

FAMOUS BIBLE CHARACTERS

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1. GOD IN MAN'S IMAGE Based on Gen. 3:8f

A young boy afraid of the dark called for his mother to come upstairs to his bedroom to be with him. She came and sought to comfort him by telling him God was there with him, and so he didn't have to be afraid. He was all right for a while, but then he called her again. When she came up he offered this proposition: "Why don't you stay up here with God while I go down stairs with daddy?" The child was simply expressing the natural desire for a tangible companion. The philosopher may feel at home with some abstract concept, but most people are like the child, and their desire is for something concrete.

Philosophy is concerned about God's nature and will, but it has never had much appeal to the vast majority of people. It is abstract and talks about God as the Ground of being and the Fundamental Force of the Universe. Most people need a concept of God that can be embodied in some kind of a mental image. This is why the Bible is filled with what is called anthropomorphism. That is a big word that simply means the picturing of God in the form of a man, and with characteristics of a man. God became a man in Christ, and Jesus said that when we see him we see the Father, and so our image of God is very manlike. Our highest revelation of God is in the man Christ Jesus. In Jesus God is a man.

Even before man knew of God the Son the Father was described in terms of human characteristics. The reason for this is obvious, for there is no alternative if man is going to have any intelligent concept of the nature of God. If anthropomorphic terms were not used to describe God He would be so abstract as to be almost meaningless, and He would certainly not be thought of in a way that would be of much comfort. God is infinite spirit, and all His attributes are so infinitely superior to ours that we cannot conceive of God at all in His essence. Our knowledge of God has to be on the level of the finite. This means we must be aware that even our highest concepts of God are fall short of what He really is. God has had to descend to the level of our finite minds in order to be known by us at all.

If you want to communicate with a dog you do so with meat and bones and scratching behind the ears. These are

hardly the highest expressions of man's nature, or of his love, but these kinds of things alone can be understood by the dog's intelligence. You would get nowhere in communicating with a dog by mathematics, art, or a lecture on biology. These are above the dog's capacity, and so rather than get no response at all you stoop to the dog's level and speak his language. This is what God has done with man. He has revealed himself in man-like ways, and with man-like characteristics. The result is that many young people form the concept in their minds of God as an old man of great wisdom with a long white beard. Mature believers know this is not so, but as C. S. Lewis has said, it is better that God be seen this way than as a mere abstraction, which is even more false to reality. He wrote, "What soul ever perished for believing that God the Father really has a beard?"

It is essential to think of God in human terms, and it is harmless as long as we recognize them as necessary symbols to represent God, but not necessarily what He actually is. The Greeks fell into this danger and had their gods on the same level with men, and this included all of their limitations and immoralities as well. Most pagan peoples have done this, and so they have a very poor concept of God. Any god who is too man-like is a partaker in man's evils. God rebuked this in Ps. 50:21, "You thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you." We must use the benefits of anthropomorphism, for the Bible uses them, but we must also avoid its dangers lest we make God in man's image. God made man in His image, and so it is reasonable to assume that God is man-like in many ways.

But we need to avoid any idea that God is like man in his fallen nature.

God has always been in heaven speaking the words that formed all of reality, but then we come to Gen. 3:8 and all of a sudden we see God walking on earth in the garden. He is now clearly in the image of man. Our very first concept of God, which we can visualize is of a man walking in the garden and talking with Adam and Eve. We cannot conceive of what He was before creation, but here we see Him as a man. What is of interest is that this is not just anthropomorphic, but is a literal description of what God actually did. He made himself in the form of a man and dwelt with man. Only the literal interpretation fits the total unity of the Bible. The ultimate goal is that God will again dwell with man.

It is not stated as such but it could very well be that this one walking in the garden could have been the second person of the Godhead. Jesus became a literal man in the incarnation, but here we see him taking on the form of a man. In the ultimate paradise that we see in the book of Revelation we know it will be Jesus who will walk with us in white, and we shall be like Him when we see Him as He is. Anthropomorphism is justified because God began his relationship with man as a man. He chose to reveal himself in the form of a man at the beginning, and actually became a man in history.

It is implied that God had walked in the garden before

this, for how could they have known the sound of Him walking if they had not heard it before? They did not see Him but heard Him coming, and if they had never seen God before in the form of a man walking, how could they ever suspect it would be God making the sounds they heard? The text implies that God actually dwelt on earth with Adam and Eve. This means that earth was once the dwelling place of God, and God had actually been on our world in the form of man before Christ. It could have been the pre-incarnate Christ who was here in the form of man. He did not come into flesh through birth, but merely took on the form of a man as we see He did on other occasions in the Old Testament.

We see that the Old Testament works away from an incarnation of God, which was lost toward and incarnation of God, which gave hope. It is no wonder that the Old Testament concept of the ultimate kingdom was earth centered, for this was the setting of the ideal in the beginning. Even in the New Testament where the eternal kingdom is pictured as heavenly, there is still the new earth as a part of it, and it appears that this small planet will be forever a place where God will dwell with His people, and walk in the beauty of paradise.

The picture of God walking in the garden was like Jesus centuries later walking in Palestine, for He was the only man on earth who was perfect. Adam and Eve had fallen and so they felt naked before God and they hid themselves. We see two frightened shameful people who do not want to be seen

in their nakedness. God's first question to fallen man was, "Where are you?" God was the great seeker of man, and Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Everything about this first picture of God reminds us of Jesus. God finds them, hears their confusion, judges them, and then provides them with coverings and the hope of redemption. This whole account pictures God as Christ-like. We see God in man's image as the God-Man.

2. ABRAHAM THE INTERCESSOR Based on Gen. 18:16-33

What comes down from the heavens has a big effect on the values of real estate. Take what happened in Stillwater in 1852 for example. Jacob Fisher, who was a surveyor, had found a small stream called Brown's Creek in back of the town. He dammed it up and made a lake, and he ran the water down the hill to power a saw mill. John McKusick bought the whole operation and had a great business. But then came May of 1852. It had been raining for many days and people were just sick of it. It would not stop, and the soil on the bluffs over looking the town could not absorb anymore. On May 14 the people heard a rumbling and a roar as a great chunk of the hill came crashing down. It covered trees and buildings. It buried barns and shops and everything along the water front.

Fortunately the hill came down where the land was low,

boggy, and worthless. John McKusick would have sold it for a \$1.25 and acre. Now he felt he was ruined, for his mill was covered along with the 5 acres that the avalanche buried. For several days he lamented the disaster of almost 20 feet of mud that entombed his mill. But when it dried up he found that he owned 5 acres of new land by the rivers edge. It was excellent land for business purposes. The land slide converted his swamp into usable land, and he began selling it for five hundred dollars an acre. Much of the present business area of Stillwater is now located on this land that was created by rain from heaven.

The flip side of this is Sodom and Gomorrah where the heavens rained down burning sulfur, and real estate values fell to zero. The land became so totally worthless that it became the symbol of God's worst judgment for the rest of history. To be like Sodom and Gomorrah was to be hell bound. They were so completely devastated that to this day nobody knows for sure where this real estate is. What the heavens rain down can do wondrous things to the real estate of this world, and to the people who live on that real estate. That is why any influence we can have on the God who controls what falls from the sky can make a big difference in this world.

Abraham was just such a man, for he could move the God who moved the forces of nature. Abraham was the great intercessor of the Bible. This prayer of his for Sodom is the first intercessory prayer of the Bible, and it is one of the most remarkable prayers in all the Bible. An intercessor

is one who pleads with God on behalf of others. Much prayer is seeking God's gifts and guidance for your own life, but the intercessor seeks them for the life of others. In the case we are looking at the others are people who deserve judgment. They are so godless they would laugh Abraham to scorn if they knew he was pleading for them. But we still see Abraham pleading on their behalf, and we can learn some important truths about interceding from Abraham. The first is-

I. THE INTERCESSOR IMPRESSES GOD.

It is impressive to see just how impressed God was with the fact that Abraham cared enough about these godless people to plead for them. God is very impressed with people who care about other people enough to pray for them. There are many people in the world who never get a chance to experience the mercy of God and get a second chance. It is because there is no person who intercedes on their behalf. The Bible reveals that if nobody cares about people who are going to be judged, they are judged. But if someone cares enough to intercede for them, God is impressed with that love and compassion, and He will be open to compromise.

This sounds like heresy doesn't it? God compromising! Yet, that is precisely what we see God doing because of Abraham's intercession. Abraham is bargaining with God. He starts with the plea that if there are 50 righteous people in Sodom that God spare the city for those 50. God agrees that this is fair enough. Abraham is immediately aware that

he may have been too optimistic. Sodom was a hell hole and how could he expect there to be 50 people unspotted by such corruption? He became a rapid realist and knew he had to convince God to come down from this original agreement.

Abraham is very clever and he uses the argument of triviality to get God to lower the number required to spare the city. "What is 5 people less than 50? Certainly you would not condemn the city for the lack of a mere 5 people. So what if there are only 45 righteous-will you spare it for that many?" God agrees and Abraham keeps on lowering the number until he gets to 10. He was too optimistic even at that level, but honors this man of intercession, for God is willing to compromise where he sees true concern.

God makes it clear that where there is no concern, and where there is no intercessor, it makes a big difference in His actions. Listen to these words of God in Ezek. 22:30-31. "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fierce anger..." God could not find an intercessor. There was no Abraham who cared enough to plead for mercy for these sinners, and the result is that God's judgment fell on them. Had there been an intercessor there could have been a compromise and a second chance given.

Is God really that impressed with the intercessor? Yes He is, and that is why the ministry of intercession is one of

the most important there is, for it moves God to compromise and make deals for the sparing of those who deserve judgment. Some Christians think it is really being a spiritual giant to take a strong stand and never make concessions. If the law has been broken, then let the violator be judged with the maximum penalty. God, on the other hand, is looking for a way to show mercy. If He can find someone who cares enough to intercede for the guilty, He will be open for a deal. Abraham said, "Shall not the God of all the earth do right?" That is precisely the way God is. He will always do the right thing, and the right thing is to find a way to beat evil and overcome it. When God has to judge and let His wrath fall, then evil has won a victory. God is ever looking a way to prevent that. He has no pleasure in judgment and the death of the wicked.

The sending of His Son to die for the sins of the world gives every sinner in history a second chance to escape judgment and be saved. Jesus ever lives to intercede for us that we might again and again escape the judgment we deserve, and instead experience the marvelous mercy of God. It is true that the Old Testament is full of the wrath of God, and at times you wonder if God delights in it because of its frequency. But the fact is, God hates judgement and loves mercy. That is why He is so impressed with the intercessor. The intercessor gives God the basis for mercy. It gives Him a just reason to hold back His wrath and patiently wait to see if judgment can be avoided. God can never care less than any other person, and so if there is an intercessor, God will listen.

The ministry of intercession makes such an impression on God that it is one of the primary forces of history. That is why Paul wrote in I Tim. 2:1-4, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." God wants intercessors because He is pleased with those who care, and they play a major role in who is spared and saved. In the light of importance of the intercessor it is tragic to think that there are people who have no one who cares enough about them to intercede for them. There are people everyday who suffer the judgment of God because they had no intercessor.

They deserve their judgment just as Sodom did, but they might have been spared if someone had cared. God is willing to make a deal. He is flexible and not locked in like a computer to destroy on command at a certain point. The program can be altered by the presence of an intercessor. God is willing to listen to any angle and try to save rather than judge. Even when the cup of wickedness is running over God is willing to seek some way of escape. This side of God is a side we need to see, for it motivates us to be intercessors. Who knows what may be accomplished if we care enough to pray? In a fallen world compromise is a necessity. Even God does not say it is all or nothing. Give me 10 righteous people and I will let the evil of the rest be spared. Just give me a fraction of hope that the future can

be changed and I will tolerate the present evil. That is the compromise God is willing to make, and that is why it pays to plead with God.

I know this is suppose to be a negative thing to do, and it is one of the stages of death and dying when people with terminal diseases try to make a deal with God. It is the fox hole prayer that says, "God get me out of this alive and I'll go to church and tithe and be the best neighbor in town." I know there is a lot of nonsense committed with this concept of making deals with God, but lets not throw the baby out with the bath water. Abraham is not praying for his own hide. He is interceding on behalf of others. There is a lot of difference. It is okay and necessary to pray for yourself, and Christians need to do plenty of this, but in this area of prayer it is easy to get self-centered and operate on the childish level of gimme, gimme, gimme. This is not what we see in Abraham here. He is interceding for others. He is making a deal for the sake of others and not his own skin.

God is willing to compromise when He knows someone else cares enough to seek away to spare the wicked from judgment. Compromise has its evil side, but we ought not to neglect its positive side. Compromise says I will be willing to change my plan for another if there is hope that good can come of it. God was willing to spare a lot of wicked people who would go on being wicked if there was some sign that a hand full of righteous people could survive in that environment and have hope of changing it. God believes that where there is a few righteous there is a way to change

things. Give Him 10 righteous people in a mass of the unrighteous and He will hold back judgment to see what the 10 can do to modify the evil. God is an optimist, and if there is a ghost of a chance of good making a difference, He will go for that chance.

