatitudes were statements of those characteristics that God loves and has compassion for. Jesus preached these words to a people who desperately needed to know that God loved them and that He wanted them to come to Him. The religions of the time had left some behind, had dropped others through the cracks, and were so self-absorbed that they ignored many who needed to hear that God loved them also.

Jesus' ministry was full of helping those in need, extending God's hope to people who didn't know Him, and searching for those who were lost. To those who followed Him, Jesus taught things that would help them to be closer to God and to be able to work for Him more effectively. His preaching was full of love, but also full of truth. Often, the truth is difficult to hear, but Jesus' love of humanity and of the truth demanded that He even voice the hard things. Read John 6:25-69 to see how Jesus was not willing to compromise the truth. Many quit following Him because He wouldn't soft-sell the truth, but He told it anyway.

Jesus taught by scripture, by parable, by observation, and by example. Many are the teachings of Jesus and they extend beyond the four gospels

to the other books of the Bible. God promised us a preacher of righteousness that is what we received.

The Coming of a Propitiation

Read Isaiah 53:4-6. We have all sinned. There is nothing that we can do about it. We are powerless. We've all seen images on television of people needing rescue. They may be dangling from a line high above the ground, trapped in the middle of a raging stream, trapped in a building with flames all around them, or adrift in the middle of an ocean. How often in these desperate circumstances, do we see them suddenly rescue themselves without any assistance from anyone? That might give a picture of us being helpless in our sins except that our powerlessness is far greater and our circumstances much more dire.

The best rescuer that we can have is one who is not also in the danger that we are in. If we find ourselves hanging by a thread over a pit, our ideal rescuer would have his feet firmly planted on solid ground. If we are wallowing in the pit of sin, unable to free ourselves, our ideal rescuer is One who is not in sin Himself. Of course, as we've already discussed, Jesus is that sinless man.

But what if our danger is not because of some accident, but because we've been condemned? What if justice demanded that we die? How could we be saved if a life were required? If a life were required for justice, then the only way for us to be spared would be for someone else to die in our place.

This promise in Isaiah tells of One who would come to be wounded for our transgressions. Being perfect Himself, this promised person would not be required to die for His own wrongs and would therefore be in a perfect position to offer himself as a substitute. But would He be willing? Isaiah 53:4 says that "... he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...." What kind of person would do that? This scripture is describing a person who loves us and that is why verse 5 says that He was wounded for our transgression and verse 6 says that "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." To be a substitute for a condemned person, an innocent person must not only be willing, but have the desire to do it.

God promised us a substitute. One who would stand in for us and receive the death that we so richly deserve. One who loves us so greatly that He would take a horrible punishment intended for us. And He was exactly who we received.

The Coming of Death's Defeat

Psalm 16:10 has two wonderful promises. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Let's talk about the second one first. Within the context of the Old Testament, it might seem a little vague, but we have the New Testament to shed light on what it's talking about. We know that Jesus rose from the dead and therefore His body did not see the decomposition that in all other cases human bodies have been subjected to.

If Jesus died in our place, what would be the end result if the power of death still reigned over us all? Wouldn't death, being our enemy and a powerful one at that, eventually get us? If Jesus, the only virtuous human who ever lived, remained dead forever, what would that mean for us? It would be contradictory. Jesus would have died so we wouldn't have to, but is death still running loose? To really save us, Jesus must defeat death.

The only way to defeat death is to live. But how could Jesus live after He was already dead? Jesus had to come back to life. In coming back to life, Jesus would defeat death. By this, Jesus would conquer the grave and demonstrate that He had the power to take back what death had taken from Him.

So we read late in the gospels where Jesus had already been crucified and buried. His disciples came to His grave and what did they find? He was gone! They were met with angels who told them that He had risen from the dead! His disciples were shocked, but very happy when they knew that He was alive and once again among them, but there was a greater implication to them and to us.

Jesus defeated death. What do you suppose the ramification of that victory would be to those who were saved and each one of Jesus' own? They would share in that victory! Among those who have repented to God and been saved, death holds no power. Our bodies, wracked by sin, will someday die, but that is only a bump in the road to those whose souls have been re-made by God through Jesus. The first promise from Psalm 16:10 is made good. The word "hell" in the verse is translated from the Hebrew word that means the grave. We won't stay dead.

We not only will live forever, but when God has re-created the new, perfect universe beyond time, we will have a body that will be fit to live in it. And it will never die. God promised us a Savior who would defeat death and allow us to take part in His victory and that is just what we have received.
We see then that there are specific promises surrounding Jesus as pertaining to His ability to be our Savior. By being the Savior of mankind, we see that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham that through his seed, all the world would be blessed. The scriptures are rife with the promises of Jesus. Some are clear-cut; others give us a picture of Him.

When Abraham took Isaac, his promised son to the top of Mount Moriah and prepared to offer him there as God had commanded, he was giving us a picture of a God who was willing to give up His only Son because of His great love for us. When Joseph, through his desire to be righteous and in touch with God, ascended to a position of favor and used that position to save Israel, he was giving us a picture of the Christ, who through His own righteousness pleased God who gave Him the power to save us all. When Joseph's brother Judah offered to take Benjamin's place in punishment, he gave us a picture of Jesus taking our place in death for our sins.

Samuel anointed David, thus establishing the throne that Jesus himself has inherited and from which He will judge the world.

John the Baptist, rather than giving us a picture, gave us the man, pointing out Jesus and saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." All of the promises and pictures that we have throughout the Bible point to Jesus just as clearly. If we will study God's work seeking to know it better, more and more promises will be revealed to us. You can - if you don't already - know God. Once we know God, we become heirs to Abraham and take part in the wonderful promise that God made to him and still keeps today.