That is why God is amazed when there is a lack of intercessors. When they can make all the difference in the world it does not make sense that they do not exist. Isa. 59:15-16 says, "The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intercede."" In a world where often the only hope is intercession God is appalled that there is no one who cares enough to intercede. But He is so impressed when He finds an intercessor, especially for the very wicked, as was the case in Sodom, that He is willing to bend to the limit to find a way for mercy.

In the light of this fact one of the greatest roles in the kingdom of God is the role of the intercessor. To be an Abraham type person is to care enough for a lost world to intercede for it, and possibly give a specific sinner in it to be saved from certain judgment. This is possible because the intercessor impresses God.

Intercession leads to a lot of believe it or not stories. One of the greatest generals of World War II was Erwin Rommel. He almost took Africa for Hitler. He was right at the gates of Cairo and victory was in his grasp, but then the whole plan unraveled. In the book Rees Howells, Intercessor by Norman Grubb we are told that Rees had a group of people

who were interceding for Africa at that very moment. They were praying that Rommel would be defeated. It seemed like a futile prayer for the battle was already lost. But God is impressed with intercessors, and when God is impressed strange things happen.

The British had just set up an 8 inch water line for fresh water. On that day they were testing it for 3 hours with salt water. Fresh water was too precious to use for testing. It was during that three hour period that the Germans attacked. They shot the line full of holes and began to gulp down the salt water because they did not realize what it was. In the hot desert sun of 120 in the shade they were immediately immobilized. With black tongues hanging out they gasped for air and life. They threw down their weapons and surrendered, and the Bible lands were saved.

The stronger was defeated by the weaker because of the power of the intercessor. Had the Germans attacked a couple of hours earlier or later they would have taken the land, but thanks to God's providence in history they were defeated by their timing.

Intercession does not manipulate God, but it does impress Him, and He responds to it. It is not a matter of certainty, however. Abraham saw Sodom go up in smoke in spite of the effectiveness of his intercession, and many who see miracles and wonders happen through intercession also see many unanswered prayers. There is no formula by which we can control God, but intercession is a means by

which we can impress God and possibly get a hearing that can lead to His acting in our favor. Erwin Prange in A Time For Intercession tells of interceding for a pilot who had a broken ear drum and he was healed, but of 4 others he interceded for who were not healed. He prayed for one man who wanted to quit smoking and he became nauseous at the smell of tobacco right away and never smoked again. But many others had no such experience. The point is that intercession does not give you the power to control God and guarantee results. It is just the key means by which we get God's attention, and a possible answer that may never be if we do not intercede. The second thing we see is,

II. THE INTERCESSOR IMPACTS MAN

This does not seem to be supported by the facts, for Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed and wiped from the face of the earth. It would appear that all the interceding of Abraham was much ado about nothing. It was a much answered prayer that in the end was an unanswered prayer. He got God down to ten, but he just as well had left it at 50, for it was a hopeless cause he was pleading. This is the most successful prayer never answered, and you might ask, what is the point of it all when it didn't change anything?

But that is just the point, it did, and the prayer was actually fully answered to the extent that God could do so consistent with the facts. Abraham pleaded that the righteous not be destroyed with the wicked, and that prayer

was fully answered. It was not a lot but Lot and his two daughters were saved, and it was a direct result of Abraham's intercession. In Gen. 19:29 we read, "So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Abraham, and He brought Lot out of the catastrophe that over threw the cities where Lot had lived." God remembered Abraham. That is, He listened to his intercession and the result was that Lot and his girls were spared. Lot became the father of the Moabites, of whom Ruth was one, and she became the great grandmother of David, and she is in the genealogy that led to Jesus the Messiah. The whole future of God's plan of salvation was impacted by this prayer of intercession. It even touched those who were judged and destroyed, for it had an impact on history all the way to Jesus.

Jesus will be the ultimate judge of all men, and He says in Matt. 11:23-24, "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." The compassion of Abraham for those wicked people lives on in the heart and mind of the Messiah, and in the end they will still be dealt with in mercy.

The point is that intercessors cannot ultimately fail. First of all they please God by being intercessors, and there is no higher success than that. It pleases God that you care,

and even if God cannot spare those you intercede for because they will not cooperate and respond to His grace, it is still a successful ministry. God loved Abraham in a special way because he cared about people. He gave him the greatest promise in the Bible when He promised that through His seed He would bless all the people of the world. The whole plan of salvation is a fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. Every sinner on earth can be saved through Jesus who is the seed of Abraham. Abraham is in the center of the whole plan because he cared about lost people and was an intercessor.

To be an Abraham means that you become a person who cares about others and it will to intercede on their behalf. It is to stand in the gap and link these people to the merciful heart of God. Caring might not change them, for it did not change the people of Sodom, and it did not change the people of Jerusalem that Jesus wept over. Intercession is not fool-proof, but it is always successful just because it pleases God and makes you more like Christ. The rich young ruler walked away and Jesus failed to win him, but Jesus wept because He never failed to care. That is the success of the intercessor. They never fail to care. They impress God and impact man in ways that may never be known in this life.

Abraham did his best and when the cities he pleaded for were wiped out he did not say, "That is the last time I waste my breath pleading with God." He just moved on to the next stage of life and made the best of it. He did not say that

prayer does not work. He recognized the limitations of what can be done by prayer. God as limits too. He could not say, "Okay Abraham, just ask me to spare Sodom if there is one righteous man," for he knew Lot was there, and so the whole evil population could be spared for this one man. Many wonder why Abraham didn't keep going. He was on a role, and so why not go all the way to one? If God would spare it for 10, why is the lack of a mere 9 people the cause for their destruction? Just 9 more people could have spared them all.

There comes a point where that logic has to stop. If Lot had lived in Sodom all that time and had not won another person into the kingdom of God, then it was obvious there was no soil fit to receive the seed. If there had been 10, it would show signs of growth, and the possibility of that 10 becoming 20, or many more. Where God can see the seed planted and growing there is always hope. But where there is no growth it makes more sense to take the righteous out and destroy the wicked, and that is what God did.

This reveals the importance of growth. If Christians can just touch a few lives, it holds back the judgment of God. God will patiently wait as long as He sees any progress. That is why intercession is not enough. It is not God's will that all be like Abraham. There has to be people like Barnabas who befriended people and Andrew who won people, and Timothy who trained people in order to have total success. But the Abrahams are vital to the whole plan of God. May God help us all to improve in the area of the

ministry of intercession.

3. REBEKAH-A DEDICATED DAUGHTER Based on Gen. 24:42-66

Bach never wrote an opera, but the closest thing to it was his Coffee Cantata. He became quite an expert on coffee because in his day coffee drinking was the popular vice much like drugs have become in our day. There were laws against it and spies roamed the city sniffing the air to catch people in the act of roasting coffee beans. Frederick the Great was disgusted with the increase of coffee drinking among his subjects. He was brought up on beer, and many of the great battles had been won by soldiers nourished on beer. The king felt that coffee drinking soldiers would not be strong in their warfare against his enemies.

The cantata of Bach is about a father who was greatly disturbed about his daughter who was hooked on coffee. If she does not get it three times a day she says, "I'm no better than a piece of dried up goat meat." Papa tries everything-he argues, he threatens, but nothing works until he promises to find her a husband if she will kick the habit. She agrees, but in the closing trio she confides that she will only marry a man who will let her drink all the coffee she wants. This is Bach's idea of a prodigal daughter. It is a rather mild rebellion in comparison to the Prodigal Son. We know that

daughters can be equally rebellious and as foolish as sons, but the Bible seldom reveals a bad daughter. There are sons galore who bring grief to their parents, but very few daughters.

The Bible is much more son oriented than daughter oriented. But there is more about daughters than we realize. Believe it or not, there are about 500 references to daughters in the Bible, and about 90 of them are in Genesis, which makes it the most daughter oriented book in the Bible. Most of Genesis is about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons. But here in Genesis 24 we see entire long chapter of this male dominated book revolving around the young daughter Rebekah who would become the grandmother of the 12 sons of Jacob.

Rebekah got in on God's plan for history because Abraham did not like the girls he saw in Canaan. They were idolaters and corrupted by their culture. He did not want his son Isaac to marry one of these girls, and so he sent his servant Eliezer back to his native Mesopotamia to find a daughter among his brother's family. This was probably the longest journey in the Bible to find a wife. It was a 6 weeks trip across the desert. In our culture we don't send servants out to shop for a wife. We prefer to see the merchandise for ourselves and make our own choice. Isaac is 40 years old, and yet he does not go along to have some input. He just took the one the servant selected, and they had a long and fruitful marriage. They had their fights, but they overcame them and became the grandparents of the 12 tribes of Israel.

For some reason the Patriarchs had a hard time having daughters. Abraham had just 2 sons-Ishmael and Isaac. Then Isaac had his 2 boys-Jacob and Esau. Then Jacob had the 12 sons from his 4 wives, but then Leah finally came through with one daughter named Dinah. She is the only daughter we know of for 3 generations in that family tree. Because of this lack of daughters the line of Abraham had to go back to the family of Nahor his brother to find their wives, for girls were abundant in his line. It gave us Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. It is a strange reality, but it is still true today that some families tend to have all boys and others have all girls, But the majority get a mixture of the two. Such was the case with the family of Rebekah. She had a brother named Laban.

The thing that surprised me in studying the families of Genesis is that many of them just had 2 children. I guess I assumed that most families were large in the Bible, but if you read with the intent to count, you discover that families with from 1 to 5 are the majority, and 2 or 3 are very common. Part of the problem in counting is that daughters are often not listed, for the family tree followed the sons. That is why it is rare to have a passage like the one we are looking at where a daughter plays the leading role on the stage of history. She was not forced to play it either, but chose to play it by her own will. It was a male dominated world, but we see that the males who dominated Rebekah's life respected her right to determine her own destiny. We read in verse 57-8, "Then they said, let's call the girl and ask her about it. So they called Rebekah and asked her, "will you

go with this man?" "I will go," she said."

She did not hesitate to make the choice of leaving her family to go to a far land to be married to a total stranger. It was an awesome decision, but she choose to go. She was the female equivalent of Abraham leaving his family to go to Canaan. Good parenting and good relationships of all kinds demand that we respect the rights of people to have a say in the direction they go. They should be consulted and given the right, and not have their destiny determined by someone else.

It is one of the hard parts of parenting to give guidance with trying to impose your will on your child. A mother was listening to her little daughter say her prayers one night. She was really into blessing with God bless daddy and mommy, grandma and grandpa, uncle Bill and aunt Dorothy, and the mailman and Mickey mouse and, the mother seeing no end to the list said "Amen." But the little girl said, "Don't listen to her God. She doesn't know when I am done."

It is hard to let children be children and have their own feelings because they often do not fit our adult agenda. One of the major problems in our culture is the refusal of parents to let their children be children. The parents are captives of the culture, and they feel the pressure to impose an adult life style on their kids. Childhood is a non-productive period of life, and so the goal is to get over it as quickly as possible. Such is the thinking of many. It is a waste of time to be

children in their minds, but this is in direct contradiction to the Bible.

John Drescher in What Parents Should Expect writes, "Because we do not see childhood as a legitimate phase of life itself, and because we as parents feel the need to find our success in our children, we do many ridiculous things. At 3 months we buy toys parents like to play with. And electric train is purchased and set by parents whose child still wants to stack blocks. A tricycle stands riderless with the driver still in diapers. We dress 5-year-olds in caps and gowns for kindergarten graduation. A little fellow recently said, 'I think it is bad I graduated because I can't even read.'" He goes on giving numerous illustrations of how parents refuse to let their children be children.

We live in a childhood denying culture. Animals do not have much a childhood. They are born and very quickly are on their own. God made people different from the animal kingdom. He made them to need a long period of childhood before becoming adults. We don't like God's plan. The animal kingdom is what we want, and so we deny that man is different and go along with the evolution philosophy that man is just another animal. And so we reject childhood as a waste and want our children to become adults as quickly as possible. This has led to children having breakdowns increasing numbers, and at younger ages. The drive to be grown up leads to inferiority feelings. This has become the number one emotional problem of teens. Almost all of them feel inferior because they cannot be mature adults, and so

they turn to alcohol, drugs, and suicide to escape a world where they don't fit in.

Jesus said adults are to become like children, and we have reversed that to say that children must become adults. The result is a culture where families are breaking down at record pace. You cannot contradict God's plan for life and not pay a price. There needs to be more of verse 57 in family life. It says, "Let's all the girl and ask her about it." Let your children share their feelings and dreams. Let them have choices about their destiny. Don't impose your dreams, or those of your culture on them. Let them be who they are as God has designed them.

Florence Nightingale changed the history of nursing in hospitals, but few realized how her choice to do so was fought by her family. She and her sisters were educated at home by their father. As a teen she fell in love with the idea of studying nursing. Her mother had other dreams for her. She was pretty and witty, and she smart and talented. Her mother did everything she could to frustrate her dream of becoming a nurse. It was not a respectable profession in those days. Her mother and sister actually felt it was immoral to be a nurse, and her sister refused to talk about the degrading topic.

Florence felt called of God to be a nurse, but her family's resistance led her to depression so deep that she wanted to take her own life. At age 30 she finally escaped the clutches of her family and got some training with the deaconesses in

Munich, Germany. But when she came back home she was sentenced to be her sister's slave for 6 months, and she was forbidden to mention nursing. She was deeply depressed again and realized she had to follow her own will regardless of her family's wishes. She left home and went back to Munich. She wrote to her mother pleading for her support, but her mother would not respond. Her family resented her and felt she had disgraced the family name. She was treated like a criminal for becoming a nurse.

You can understand why Florence wrote in July of 1851, "The family uses people, not for what they are, nor for what they are intended to be, but for what it wants them for-its own uses. It thinks of them not as what God has made them but as the something which it has arranged that they shall be." Her family interfered and got her fired from her first job at age 32, but she fought back and got reinstated. It was not until she became famous that the family stopped fighting her. It was too late then, however, and even though Florence nursed her own mother the last 7 years of her life, they were never close because she was a parent who never had the wisdom to say, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it."

Let your daughters and your sons tell you how they feel. Let them express their own dreams, for God could have put in them, as he did in Florence, the ambition and ability that you have no understanding of and not interest in, but which are a part of His plan for their lives. The Bible is mainly about men who leave their land and people to go into an unfamiliar world to do the will of God, but here in Gen. 24

we have a daughter doing so. As history developed more and more daughters have become called of God to make such commitments. Today there are more women on the mission field fulfilling the great commission than there are men.

Rebekah's life reveals that commitment like hers can change all of history, but it is not necessarily glamorous. We take famous people like Florence Nightingale and pick out the honors she received and the great events of parties with the Queen, and we think such a life would be so glamorous. But the fact is, she had a hard life, and it was full of loneliness and sorrow with very little glamour. She saved many thousands of lives by her influence and commitment, but it was mostly just blood, sweat, and tears, and not a lot of enjoying ambrosia-the nectar of the gods.

As we follow Rebekah back to Canaan to be the wife of Isaac we see it was a commitment that changed history, but there was not a lot of glamour. Isaac was a rather generic sort of husband. He was not a very exciting personality. He like to hunt and so he favored Esau the hunter. But she favored Jacob, and so there was conflict in the family. She sent Jacob back to her brother and never saw him again, and Esau was a great disappointment to her, for he married pagan girls. The point is, she played a major role in God's plan, but her life was not full of the spectacular. There was disappointment, boredom, loss, and just the typical life of most wives and mothers. But she remained committed, and that is why she was God's choice for this role.

She was given a choice and she remained committed to that choice, and that is what God is looking for in daughters and sons. Rebekah was pretty we are told, but she never became famous for anything. She just had a family of two boys and did her best to raise them. Nobody is clamoring to get the movie rights to her life story. It was a rather commonplace life she lived, but she had the key ingredient that makes any daughter an asset to the kingdom of God, for she had commitment. If you teach your child to be a committed person, you will prepare them to be used of God.

Lack of commitment has always been a major weakness in people. Adam and Eve were not committed to obey God's will whatever the cost, and they lost paradise. Lack of commitment has been the major problem of man ever since. The bottom line cause of every problem every church faces is the lack of commitment. If all believers were committed people, there would be no problem in getting people to do the work of the church, or to fund missions, or to achieve any of the realistic goals that are aimed for.

A missionary society wrote to the famous David Livingstone in Africa, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to send other men to join you." Livingstone replied, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all." We are a soft people. We have so many options of enjoyment that it is painful to do anything that is hard and costly. Commitment involves pain, and we just do not like the idea. There was

pain involved for Rebekah to leave her family and travel for weeks over the desert to marry a stranger. It was hard, and called for commitment.

An old Swedish hymn has this line, "There is nothing that is not won by the love which suffers." This is so true of God's love which gave His Son to die on the cross to achieve the reconciliation of God and man. But it is true in every realm of life. Commitment is love for anyone or any goal that will be pursued, even if it means suffering. John Audubon became the famous naturalist and the name to be ever associated with bird lovers because he was committed to learn about birds. He would go out at midnight and crouch in the swamps just to learn more about the nighthawk. He would stand in water that was stagnant up to his neck while poisonous water moccasins swam past his face in order to get a picture of a New Orleans water bird. He risked his life for what seemed so trivial because he was committed to his goal.

Shun Fujimoto of Japan, in the 1976 summer Olympics, broke his right knee in a floor exercise. He refused to give up, and he competed in his strongest event, which was the rings. His routine was excellent, and when he dismounted with a triple summersault twist the pain shot through his whole system like a knife. Tears ran down his cheeks, but the tears were soon gone, for by his commitment he won the gold medal.

The stories are endless of people who are so committed to a goal that they will suffer greatly to achieve it. We need to

have goals that we know are God's will that we are pursuing with diligence no matter what suffering may be involved. It does not have to be a commitment to be great or famous. God does not put that kind of pressure on us like parents often do. He just wants us to be like Rebekah, and be committed to what He has called us to be. She was called to be a wife and mother, and that is a worthy calling. Today daughters are called to be just about everything that sons are called to be. We need to encourage them to follow their dreams and be committed to do all that they do for the glory of God.

The thing that impresses me about God's call to people in the Bible is that all He really asks for is commitment. He does not ask them to be great. He does not ask them to do spectacular things. He just asks them to go where He wants them to go and be committed to the goal. Abraham was not told he had to go to Canaan and be a hero of any kind, or become famous in the land. He was just called to go there, and that is what he did. Rebekah was just asked to go to Canaan and be a wife, and she went and was committed to it. She did not have to become great or famous. All she had to do is be what she was called to be-a wife and mother. God does not put pressure on His children to be something they are not called to be, or gifted to be. He just wants us to be the best of what we are called to be, and that is what Rebekah was as a dedicated daughter.

4. JOSEPH-DREAMS CAN COME TRUE Based on Gen. 37:2-20

Vanna White, the glamorous star who shows the letters on Wheel of Fortune, was a leader in her church youth group in North Myrtle Beach, North Carolina. Her pastor wrote about how he asked her, when she was a senior, what she was going to do after graduation. She responded that her dream was to become a model, and so she was going to modeling school in Atlanta.

This is how the pastor reacted: "Vanna, no!" I said. "Don't do that! Those schools will do nothing but take your money. Nobody ever gets a job at one of those places. You have brains! Ability! You could be more than a model!"

She thanked me politely and said, "But I have this dream of going to Hollywood and becoming an actress." "From North Myrtle Beach?" I asked. "Vanna, that only happens in movies. This is crazy!" He goes on to say he is not surprised that her autobiography does not mention his ministerial influence. He points out that Vanna makes more in one week than he makes in a whole year of giving good advice to aspiring teenagers. His point in telling this story is to call attention to the fact that it is not wise to try and interfere with other people's dreams.

A dream can be an escape from reality, but it can also be an alternative to a present inadequate reality. A dream can provide an ideal toward which we strive and thereby change

reality for the better. In his book, *Finding The Goal Posts*, Lawrence Howe tells of such a dream in the life of Cecil Rhodes. He was 22 years old when he conceived the idea of an international scholarship fund. A plan that would bring the keenest minds from around the world to study together, and grow in their appreciation of the culture and learning of other lands. Such a project would, of course, take millions of dollars, but with no money and a dream, Cecil Rhodes made out his will bequeathing millions of dollars to this noble cause. Then he signed his name to his dream and went out into the world to back it up.

He struggled against adversity; sometimes succeeding; sometimes failing, but before long he came into possession of the great Kimberly Diamond Mines in South Africa, and he became world famous for his fabulous wealth. He was comparatively young yet when he fell prey to tuberculosis and he knew the end was near. He called for his will to have it read. He did not need to add anything to it except a paragraph of instructions to his lawyers advising them how to make his wealth available to fulfill his dream. He did not even need to sign it, for he had done that years before. As Howe said, "He literally signed his name beneath his ideals. He built great castles in the air, and then went out by hard work to put foundations beneath them..." Here was a dreamer who built his castle from the top down.

His dream was not an escape from the real, but an ideal he sought to make a part of the real. This kind of dream ought to be standard equipment in the mind of every

Christian, young and old alike. As Christians we are bound to be realistic, but we are not bound by reality, for our ideals are always to be far superior to the reality of what is, and they are to drive us on to change the real till it conforms to the ideal.

In an article titled "Dreams: Pathway to Potential," Kent Hutcheson writes:

“A person who has dreams is filled with expectation, and no obstacle seems insurmountable. He had a positive attitude, is excited and is never bored.”

This means that dreams are practically the same thing as faith. Listen to Heb.11:1, "What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us...." Faith and dreams are one. It is a weak faith indeed that has no dreams of being more of what God wants you to be in the days ahead. Someone printed on a piece of stationary, "The poorest of all men is not the man without a cent but the man without a dream."

In the Congressional Library over one of the entrances leading to the archives are these words: "They build to low who build beneath the stars." Thank God we have ideal that soars far beyond the furthest star into the very presence of God where Jesus sits at His right hand. There is our ideal, and our dream, if it is divine, is to be conformed to His image. This morning I want you to consider with me a dreamer in

the Old Testament whose life conformed to that of Christ in many ways. Joseph is one of the most widely known and loved characters of the Bible. He is one of the few great heroes of the Bible whose life is not blotted by a fall. Like Jesus, he was tempted, but remained faithful. Like Jesus, his own received him not, and he was unjustly persecuted, but like Jesus, he forgave and became the savior of the very ones who hated him. We want to consider his life from the point of view of the three results that can come into the life of the dreamer.

I. DREAMS CAN CAUSE TENSION.

Have you ever wondered as you watch your children fight like animals, what good can possibly ever come of them? Jacob must have wondered this often as he watched his 12 boys growing up. There would be tension enough without creating special sore points as Jacob did. He showed such a special favoritism to Joseph that he made the other boys jealous to the point of hating him. Joseph was the child of his first love Rachel, and he was born to him when he was 91 years old. Jacob made no attempt to hide the fact that Joseph was special. He broadcast it by making him a long robe of many colors. This was the garment of an overseer-one who is superior.

It was perfectly natural that Joseph was not popular with his brothers. This was not his fault, but it was the fault of Jacob showing favoritism. I read of a father who heard a knock on his bedroom door and he said, "Is that you pet?" "No it isn't pet, its only me." replied a little voice

quivering with sorrow. The father's eyes were opened and that was the end of pet in that family. Jacob did not see his error, however, and so tension remained in his family.

Then came the straw that broke the camels back. Joseph had a dream that only added fuel to the flame of hate already raging in his brothers hearts. He had a dream, and he shared it, that all his brother and even his mother and father would bow before him. It was a God given dream, of course, but the family just considered him an arrogant brat. Even his father rebuked him for such a dream.

A somewhat similar relationship existed between Isaac Watts, the great hymn writer and his father. As a boy Watts had such a talent for poetry that he made his general conversation rhyme. His father tried to discourage it and one day he became so exasperated by Isaac's constant rhyme, he threatened to punish him in a very un-poetic manner if he did it again. Being so much a part of him, he unconsciously did it again and his father picked up the rod. Isaac fell to his knees and pleaded-

**dear father on me mercy take,
and I will no more verses make.**

His father was disarmed and recognized his son was born to be a poet. He recognized his sons dream was God given, and so the tension was eased. But this was not the case with Joseph's family. Things went from bad to worse and so we see, not only can dreams cause tension, but-

II. DREAMS CAN COST TRIAL.

Jacob sent Joseph to see if all was well with his brothers. When they saw him coming they plotted to get rid of this arrogant dreamer. They said we will kill him and then see what becomes of his dreams.

The majority can never tolerate the dreams of the one who seems inferior to them. The man who dares to be different and put his dreams into practice must be prepared to face trials. When George Stephenson planned to draw a train of cars by steam at the rate of 14 miles per hour, he was regarded as a fit candidate for the madhouse, but he had a dream and he went for it. When Fulton proposed to use steam to navigate the Hudson river, men of science ridiculed him and called it the silliest idea to ever enter a silly mind. Most scientific dreamers face the same criticism, but without these dreamers there is no progress.

In the realm of social reform nothing would change without dreamers. Why do we have a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday? It is because he was a man who said, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." The dream cost him his life, but it was a dream that changed our nation more than most of us can imagine.

When William Carey shared his great dream of bringing the Gospel to India, he was criticized by theologians and

politicians. His plan was publicly denounced in the House of Commons as the "mission of a lunatic." Even after his dream began to become reality, Christians expected the wrath of God to fall on him for this interference with God's business. Sidney Smith, a brilliant man of his day called the early missionaries, "a little detachment of maniacs." Today we know Carey as the Father of Modern Missions, and one of the great heroes of Christian history. But he had to pay a price to fulfill his God-given dream. Dreams are not free if you are determined to follow them.

**“The man is called a fool or knave,
Or bigot plotting crime,
Who for the advancement of his race
Is wiser than his time.
For him the hemlock shall distil.
For him the ax be bared,
For him the scaffold shall be built,
For him the stake prepared.
Him shall the scorn and wrath of men
Persue with deadly aim,
And malice, envy, spite and lies
Shall desecrate his name.”**

Author Unknown

Joseph's dream cost him 13 years of trial. He was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery and he was 30 before his dream was fulfilled. During those 17 years his faith in his dream was tried to the utmost by the pit, Potiphar's wife, and prison. Yet in perseverance, patience and purity he held fast

to his dream and God honored him. We tend to think it is harder to stand for our ideals in our day, but nobody ever faced greater odds against him than Joseph. He stood alone with the majority always against him. It always seems to be that way for dreamers.

Luther came to the point where he stood before his superiors and had to choose for safety and conformity, or for his God given convictions. He did not have an army behind him. He stood alone and his decision changed the course of history. He said, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."

**"The fighting heart may some day win.
The quitter never can.
There's many a battle turns
Upon the spirit of a man."**

No young person has ever faced more pressure to be immoral than Joseph. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. You can talk about all the pressure of modern times to entice you to forsake your Christian convictions, but they could never be harder to overcome than what faced Joseph. It was go to bed with her or go to prison. He refused to dash his dream to pieces with the hammer of lust and chose prison. That is an awful price to pay for holding to a dream, but he paid it.

In prison he got along well, but thanks to a forgetful and ungrateful butler, whose dream he interpreted, he had to

remain in prison for 2 extra years. It was all so unjust and unfair, and he could have easily said phooey on the dream, but the fact is that is what was enabling him to hang in there. In all his trials we do not hear him complaining and rebelling and doubting. How could he do it? The answer is in the poem of Edgar Allen Poe,

**“That holy dream-that holy dream,
While all the world were chiding,
Hath cheered me as a lovely beam,
A lonely spirit guiding.”**

It was a lonely road to travel, but Joseph traveled unyieldingly faithful to his dream and the God who inspired it. We have seen that dreams can cause tension and that dreams can cost trial, but the good news is our final point,

III. DREAMS CAN COME TRUE.

The brothers said, let us cast him into the pit and we will see what will become of his dreams- and they did, for they saw the dream come true. Joseph never wavered through all his trials and even when the real was in utter contrast to the ideal he remained faithful until he finally came to be the prime minister of Egypt with the power of life and death. He used that power to save his family and thereby prepare the way for the great plan of God for the children of Israel.

It is marvelous to see Joseph's attitude when he was in power. What character he had. He was faithful in prosperity

as well as in adversity. He never forsook his ideals. No wonder the story of Joseph is one of the most popular in the world. God entrusted His great plan in history to a 17 year old shepherd boy. God could not have given a more clear demonstration of His faith in teenagers. Give God a teenager who wants to build above the stars; a teenager who dreams of a life in God's will; a teenager whose ambition is to be like Christ and to be guided by Christ, and I'll show you a teenager that God is willing to use to change the course of history. God wants teenagers, and pre-teenagers, and post-teenagers who dream inspired dreams, and who live their lives according.

Anyone can sit down and list reasons why a thing cannot be done, but the dedicated dreamer will go ahead and do it. The task of the church in winning the world is humanly impossible. But God calls us to dream gloriously and then live for the glory of that dream.

**Are you laid low by dilemmas,
Or are you lifted by dreams?**

Dream your own dreams. Don't try to fit your life into somebody else's dream. The glass slipper would fit only Cinderella because that was her dream and nobody else's. Everybody wants to be somebody, but too often they want to be somebody else. Do not dream of being somebody else, but dream of what God can do through you, for you have the same capacity to dream as anyone else. Why do you think Lincoln was president when our nation went through the

Civil War? It was because Lincoln had a dream of a country where all the people were free. He never gave up that dream even though he had to endure great opposition. He was willing to pay the price for his dream, and God saw to it that the slipper of victory fit his foot, and he became the man who set the slaves free, and saw his dream come true. God uses dreamers of every age. Edwin Markham wrote,

**“Ah, great it is to believe the dream,
As we stand in youth by the starry stream;
But a greater thing is to fight life through,
And say at the end, the dream is true.”**

Victor Frankl has become one of the great authors and speakers of the 20 th century. He survived Hitler's concentration camp, and he tells us why. "Others gave up hope. I dreamed. I dreamed that someday I would be here, telling you how I...survived the Nazi concentration camps.....in my dreams I have stood before you and said these words a thousand times." His dreams kept him going when the non-dreamers died in despair.

Dreams will never come true if we go on sleeping. Paul says in Rom. 13:11, now it is high time to awaken out of sleep. We must wake up and get into action to make our dreams come true. It may take days, months, even years, but if we have a dream that is consistent with God's will, we will see some, much or all of it come true, and any part of a dream coming true is far better than having no dream to aim for and achieve. Someone wrote,

**“Hold fast your dream within your heart,
Whatever might befall;
Let others laugh, if laugh they will,
But keep your dream through all.”**

Jammie Buchingham tells of a young woman he visited in prison. She had been a part of the Charles Manson gang, and had been convicted on 7 counts of murder. She was sentenced to die in the California gas chamber, but just before she was executed her sentence was changed to life in prison. Somebody sent her a Bible in the mail, and she just tossed it to one side and never looked at it once. Unknown to her there were people who had the audacity to dream that such an awful person as her could become a child of God. They prayed and sent her letters telling her of God's love. She finally picked up the dusty Bible and began to read. She had only known hate all her life. When she read the life of Jesus, and saw His love for and tenderness toward the fallen, she realized that is what she had dreamed of all her life-to be loved and accepted.

The Bible told her she could be forgiven and accepted if she opened her heart to Jesus. She slipped off of her cot in that lonely cell and asked Jesus to come into her life and be her Savior. Susan Atkins is still in prison, but she is a free woman in Christ. She has led a number of other women to Christ in the prison, and God has made her greatest dream come true, for she is loved and she is loving-the two greatest dreams anybody can have. It looked as if her life would end as a nightmare, but the Gospel made her dare to dream again,

and she discovered what God wants all people to discover; if we will dream the dreams God dreams for us, we will see our dreams come true.

We have just started a new year, a new century, a new millennium and the one thing we know will be true of the future is that God will use dreamers to make a difference in time and eternity. Tony Compolo said, "Without personal dreams about the future, we are all dead." One of his goals in life is helping people dream bigger dreams. The future for us as a church will depend upon its dreamers, and it is never too late to start dreaming. What can you do for this church? What can you do for this community? What can you do for your family, friends and neighbors? What can you do for yourself? What can you do for the kingdom of God? What is your Dream?

5. JACOB AND JOSEPH Based on Gen. 42:1-20

If the strong-willed child is the greatest challenge for parents, the strong-willed adult is the greatest challenge for God. The greatest obstacle to God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven is the strong stubborn self-will of man. All of the judgments of God through the Bible and through history are due to man's stubborn will. Over and over the story is repeated of Jesus in sorrow saying, "I would but you would not."

Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let God's people go, and the result was that Egypt suffered great judgement. Then the people of God stubbornly refused to take the land God provided for them, and they were condemned to wonder in the wilderness until all the stubborn people died. One of the Proverbs most often illustrated in the Bible and history is Proverbs 29:1. "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy."

The stubbornness of men is the primary cause of the judgment of war. Stubborn dictators have forced us into many costly wars, but Christians have their share of guilt as well. DeWitt Talmage, one of the great preachers in American history during the Civil War, tells of how Christian leaders came up with a plan to avoid that tragic war. The plan was for the North to pay for the slaves and set them free. This way the South would not suffer the economic loss and slavery could be ended without great instability in the economy. The leaders of the North laughed and said they would not pay, and the leaders of the South said they would not sell. The result of their stubborn refusal to except this Christian compromise was the worst war in our history. The North ended up paying not only all it would have taken to buy the slaves, but it paid in the blood of half a million of its men. The South paid even more in blood and money, and the end result was far greater instability. Everybody lost because of stubbornness, and many of these leaders were Christians.

There are wars that are necessary, but this worst one was total folly due to the stubborn refusal of men to listen to

Christian advisers. Their plan could have prevented it all, and made both sides winners without a war. In our text we are focusing on one of the most stubborn men in the Bible, but one whom God used greatly. He illustrates that godly people can still be obstacles to the will of God. Good and godly people are often part of the problem. It is good to see this so we do not pretend that it could not be us who are hindering the will of God. We have the biographical accounts in the Bible to challenge us to look at ourselves in the light of their lives, and learn to avoid their mistakes. Jacob's life is loaded with lessons, for he made so many mistakes.

Jacob had lost his favorite son Joseph and thought he was dead. This loss had an impact on his emotions, and it was still affecting him 21 years later. It made him over protective of his younger young Benjamin. He is not little Benji any more. He is a grown man with a good size family of his own, but he is the only son left which was born to him by his first love Rachel. Jacob will not let Benjamin out of his sight. He sent his other 10 sons off to Egypt to face the dangers of thieves, war, and the unknown, but not his baby Benjamin.

The older boys have apparently adjusted to their father's favoritism by now. They hated Joseph for being his favorite, and they got rid of him by selling him into slavery. But there is no hint that they had any hostility toward Benjamin. He is still alive and well and being treated royally. Dad says that the rest of you guys can go and risk being lost or killed, but not my boy Benjamin. If you are a child of Rachel, you are exempt from risk from this family.

As the story unfolds the brothers go to Egypt and encounter their long lost brother Joseph, but they do not recognize him. Joseph, however, knows them, but he does not know what has happened over the last two decades. He does not know if they have found a way to eliminate his brother Benjamin as they did him, or if he really is safe at home. Joseph has to find out if his brother is alive before he reveals himself, and so he demands that they bring their youngest brother to Egypt to prove they are not spies. Simeon is kept in prison until they return with Benjamin.

When the boys get home and report this to Jacob he builds his own private wailing wall. He laments that life is rotten and everything is against him. The chapter ends with Jacob saying in his stubborn determination, "My son will not go down there with you. His brother is dead and he is the only one left. I'll die in agony if anything happens to Benjamin." Everyone knows it is inevitable that Benjamin will have to go, for the whole family will die of starvation if he doesn't. Jacob is trapped, but he will not give in. He is obstinate old man and will resist reality as long as he possibly can. With bulldog tenacity he holds on to his self-will saying, "No way-never." Like Peter saying to Jesus, "You will never wash my feet," in his pig-headed stubbornness he has no idea that going to Egypt is the will of God for the salvation of his whole family.

He is blind to all but his own agenda. He does not consider the possibility of God providently controlling the events of his life. This is the life of fear rather than the life of

faith. Faith says, "Who knows-maybe God is leading this way for my good." Fear says, "I don't like it, and I'm not going to cooperate with what seems inevitable." It is easy to understand why Jacob's ten boys are not great men of faith with the example he gave them. He created so much friction for his family by his radical favoritism. He said that Benjamin is the only one left. Ten boys stand there as his sons, but Benjamin is all he has left. You can see why there is no chapter on Jacob about how to win friends and influence people. He didn't even have the courtesy to pretend that his kids were all equally loved.

God loves them all, however, and has a plan by which all the tribes of Israel can be saved from the famine. Jacob has to be dragged kicking and screaming into this plan of God. He hated it and resisted it. He, no doubt, prayed that God would help him get his way. He did not know it, but his prayer was saying, "Not thy will but mine be done." He could not conceive that God's will was for him to cooperate with this unknown authority down in Egypt, who was, in fact, the so he so much loved and missed.

God is trying to save Jacob and his family, and Jacob is trying to fight it every step of the way. In this case his ignorance was not bliss, but the basis for his blindness. We have to be somewhat sympathetic with Jacob. We can see the whole picture of God's providence at work, but all he could see is that he was losing control of his life and family. He is being a stubborn neurotic, but he is doing it because he cannot stand the pain of even thinking about losing his only

son left from his first love. We have to feel some of the pain he is feeling and recognize it is understandable that he is being so mulish on this issue. Most of us are in the same boat when life does not go as we plan, and we feel forced to go a way we don't want to go.

The problem is that we tend to see life from the perspective of fear rather than faith. This is what makes the difference between the pessimist and the optimist. The pessimist says, "Look at all the things that can go wrong." He lives in fear and tends to pull into his shell. He refuses to stick his neck out and take a risk. This was Jacob, for he feared to let Benjamin go to Egypt because there were too many negative possibilities. He never dreamed of the positive possibilities, but was guided by a pessimistic attitude toward the future. The optimist knows life is risky too, but he refuses to live in a shell. You have to give God a chance to use your life for good and greater things, and so you take a chance and walk into the unknown future in faith believing that He will guide you.

Faith goes beyond what is seen and trusts in the unseen hand of God working in history. Poor Jacob did not know it was his son Joseph down in Egypt that was putting him through such a dilemma. If he had known there would be no need for faith. Someone said, "Faith is a willingness to trust God when questions cannot be answered by the knowledge that is available to us." Nobody in the family but Joseph knew what was going on, and how God had made the salvation of Jacob's family possible by the position God had

lead him to possess. Joseph did not need faith at this point, for he had knowledge, but Jacob needed faith, and that is where he was weak.

All of us live by fear or faith in everyday life. Which one dominates us determines whether we are optimists or pessimists. When we walk by faith we believe that even if things are going wrong from our point of view God has a plan for the future and we can press on in hope.

**Faith is more than just a word,
It is a feeling, deep and true
That with every passing hour
Hope is born anew.**

**Faith means having courage
To know as days go by
That just as long as faith lives on,
Then hope can never die. Author Unknown**

Faith is not believing a creed. Faith is trusting God and believing that we don't have to fear the future just because it looks so scary and so contrary to our own plan. We can go with the flow of events and accept the inevitable that we can't change or control, and believe that God is working in it for our good. That is exactly what God was doing in Jacob's life, but in fear he fought it and missed the joy and peace of walking forward in faith.

What we need to learn from Jacob's loss of joy in his

journey with God is that even virtues can be vices when they hinder our faith in God's providence. Jacob had a lot of tough times in life. He had to leave home young and never see his mother again because his brother Esau wanted to kill him. He got ripped off by his uncle Laban who gave him Leah on his wedding night rather than Rachel. He also robbed him of his just wages. He had plenty of tension with the four mothers of his 12 sons. There was jealousy, envy, sibling rivalry, and rivalry between Rachel and Leah. Joseph is taken away and presumed dead. One by one his wives all die before him, and by the time of our text he is a widower with a large family of children and grandchildren.

It can actually be seen as a virtue that he wants to preserve the special son of his special wife. He has had so many problems in life, and so why not work like crazy to keep one of the good things he had keep going for him? You can call it selfish, but it seem like a justified selfishness. He at least feels justified, and even feels noble that he is so protective of his son Benjamin. It seems like a virtue to him, and if we didn't know the will of God, it might seem like a virtue to us as well. That is the problem with virtues-they can be so extreme, or so persistent, that they become a hindrance rather than a help to our walk with God.

I think of the testimony of the great American mathematician Ernst Straus who worked with Einstein. One day when they finished a document they had written together they looked for a paper clip to hold the paper together. They found one, but it was twisted, and so they then looked for a

tool to straighten it. In their search they found a whole box of good paper clips. Einstein took a good one and began to use it to straighten out the twisted one. When Straus pointed out that it was no longer necessary to do this, Einstein replied that once he set his mind to a certain goal nothing could deflect him.

It is a noble attitude to press on to your goals, and this was a virtue in Einstein, but when you press on even when the goal is meaningless you have let a virtue become a handicap and a nuisance. This is what Jacob did, and his love for Benjamin became a hindrance to pressing on to experience the joy of God's guidance in his life. From God's point of view everything was going just right. Joseph was now in position to save the whole family. All that had to be done now was to get Jacob to stop being such a stubborn pessimist.

It only he had the faith of Paul who could say, "If God is for me, who can be against me?" But instead he cries out in verse 36, "Everything is against me." Jacob is the father of the whole history of Jewish pessimism. Abraham Ibn Ezra in the 17th century lamented,

**My labor's vain,
No wealth I gain.
My fate since birth
Is gloom on earth.
If I sold shrouds
No one would die.
If I sold lamps,**

**Then in sky,
The sun for spite
Would shine by night.**

This is the spirit that was gripping Jacob. Everything is against me he is saying, when the fact is, everything was working for his good. He is crying that his son Joseph is dead, but the fact is, his son Joseph was the Prime Minister of Egypt with the power to save his whole family. He is lamenting that Simeon is gone, and in fact he is under the protection of the most powerful man in Egypt, which happened to be his brother. He fears Benjamin may be harmed when the fact is, he is the key to all their happiness. His sky was bright with stars of hope, but he saw none of them, for he covered them all with a dark cloud of gloom because he stubbornly refused to believe that life can be going God's way even if it is not going the way that seemed best from his perspective.

Jacob is one of the great Bible examples of how godly people can live lives of non-faith. Jacob spent years of his life and much of his emotional energy grieving and worrying about things that never happened. Studies show that the vast majority of things people worry about never happen. It is wise to be cautious and not take unnecessary risks, but to fret and worry and be an emotional cripple over potential dangers is folly. Jacob lived on the negative side of life and wasted so much of the joy of life. Everything turned out better than he could have ever dreamed. He lived in peace and prosperity with his entire family in the best part of Egypt. He had the

best of everything, and he died in luxury with the love of his large family surrounding him. The same of it is, he wasted so much of his God guided life because he refused to believe that God was guiding.

Joseph lived in great contrast to Jacob. He never said, "Woe is me, for everything is against me." No one had more right to see life through pessimistic eyes, for he really had a lot of awful things to endure. He was rejected by his own brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused and unjustly sent to prison. Yet, with all of these negative events, Joseph was a man of faith who believed that God would guide and use his life to make dreams come true.

Here is a father and son with two different ideas about God. Jacob could only believe God was in his life when their were good times. He had a sunshine concept of God. It is the concept that God loves me because I never get sick, my car always starts on the coldest mornings, and I can always find a good parking place. This is a popular concept of God, but the problem with it, in a fallen world where Murphy's Law is as persistent as gravity, is that it leads to a lot of pessimism. Where is your God when things do go wrong, and everything seems to be against you? Jacob feels God forsaken, pessimistic, and in despair.

In contrast, Joseph has an all season God. He is a God you can trust even when life is not easy, but one trial after another with no apparent meaningful purpose. Joseph does not have a theology that says, if clouds darken your sunshine and life

gets hard, and you suffer injustice, then you are forsaken by God. Joseph lives a faith life that says, God will work in everything for good for those who love Him. When I can't see it I trust Him and press on. Meanwhile I will do my best to enjoy the detour and use my gifts to serve others.

Now keep in mind that both Jacob and Joseph are God's men. The contrast here is not between the believer and the unbeliever. It is between two different kinds of believers. Christians tend to fall into these two categories. The Jacobs who are fear conditioned and the Josephs who are faith conditioned. The Jacobs are the pessimists and the Josephs are the optimists. This duel perspective will never change until we all become like Jesus. Some Christians will take the low road and some the high road. The good news is that both Jacob and Joseph fulfilled the will of God. God can and does use even the pessimist to accomplish His purpose. But the Jacobs cannot enjoy the journey of life as much as the Josephs. They cannot in everything give thanks because they do not believe God is at work even when it seems meaningless.

Since Jesus had the Joseph spirit, and we are to become like Jesus, it follows that God's goal is for us to develop the Joseph spirit and overcome the tendencies to be like Jacob. Instead of, "Everything is against me," it should always be, "If God is for me who can be against me?"

6. JOSEPH THE ACTOR Based on Gen. 42:1-22

The old joke is the question, who was the greatest actor in the Bible? The answer is Samson, because he brought down the house. The surprising thing is that there really are actors in the Bible and Joseph is the first. He put on a performance that would have won him an Academy Award. He portrayed himself as a tough guy when his heart was so tender that he was fighting back tears constantly. In verse 24 we see Joseph overcome by his emotions, and he had to turn away and let some tears flow to release the pressure. But then he turns back and acts like a cruel tyrant by having his brother Simeon thrown in the slammer.

Joseph not only has to fool his brothers by this act, he has to fool his own emotions, for they are ready to explode in compassion. He cannot let his identity be known until he knows his brother Benjamin is alive and well. So he not only has to deceive his brothers, but his own heart as well, which longs to rip off the mask and embrace these ten brothers of his. Joseph is wearing a mask and playing a role that is not his real self, and that is what an actor does. It is interesting that the first acting we see in the Bible takes place in Egypt. Scholars who study the history of theatre tell us that the art of drama was first developed in Egypt.

In the thousand page book A History Of The Theatre by George Freedley and John Reeves, the first chapter is on dramas for trade on the pyramids of Egypt going back to 3200 B. C. The priests were the first actors. It is interesting to note that Joseph married Asenath the daughter of one of these priests. Joseph, no doubt, saw the portrayal of the

many religious dramas of that time. He knew about acting, for it was a part of his culture just as it is a part of ours.

Joseph is so convincing in this drama of the Stranger And His Brothers that go back to Jacob thoroughly persuaded that this harsh and ruthless taskmaster means business. They had no intention of crossing him, and so Joseph was really quite good as an amateur actor. Ordinarily the rulers of nations brought in actors to entertain them, but here we have the ruler himself putting on the show for his own benefit to achieve a goal he could not achieve in any other way. It was a controversial choice, and not all commentators are pleased with his deception. John Calvin found the deception offensive, and some Jewish scholars feel Joseph should have avoided this whole scene by contacting Jacob and letting him know that he was alive before this event even happened.

It is easy for modern men to try and second guess Joseph and pretend they have a better plan. But let's face reality. God had led Joseph to this point where he could be the savior of his people. The plan of God is working perfect, and what Joseph does accomplishes the goal. I agree with Robert Candlish who says in his classic commentary on Genesis, "...we must regard him as all along acting by inspiration." This conclusion not only fits the context here with Joseph, but a study of acting in the Bible confirms it. Acting is a legitimate means of conveying truth, or for dealing with situations where the truth needs to be hidden from those who can use it for harm.

David was quite a dramatic actor, and it saved his life on one occasion. David was afraid of the king of Gath, for he could have easily had him killed. We read in I Sam. 21:13-15, "So he feigned insanity in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard." It was so real that the king said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?" David's act got him out of that mess, and they were glad to let him escape. Here was a mini-comedy that David, no doubt, repeated around many a fire for a good laugh. His acting career saved his life.

Acting also played a major role in moving David to actions that others wanted him to take. Nathan the prophet came to him putting on an act about a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. This made David very angry, and then Nathan let him know that the story was really about him with his 8 wives taking the one wife of Uriah. David saw that he was the man that made him so angry, and he repented. Acting moved him to repent when nothing else could. Sure it was a trick and a form of deception, but it was God's prophet who did it for the good of David, for he had to be moved to repent in order to be forgiven. Acting saved him again. Acting also saved his son Absalom from his own anger.

In II Sam. 14 we have the account of the greatest actress in the Bible. She is not named, but just called the woman of Tekoa. She was instructed to pretend to be a widow in

mourning, and to dress in mourning clothes and not wear any makeup. She was to go to David with a sob story about her two sons getting into a fight and one killing the other, and leaving her with only one son. Her surviving son was going to be killed for his crime, which would leave her destitute with no family left in the world. David is moved by the performance, and he issues an order that her son was not to be touched.

She then takes off her mask and asks David why he is not being as compassionate to his own son whom he has banished. David saw the point, and he issued an order allowing Absalom his son to come back and live in Jerusalem. The point is, acting and pretending to be someone but who you really are was a powerful force in moving people in the ancient world, and it still is today.

Jesus even used this tool of acting to accomplish His purpose. On the road to Emmaus after His resurrection He met and walked with two of His disciples. He did not reveal who He was but acted like a stranger. He acted like He did not know what had happened and why they were so sad. They explained the whole story of the crucifixion and the women's experience at the tomb that morning. Jesus then gave them a lesson on Old Testament prophecy, and then it says in Luke 24:28, "Jesus acted as if He was going further..." It was only pretense, for he wanted to stay with them. They urged Him to come into their home and He did. It was there that their eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread. Jesus pretended to be somebody else. He had on a mask an

played the role of a stranger before those who knew Him well. Jesus was sinless, and so it follows that acting is no sin, for Jesus did it, and the church picked up on the power of acting to convey truth.

When Rome fell the theater was lost for centuries. But it was the church that revived it. It all started with reenacting the great events of Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter. For hundreds of years all drama was in the church with actors and elaborate costumes. The church was to the Middle Ages what TV is to us today. It was the place of entertainment, but it was also for the purpose of teaching religious truth. The oldest and most numerous of plays that exist are of the 3 Mary's going to the tomb on Easter. Over 400 have been discovered. By 1536 there were elaborate plays like the Acts Of The Apostles with 300 actors playing 494 roles. Today there are passion plays all over the world, and Christian plays by the thousands. The greatest story ever told is told again and again through the medium of drama.

One of the greatest examples of a Christian play is Joan Winmill Brown's Corrie The Lives She Touched. Corrie Ten Boom had some elaborate deceptions by which to save Jewish babies. When she got the message that the orphanage in Amsterdam was going to be raided and the babies killed, she contacted 30 teenage boys in the underground and asked for their help. They had German uniforms from soldiers who had defected. These young men put on the uniforms and drove up to the orphanage in trucks and demanded that the babies be turned over to them. The orphanage workers

believed they were authentic and wept as they handed over their Jewish babies. They had no idea that what seemed like tragedy was really the salvation of those babies. They were put in many homes and their lives were spared all by means of good costumes and good acting.

I do not know if Jesus meant, when He said we must be like children, that He was saying we must learn to live in a fantasy world of imagination, and learn to pretend more. There is, however, no escape from the facts of the Bible and history. God has used pretending or acting in some marvelous ways. Let's not be superficial, however, and assume because acting can be a legitimate tool of God that it is free of all danger. That is not the case. Acting is equally a tool of the devil, and a lot of harm has been done by acting and pretending.

The drama from hell began in the garden when Satan put on the serpent outfit and pretended to be a friend of Eve. He deceived her into disobeying God. He tried the same trick in tempting Jesus. He acted like a friend who was helping him to get the fame and power he rightly deserved. Jesus saw behind the mask, however, and was not deceived by this clever actor. Jesus had to be on His guard constantly against actors out to deceive Him. In Luke 20:20 we read, "Keeping a close watch on Him they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something He said that they might hand Him over to the power and authority of the governor." People pretending to understand Jesus were always asking Him which seemed sincere questions, but they

were hypocrites really seeking to trap Him in some violation of the law.

We could study the word hypocrite, for it means to be an actor, and this is why we tend to have a negative view of the actors, because they use deception. We think it is all one sided and evil, but the point of this message on Joseph's acting and other actors of the Bible, including our Lord, is to point out that there is also a good and positive side to it. Just because Satan corrupts everything and uses it for evil does not mean the Christian has to give it up. It is to be used for good, and for doing God's will, and that is why drama is so popular in the church again today.

There is a danger of us rejecting it because it seems like conformity to the world. The world is fanatical about drama and acting. The heroes of our culture are actors, and there is a movie madness in our land. To go along with this and add plays to the church seems like just going along with the crowd. There is a real risk that this will happen and so we need wisdom. But we cannot escape the facts. Acting can be used for good as well as evil.

Look again at the story of Joseph. The very Hebrew word for Joseph's pretense, which is NAKAR is the word used in Gen. 37 when these ten brothers now before him came home to their father Jacob with the bloody coat of Joseph. They were pretending that he had been killed by a wild beast. They put on a play of great sorrow at such a tragedy. Poor Jacob was fooled by it. Jacob had a whole family of hams,

and that is bad news for a Jewish father. But these same ten actors are now being deceived by Joseph the very way they deceived Jacob. They are getting a taste of their own medicine.

We need to see that the very tools that are used for doing evil need to be redeemed and used for good. The deceivers need to be deceived and brought to a point of repentance, and this is what Joseph is doing by his acting. I would not be surprised that Satan, the great deceiver, was being deceived himself by the crucifixion. Satan had to think that he was succeeding by getting Judas to betray Jesus, and by getting the leaders of the Jews to crucify Him. It looked like he was a clear winner, but he was deceived, for by entering death Jesus was able to release the captives of Satan, and destroy his greatest weapon over man. Jesus did to Satan what Satan did to Adam and Eve. He led him to believe that he was gaining a total victory when in reality the cross meant his total defeat.

This is what is going on in this story of Joseph. He is now in a position to reverse the awful story of their evil. He can turn this whole account into a comedy with a happy ending, but he needed to use his gift of acting to make it happen. Just as the devil should not have all the best songs, so he should not have all the best actors. Evil needs to be fought with its own best weapons. Many plays downgrade the Christian faith, and it is only right that Christians write quality plays that exalt the Christian faith.

Joseph could put on his act with no rehearsal because he

spoke to these brothers in the language of the Egyptians. They could not tell if he should the wrong emotion and under the stress of the situation forget his lines. Verse 23 tells us that Joseph spoke through an interpreter. The brothers assumed he could not understand their language, and so they talked in his presence not knowing that he could understand them perfectly. He had them at a real disadvantage. He knew all that was being said, and they were in the dark about who he was and what he was up to. This made it easy to deceive them, but on the other hand, it made it so hard for Joseph to control his emotions.

When he heard his oldest brother Reuben tell the others that they were now paying for their sin against their brother Joseph, he was so deeply moved that he had to turn away and weep. He had not known through all these years that his oldest brother had loved him and tried to save him. Hearing that brought a lump to his throat and tears to his eyes. Joseph was a very emotional man. He cried more than most men, and he was not acting when he wept. It took enormous energy to play his tough guy role because of his emotions. It was a difficult battle to keep the act going and not blow his cover.

In 43:30-31 we see two decades of suppressed emotions held back even though they are pushing with flood force against his heart. The ten have returned to Egypt with Benjamin, and we read, "Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. After he had

washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, serve the food." He has temporary control, but as the play goes on Judah gives a moving speech about the love of Jacob for Benjamin, and the fact that he will die if he is not brought back.

This causes Joseph to lose it. He is a strong man, but he is overwhelmed by the flood of emotion, and we read this in the first two verses of chapter 45: "Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it."

Then we read in verses 14 and 15, "Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him weeping, and he kissed all his brothers and wept over them." The act was over, but not the tears. When Joseph's old father Jacob was finally brought down to Egypt it was flood time again, and in 46:29 we read, "As soon as Jacob appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time." Two more times Joseph wept, but I think we have seen enough tears to know that he was one of the most emotional men of the Bible. Real men do cry, for Joseph was a man's man, yet he wept frequently.

All of this has relevance to acting, for the emotions of Joseph were a real handicap to him, but in spite of them he was able to act his role out and accomplish his purpose.

There are fears in tears, and all sorts of emotions that have to be overcome to be a good actor, but they can be controlled, for we see it in the experience of Joseph. God's will was served by his acting, and it continues to be served today by those who portray the good news of Christ through acting.

7. MOSES MEETS GOD Based on Ex. 3:1-15

J. B. Phillips in his book *Your God Is Too Small* tells of how he asked a group of young people to give a snap answer to the question, "Do you think God understands radar?" They all said no, and then they roared with laughter as they considered how foolish their answer was. It showed that in the back of their minds they thought of God as an old man who lived in the past and was rather bewildered by modern progress. Nothing is more pathetic than a mature person with an immature concept of God. Such an adult is seldom a dedicated Christian, or an active servant of God. More than likely they reject God completely. They mature in all other areas of life, but in their concept of God they remain childish. To make things worse, they think the rest of us are worshipping the God of their immature conception. They think we are quite simple and unacquainted with the hard facts of life.

These people have not rejected God, for they don't even know Him. They have only rejected a god who doesn't exist anyway except in their own mind. What these people need is

a true biblical concept of God. This is what we all need, for our conception of God controls our attitudes and actions, and it determines the measure of our devotion to Him and His will. Is your God just a spare time God you call upon only in emergencies? You answer that by your commitment to Him. The person who gives his God only one hour a week of his life has a very small God and not the God of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One cannot stand in the pulpit and hand over to you an experience of the greatness of God any more than one can measure the horizon with a ruler. This can only come when a person says with Moses, "I will turn aside and see this great sight." A man has to be willing to forsake his old concepts if he would grow in the knowledge of God as He really is. When Martin Niemoller was in Hitler's prison he had time to think, and he turned his thought toward God. He had to give up his old opinions about God. He wrote, "It took me a long time to learn that God is not the enemy of my enemies. He is not even the enemy of His enemies." He had to give up the God He had created in his own image, and he came to see that God is love.

Moses needed to grow in his knowledge of God as well. God had prepared him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. The first 40 years of his life he gained the best education possible in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but this knowledge was not enough for the task God had for him. He needed some good practical experience, and so God in His providence saw that he got it, and for the next 40 years he was

a shepherd in Midian where he learned the ways of desert life. He learned about the plants and animals, and about water sources and hardships. Now the second 40 year training period was over, and all Moses needed now was to meet God, and this he did at the burning bush, which is the Damascus Road experience of the Old Testament. We want to look at this experience and draw from it 3 things which God does that enlarge our concept of Him.

I. HE DEMANDS REVERENCE. v. 4-5

You will notice that God appealed to the curiosity of Moses. Some people feel that faith and curiosity are contradictory, but this is not so. The impulse to inquire and learn is essential to a growing faith. God says, "Come now let us reason together," and all of nature is a stimulus to investigation. Curiosity is what made Watts ask why the lid on a boiling kettle bobbed up and down? His search for an answer led to the first workable steam engine. Curiosity is what made Sir Alexander Fleming investigate a mold, which led to the discovery of penicillin. Curiosity is what led Zaccheaus climb a tree to see Jesus, which led to his conversion. It may have killed the cat but curiosity saved him and many others.

God wants people to investigate, but we see that when Moses came near He stopped him and tells him to take off his shoes. This was a sign of reverence and God demands that. If one is going gain from his search he must come in reverence and humility, for neither God nor His creation will reveal its

secrets to the proud and irreverent. "Moses was led through the gates of curiosity into the sanctuary of reverence. Those who come to God or nature in pride to force the truth from them are courting disaster. You can count on it that those working with atomic energy are reverent before its power, and they are not careless and proud as if they needed no caution in its presence. To do so would be as foolish as for a Jewish person of old to stumble into the holy of holies.

The great men of science such as Copernicus, Newton, Kepler, and Edison have been men of reverence in their inquiry. Edison said, "I sit down before the law. I try to find out how the law operates. I try to bring my mind and mechanisms into harmony with the way things are, and the more I obey the law, the more the law obeys me and serves my purpose." Success in science comes through obedience just as success in the Christian life does. This is the only way to know God and His will. You must adjust to reality and not try to twist reality to your proud and preconceived notions.

A proud self-sufficient tourist went through one of Europe's famous art galleries looking at many great masterpieces. As he was leaving he said to the custodian, "I don't see anything so great about these paintings." The custodian replied, "Sir, these pictures are not on trial, those who view them are." So it is with Scripture, God and His Word are not on trial, but you are. You must come in reverence seeking to know God if you expect to grow. The poet wrote,

**Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every common bush aflame with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries.**

II. HE PROMISES HIS PRESENCE. v. 11-12

Moses said, "Who am I?" Forty years before Moses felt he could handle things and he killed an Egyptian, but now he is more mature and humble. He wondered how a shepherd like him could walk into the palace of Pharaoh and persuade him to let hundreds of thousands of slaves go free. It can't be done was his thinking, and he was right if he thought the success of the plan depended on his eloquence and ability to charm Pharaoh. Without the promise of God, "Certainly I will be with you," Moses could not have succeeded. This is the case with the Apostles as well. Without the promise of Christ to be with them they could not have succeeded. Nor can we, or anyone else, for we all need God's presence to be successful. With His presence comes all the other promises. If God wills it then it can be done. The poet has written,

**Never say it can't be done,
It simply isn't true.
What you mean my son
Is it can be done,
But can't be done by you.**

One of the greatest fallacies in the world is that one does not count. All of history proves it to be a lie, and yet we

believe it. What can I do? Problems are too big for any one person to make a difference, and so I ignore the problem and become a part of the problem. It is true that you cannot do anymore than Moses could on his own, but could we believe and claim the promise of God to be present with us, then we could say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When David Livingston returned to Scotland after 16 years in Africa where he suffered 27 attacks of African fever, had one arm rendered useless by the bite of a lion, lived among a people whose language he did not know, and whose attitude toward him was often hostile, he said, "Shall I tell you what supported me through all these years of exile? It was this, 'Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'"

There has never been a power that has been able to conquer a people who live and believe in the presence of God. When Julian the Apostate was Emperor of the Roman Empire he did all he could to destroy churches and erect idols. Libanus, one of his friends, asked a Christian one day, "What is your Carpenter of Nazareth doing now?" The Christian responded, "He is making a coffin." And soon Julian was in it and all the idols were swept away. In his dying breath Julian cried out, "O Galilean! Thou hast conquered!" The early church believed that there has always been success where there has been one or more persons who believe that God is with them, and that through them God can accomplish His will. Moses said, "Who am I?" But that is beside the point said God. It is not who you are but who is behind you and with you that counts.

III. HE REVEALS HIS ESSENCE v. 13-15

To try and define God is to confine Him. Our minds cannot fully grasp His nature. This should not surprise us, for we cannot fully understand anything. The Psalmist cried out, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou understandeth my thought afar off." But when he reverses the process and considers God he says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it." This does not mean we must join those who think of God as a vague blur. We cannot find out by searching, but we can know who God is if he speaks to us, and that he has done. Paul constantly urges us to grow in the knowledge of God, and we can only do so by searching His revelation. Someone said, "We can never attain a maximum love of God with only a minimum knowledge of God."

A virtuous godly man may be ignorant of many things, but his ignorance is not one of his virtues, nor is it the cause of his godliness. It would be strange if God could be loved better by being known less. What I am saying is that theology is not just for the theologian, but it is for all believers. Imagine telling a man who is going to drive across a field and over a hill that he better watch out for the tree just over the hill, and he says, "Don't talk to me about trees. I'm a motorist and not a botanist." This is carrying specialization too far, for that tree is not only a fact of botany, but a fact of life. Likewise, God is not just a fact of theology, but He is the greatest fact of life.

The first and most basic fact that God reveals here to Moses is that He is a Person and a God of persons. Those who know God only as He is revealed in nature come to think of Him as a power rather than a Person. They call Him the first cause, the unmoved mover, the cosmic organism, or the stream of tendency. It is easy to see how they arrive at this conclusion, for power is what nature reveals. A prominent physicist tells us that if we had to pay for the light bill from the sun at one penny per kilowatt, one-hundredth millionth part of a second would cost us more than World War II. Thank God he doesn't charge for His power. The Bible tells us that this power has its source in a Person, and it goes further yet and even says He can be known as a Father.

God is not a power that is unconcerned for us, but He is a Person whom we can know by faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian attitude to the wonders of the universe is in the words of the hymn, "This is my Father's world." All of reality should take on new meaning to one who knows God. A mother rushed up the stairs as a thunderstorm broke loose thinking her little boy would be frantic with fear, but she found him at the window with his eyes bright with excitement. He was shouting loudly with every clap of thunder, "Bang it again God! Bang it again!" He had no fear of the power because he knew the Person behind the power.

The second thing God reveals about Himself is that He is the Eternal Present One. God never began, but always is. If He began then whatever caused His beginning would be

greater than God. When the skeptic asks when did God begin, he is contradicting himself and does not realize it because of his false concept of God. He is asking when did that which had no beginning begin? God by very definition is without beginning. How far down is a bottomless pit? Bottomless by very definition eliminates the possibility of giving any meaning to the question how far down? How long is eternity? This is asking when does that end which by definition has no end. If you ask where was God before creation, you are asking where was God when there wasn't anywhere, and where was God when there wasn't any when. You might say that you don't get it, and you are not alone, for eternity is just not part of our experience. About all we can say about it is that it is not time, and we cannot think a part from time.

Eternity is ever present, but in contrast time is never present. You might say that it is right now, but that is not so for even in saying the word now you see the constant flow of time. By the time you say the word the end is already past, and when you finish the word the time you referred to is already gone. The present is so short, and so all of life is either in the past or the future, whereas in eternity all is present. The present is just the hole in the needle through which the thread of time passes for us, but for God it is where He dwells beyond any of the limitations of time.

What God says to Moses implies many things about the nature of God. The important thing is that we begin to see that the God of Scripture is greater than any concept that

man has. The gods that many atheists reject are puny concepts that have nothing to do with the God of Scripture. We do not believe in the gods most people reject either. They are often the product of man's imagination and not God's revelation. On the other hand, we do not believe in the many gods that others create in their own image. The god of the alcoholic is liquor and they are deeply devoted to their god. They love neither father nor mother more than it, and they will go to any length for it. There are many such gods that people are devoted to, but they are not the God revealed in Scripture through Jesus. He alone is worthy of our worship and devotion.

God taught Moses that He demands reverence, promises His presence and reveals His essence to those who seek Him and obey Him. Your God is not big enough if He is not this God who revealed Himself to Moses and more completely through His Son Jesus Christ.

8. RAHAB THE HARLOT Based on Josh. 2:1-21

Women do not have fight to play a major role in war. The gentle schemes of women are often able to do what bombs and bullets cannot do. Mary Murray is a great example from the Revolutionary War. George Washington and two of his generals had escaped from the British in New York, but General Putnam was still evacuating lower Manhattan. What

they did not know was that they were marching right into the path of the British General Howe, who had just come to the colonies with 8,000 fresh troops. It would have been a terrible defeat for the colonies.

Mary Murray, the wife of a wealthy New York merchant, learned of this impending disaster, and she went into action. She invited the British General to stop for a cooling drink in the spacious parlor of her mansion. This pulled him off the road, and she sent one of her servants upstairs to watch the cloud of dust so they could know when the American troops had passed by. Fortunately, it was a hot day that September 15, 1776. General Howe accepted the invitation, and when he prepared to leave she insisted he stay for a mid-day lunch. General Howe hesitated because his men had to stand in the hot sun. She solved that by having tables set out in back under trees. The whole British army was kept cool and entertained until the Americans were safely past.

The British never knew that a great victory slipped through their hands because of a kind hospitality of a woman. On Park Ave. of New York City there is a tablet honoring Mary Murray for her heroic hospitality that made it possible for the American army to escape. She helped win the Revolutionary War with the weapon of kindness. It is a very effective weapon, and we want to focus on a biblical woman who became one of the most famous women in history because she was kind to the Israelite spies, and helped them escape from what appeared to be a hopeless situation.

This one act of kindness led Rahab to become a part of Israel's history, and to even become a link in the chain that led to the Messiah. She is part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. She is referred to by James as a great example of the power of works, and in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, she is one of the two women named in that great faith chapter as a great example of faith. In spite of all her fame, and all the coverage she gets in God's Word, her name never became a popular name, which is usually the case with women who do good and great things in the Bible. The reason for her name never becoming widely used is due to the first aspect of her life that we want to consider.

I. HER PAST PROFESSION.

Rahab was a harlot, or better known in our culture as a prostitute. Here is a paradox, for she was a heathen harlot who became a messianic mother, her name never escaped the taint of her past, even though she did fully escape that past, and will be singing in eternity the song of the redeemed. The study of Rahab forces us to look at the subject of prostitution, for this profession is always linked with her name except for one time in the genealogy of Matt. 1. Even when she is held up as a great example of faith and works she is called Rahab the harlot.

The question that comes to our minds is why? Why is prostitution so persistently prevalent all through history? It is known as the oldest profession, and it is a profession that has played a major role in history. You cannot study the role

of women in history, and not study this aspect of it. The Bible recognizes it as a major subject. Harlot is used 40 times in the Old Testament, and 8 times in the New Testament. Whore, whoredom, and whoring, are used 83 times in the Old Testament and 9 times in the New Testament. These represent just a partial list of the biblical material on prostitution, but they represent 140 verses of God's Word on this issue. There is more on prostitution in the Bible than on many other subjects, and it is because God knows the heart of man better than we do.

Prostitution is, and always has been, a major economic issue. Women have turned to it all through history for survival. Men have always been tempted to cash in on the willingness of other men to pay for sex. God knew the Jews would be no different, and so He warns in Lev. 19:29, "Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness." God knows that prostitution is the door to every other form of evil, and once you open that door, the nation is on a downhill slide. With it comes drugs, gambling, and crime of every sort. It gives the underworld a major in road to society.

The point I want to focus on out of many we could consider is that the degrading of women by means of prostitution is primarily the responsibility of men, and when men treat women this way, they destroy their own values, and their own ideals. Men cannot treat women in a lowly manner and expect to rise themselves. Men rise or sink depending on how they treat women. Keep in mind that for every

prostitute there are many men who keep this profession alive. This means that women are only a fraction of the problem. The main problem is the lust of men.

The reason prostitution can never be eliminated by men is because men are the power behind it. I have never studied a subject that was more frustrating. Millions and millions of women are enslaved, and almost nobody cares because the power structure of our world demands these slaves. The economic system of many nations depends upon prostitution. Tourism and prostitution go hand in hand around the world. Business is a key supporter of prostitution, and men are rewarded for a good job by being given a night with a prostitute. Governments and businesses entertain customers and diplomats with prostitutes.

This is not a new thing in our day at all. It has been a part of history. So basic is prostitution to the way of life of sinful man that the great leaders of the church were not in favor of abolishing it. St. Augustine, one of the most influential men in the history of the church, said, "Remove prostitutes from human affairs, and you will unsettle everything because of lust." Centuries later the great theologian St. Thomas Aquinas said, "Prostitution in the cities is like the sewage system in the palace. Do away with it, and the palace will turn into a place of filth and stink." Church councils have supported prostitution as a way to control men's lust so that it does not lead to rape, adultery, and the contamination of the marriage bond.

My point in all this is that the prostitutes of history have been some of the most pathetic people because they have been slaves that no one is interested in setting free. Even Christians have not really tried to eliminate this blight, because they see beneficial fringe benefits. The vast majority of prostitutes hate what they have to do, but they have to no way of escape. Poverty forces most of them into it, and economic necessity keeps them there. You can, in self-righteous pride, say I would starve first, but you do not understand what life does to so many women.

In Indonesia, for example, the extreme poverty forces up to 60% of the women into prostitution. In Jakarta back in 1979 there were 600 Christian prostitutes who joined together to care for their children. They had Bible studies and prayed together, but there was no other way to survive, and that is why they were prostitutes. Studying the history of this tragic reality of life has helped me understand why the Bible conveys such a message of sympathy for the prostitute. I can better understand why Jesus let a prostitute wipe His feet with her hair. I can better understand why He was willing to accept the woman at the well in spite of her shabby past. I can better grasp how Jesus could let the woman taken in adultery go free and unpunished. What I can better see is that God understands that women are victims of system that forces them into immorality that they would not choose if they were free to make a choice.

I am not blind to the many wicked women in history who love evil, and who love to enslave other women, as well as

men. That is a part of history as well, but the fact is, the majority need compassion for they are slaves and victims. By the providence of God Rahab got the chance to be free of her past, and she grabbed it and became a godly woman. If the prostitutes of the world were given a chance to be free and have the ability to make a decent living, most would make that choice. Jesus said to the Pharisee that the harlots and Publicans would enter the kingdom before them. The implication is that they would respond to the Gospel and become godly people.

What we need to see is that the ministry to prostitutes is a valid ministry of compassion. Economic inequality has always been the main cause for prostitution. The more poor women you have in this world, the more prostitutes you have. There are those, of course, who are rich and high class, but the majority in the world are pathetically poor. Only women themselves can stop the exploitation of their sex. The power structure of men will never stop it. Abortion is so hard to fight for the same reason. Any effort to halt the free expression of man's lust will face enormous opposition. Unless women organize to change the way things are the best we can hope for is that, like Rahab, one by one there will be those who escape this oldest profession to live a life of dignity and respect. The second thing we want to focus on is-

II. HER PRESENT POSSESSION.

As we confront her in our text she is a woman of faith, and not a woman of filth. She is intelligent and not immoral. She

is an impressive person who is decisive, and she makes a choice to save her family at the risk of her own life. So much is noble about Rahab that it is easy to see why one of the spies fell for her. According to Jewish tradition one of these two spies later married her, and she became a part of Israel, and a mother in the blood line to Christ. Her son Boaz grew up to marry Ruth the Moabite, who was another Gentile. With a mother like her he had no fear of marrying a Gentile woman, for he knew they could be marvelous. God did also, for both of these Gentile women became a part of the blood line to the Messiah.

Rahab possessed a keen intelligent mind. She kept up on current events, and she knew what the God of Israel had been doing. She listened to the news, and paid attention to the changing times. She was ready to change to fit the new circumstances that history was bringing. She could see her people were doomed, and that the future was with Israel. She was prepared to act on her faith in that future. It was not a self-centered choice. She loved her family. She may have been the black sheep of the family, and may have been rejected for her decision to be a prostitute, but she did not reject them. Her deal with the spies included her whole family.

It is not true that a prostitute is incapable of love. Rahab was one of the most loving daughters we have any record of in the Bible. We do not know what her parents and siblings thought of her, but we know how she felt about them. In spite of her degrading profession she still possessed a deep

love for her whole family. People caught up in the most degrading aspects of human life can still be very likeable and loving people. Rahab still possessed the capacity, in spite of all the lust and abuse she had seen, to see the beauty of what God intended in the male-female relationship. I have read stories and seen movies of prostitutes who fell in love and made good wives. This is not fiction, but fact. Many prostitutes have married and made wonderful respectable wives. It takes a unique man to make it work, however, and many men could not handle it. It was certainly providential that one of the spies was just such a man.

What we see in Rahab is the other side of the depravity of man. We see the dignity of man. We see that even in the fallen state men and women still possess the shattered and tattered image of God. Rahab had a lot of good qualities even as a heathen harlot. That is why it is important for Christians to approach all people from the point of view of respect. Even the harlot has the capacity to respond to what is good, noble, and righteous. The harlot has the same capacity to chose to follow the light as anyone else. The result is we have a story in the Bible of Jewish spies entering into an agreement with a pagan prostitute. They made a treaty with her, and they promised her deliverance because of her faith in the God of Israel, and her action to preserve their lives.

Don't write people off because of who they are, or what their past is. God providentially led the spies to Rahab for her sake, and for a lesson to His people for all time. The lesson is not that everybody will turn out good if given a

chance, for this is not so. The lesson is that people in every category must be offered a chance, for no matter how depraved they are, they can chose to trust God and rise to a level of dignity and usefulness in the plan of God.

Jesus was virgin born, but lest anyone gets the idea that God will not use anyone who is less than perfect, there are women like Rahab in Christ's genealogy. The majority of the human race is closer to Rahab than to Mary, and Jesus came to seek and to save the fallen and the lost. The plan of redemption cannot be fully seen by looking at Mary. We need to see Rahab as well before the picture is complete. Then, and only then, can we see the glory of God's amazing grace. Had God consulted the Pharisees He would have been told it was in bad taste to include a harlot in His Son's genealogy. But God is not concerned about what people were. He is concerned about whether or not they possess faith. If they do, then that present possession can wipe away the bolt of their past profession.

By faith Rahab saved her future husband by helping him to escape. By faith she saved her whole family. By faith she saved herself, and by faith she has saved many others because God used her example in His Word so that many others through history could see the good news of her deliverance, and put their trust in the same God to deliver them. Like the woman at the well, this Old Testament woman of ill repute gained the reputation of being one of God's best tools for evangelism. The last aspect of her life we want to focus on is-

III. HER FUTURE POSITION.

We are looking at what she became in history long after she was gone from the stage of history. No one could ever dream that a woman like Rahab could gain a position in Israel, and in God's plan, that would make her a great example. She was a Gentile, and a woman, and a prostitute. The only possible way she could have sunk any lower would have been to add to this list the term leper. She was, for all practical purposes, the least likely person to ever become an example for anyone, let alone the people of God. She illustrates that a Gentile can become a Jew by faith and by marriage, but more important, she illustrates a person in darkness can become a great light by the grace of God.

It is important that we see that the Bible gives us great examples of women who are redeemed so that we never think they are secondary in God's plan. Lydia was the first Christian convert in Europe, and Rahab was the first pagan convert to Judaism in Canaan. All through history we see that women are often the first to respond to the grace of God, and they open the way for men to follow. Women are often spiritual pioneers who blaze new trails that become highways for millions.

There are other prostitutes who have become famous, but none as famous as Rahab. As a youth, when I stood by her grave on the hill outside Deadwood, South Dakota, I thought that Calamity Jane was a great woman. I later learned that she was one of the worst women who ever lived. She was a

foul mouthed, crude, and very unfeminine prostitute. But her story illustrates two points I am trying to convey in this message on Rahab. She was forced into prostitution by society. Her parents with 6 children were pioneers, and shortly after her mother died on the trail, her father died when they reached Salt Lake City. The younger children were taken by the state and put up for adoption. Jane was 15, and so she was left on her own. She became a prostitute for survival. This is the way millions have become prostitutes through history. A study in Paris in the year 1828 showed that there were 1255 prostitutes in that profession because they lost their parents, or were abandoned.

The more you read about the causes of prostitution, the more compassion you have for those women who are in the worst of all types of slavery. I cannot admire Calamity Jane as I did in my youth, but neither can I despise her because of what I have learned about her background. Jesus had such compassion on sinners because He knew why people lived on such a low level of immorality. It often takes us along time to understand the reasons why people are what they are.

Calamity Jane also illustrates the fact that the worst have something of the image of God in them yet. In 1878 when smallpox swept through Deadwood, and people were dying like flies, she worked day and night nursing the sick and dying. The paper referred to her then as an angel of mercy. She was a dark angel, to be sure, but she set an example.

Rahab's example is the greatest, however, for she

abandoned all other loyalties, and put her faith in God. She risked everything, and even became a traitor to her state. She rejected her pagan gods, and put her trust in the God of Israel. This was a daring thing to do, but she did it and became one of the only two women in Heb. 11 as great examples of faith. Sarah is the other woman, and Sarah means princess. So we have the princess and the prostitute, the high and the low, but both are examples of great faith, and they make it clear that faith is an open choice for all. No one need miss God's best because of their past, however vile and out of God's will. A present faith in Christ can lead anyone to have a future position in God's eternal kingdom. The story of Rahab gives hope to all the sinners of the world that they too can become children of God by faith in the Christ who will cast none out who come to Him in faith.

9. DEBORAH THE WISE Based on Judges 4

Everyone has heard of Paul Revere, but very few would recognize the name of Sybil Ludington. Her father was a colonel in the Revolutionary Army in Connecticut. One night a messenger came banging on the door of their home. Sybil let him in and went to get her father. She listened as her father received the report that 200 British troops had overrun Danburg, Conn.

The British had taken advantage of the fact that the American troops had gone home to their farms to plant their

fields. The British easily stormed past the guards, and they began to loot and burn the town. Colonel Ludington realized the messenger has to go out to the militia immediately, but the messenger was too exhausted. Sybil volunteered, but her father refused to let a 16 year old girl go riding into such a dark and dangerous night. But Sybil insisted, for she knew the country and there was no one else to go, and time was running out.

Sybil got her horse prepared and off she rode. Through the night she rode to every farm house and shouted the message, "The British are burning Danburg. Meet at Colonel Ludington's mill." She fought back many tears in the lonely night and her voice gave out. Her horse was also exhausted, but she achieved the goal, and the British were driven back to their ships. Sybil became known as the female Paul Revere. In 1975 a stamp was issued in her memory, and a statue of her stands in Memorial Hall in Washington, D. C.

All through history women have played a major role in war, and in the defense of their people. Women warriors who actually led troops in battle are more frequent in history than most of us would ever think likely. Probably the most famous of all is Joan of Arc who lived from 1412 to 1431. This 19 year old girl led France to victory in a war they had been losing to England for 75 years. Joan had no schooling, and never learned to read, but she heard the call of God to save France. She persuaded the French Commander to give her the chance. They had nothing to lose, for it looked hopeless, but this young girl rallied the French Army and won victory

after victory. She united a divided nation and reestablished France as a major world power.

We want to focus our attention on Judges 4 where we see the Joan of Arc of the Old Testament. Deborah also rallied the forces of the nation of Israel, and she won for her people freedom from what seemed hopeless odds. For 20 years Israel had suffered oppression from Jabin the king of Canaan. He had 900 chariots of iron, and Israel had a grand total of zero. You talk about an uneven balance of power. This was like trying to fight tanks with bows and arrows. In our world today one of the key issues is balance of power, and who has the most and fastest strike capability weapons. Israel was certainly not the leader in that day.

When Israel did evil and developed life styles out of God's will, the pagan nations around her won all the wars, and they were slaves. When they repented and called upon God for deliverance God would raise up a leader who would set them free even though their weapons were inferior. Weapons were never the key factor in the wars of the Bible. The key was always the relationship of people to God. Unless God has changed His ways of dealing with nations, the future for Israel and America is more a matter of worship than of weapons. When people turn to God, and call upon Him for His guidance and help, then he raises up leaders to accomplish His will in history. That is what the book of Judges is all about. One of these judges that God raised up was this female judge by the name of Deborah.

Why God raised up a woman to do what is generally considered a man's task, I do not know. But its in the Book, and we have to face up to the fact that God is an equal opportunity employer when it comes to using the sexes to do His will in history. Every so often God uses a woman to do what he usually does by means of a man. This forces us to keep our minds open to God's leading, and not be limited by custom or tradition. If God gives a woman the gifts to lead men for their good and God's glory, then let her lead. The legalistic Christian says, "We never did it this way before." The biblical Christian says, "God is always doing things like He never did before. If He empowers a woman with superior gifts, then we need to submit to God and follow her leadership."

This is precisely what we see the people of Israel doing with Deborah. God was on and exaltation of womanhood campaign in this period. He not only raised up Deborah to lead His people as a prophet, a patriot, and poet, but He made sure that no man got the glory for killing the cruel oppressor Sisera. By His providence this job was done by the hand of the woman named Jael. God wanted women to be the heroines of this period of history. It ought to keep the greatest of men humble to see that they have done nothing that God could not have done as well through a woman if that was His choice.

Sexual pride has no support from the Bible. The Bible has no interest in the issue of which is superior, the male or female. The Bible is very clear on this issue, for it says that

the godly male or female is superior to the ungodly male or female. Sexuality is not the issue, but spirituality is, and that is why Paul stresses that in Christ there is no male or female. The only status that really matters to God is not, are you a Jew or Gentile, are you male or female, are you in bonds or free, but what matters is, are you in Christ, or out of Christ?

Deborah was used of God, not because she was a woman, but because she was a woman of faith who committed all of her abilities to be used by God. Like the other judges of Israel, she came to power by the sheer force of her marvelous gifts. She had no royal blood, but was just an amazing and brilliant woman. Men came to her for guidance because she was so wise. We want to look at the three areas where her wisdom was revealed. First she was wise as-

I. A PROPHETESS.

A prophetess is not the wife of a prophet-she is a prophet -a female prophet. Her husband Lappidoth was likely a godly man, but nothing is known about him. He is an obscure husband married to a famous and gifted woman. She is superior to him because God chose to give her gifts that He did not give to Him. The result was the people of Israel did not come to him, but to her for leadership. We have no reason to doubt they had a wonderful marriage in spite of this role reversal. It is exceptional, but the point is, the exceptional is real, and the Bible deals with it. In the New Testament we have another illustration in husband and wife team of Pricilla and Aquilla. She was superior to him, and

became the leader of that team.

What the Bible demands is just common sense. If the wife is gifted in some area or all areas, then wisdom demands that she be the leader where she is strong. Paul recognized this with Pricilla. He puts her name first whenever he refers to them. Does this destroy what Paul says about wives being submissive to their husbands? Not at all. It just destroys the legalistic application of the principle, which is the only thing any woman could object to about that principle. Submission is simple an acknowledgement of another's gifts, wisdom, and authority. Paul demands that it be mutual between mates, for sometimes the wife has superior gifts. Both the Old Testament and New Testament illustrate this, and Deborah is the prime example.

The times were chaotic and pressures were tremendous, and yet we see the people of Israel turning to a woman for wisdom. Women are not supposed to be as emotionally stable in a crisis, but this was long before any of those studies were published, and so Deborah just went on giving her wise judgments. Deborah means, "A bee," and just like the bumble bee who never read the reports that it is not built right to fly, goes on flying, so she went on doing what women are not supposed to do well. She kept cool, and gave forth the Word of God for personal and national guidance.

She is the one who sent for Barak, and gave him the Word of God that he was to be the general of Israel's army to fight Sisera the general of Jabin's army. She is the one who gave

him the prophecy that he would win the battle. God gave a woman the gift of prophecy, and this exalted that sex to the level of being the very mouthpiece of God along side of men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. I have not heard many women preachers myself, but regardless of how I, or anyone else, might feel about them, in the light of Deborah I would not have the audacity to ever say it is not biblical for women to proclaim the Word of God. This is a hot issue for many, but it certainly wasn't in the day of Deborah.

The thing that impresses me about this whole account of Deborah is its naturalness. It is just recorded as fact. Deborah was wise, and she was a prophetess that everybody accepted as God's choice for leadership. There is no big hassle made about changing history to herstory, or boycott to girlcott, and all of the nonsense we have in our day about trying to change sexes language. The Christian is to simply accept the providence of God as did Israel. If God gives a woman gifts, then let them be used, and praise God for them. The male or female that is God's choice will be a blessing to both sexes.

If God raises up a gifted woman, men need not fear to follow her, for her leadership will only exalt the male role. Deborah is the one who got Barak exalted to a place in Heb. 11 where she never made it herself. The male role and status are not threatened by her leadership. By this we can discern between women who are truly sent of God, and those who desire to use their gifts to defeat and dominate men for their own glory. Deborah's concern was for the glory of God and

the good of His people. A great and godly woman will always be one who lifts men to a nobler level. Deborah did just that, and made her mark in the public arena of political leadership with God and the people's full approval.

As a prophetess Deborah was able to discern the mind of God, and to declare it to men, and, thereby, see God's will accomplished. Thank God for men who know when to listen to women. Had Pilate listened to his wife he may have treated Jesus differently. Had Nabal listened to his wise wife Abigail and let her handle his public relations, he would not have gone down in history as a blundering fool. The point is, the Bible supports the truth that most of us have to learn the hard way, and that is that your wife may be right, and you need to listen to her. She may, in fact, be your best advisor, just as Deborah was the best for Israel.

The opposite is also true, for Ahab never should have listened to Jezebel, and Herod never should have listened to his wife. Solomon undermined most of his wisdom by listening to his foreign wives. The female is equal in folly as well as in faith, and so we are not trying to superficially exalt the female as a paragon of virtue. We are simply recognizing that the female has all the same potential for good or evil as the male. Therefore, she is to be treated, and related to, in ways that acknowledge that equality.

That prince of expositors G. Campbell Morgan writes, "The one great message of the story seems to be that it warns us to take heed that we do not imagine ourselves to be wiser

than God. When He calls and equips a woman to high service, let us beware lest we dishonor Him by refusing to recognize her, or cooperate with her." In other words, the Christian attitude is to let women rise to the level of their gifts and abilities. Listening to, and following, a wise and godly woman can be the key to God's best in life. God can do what He wills without a woman or a man, for that matter, but that is what makes it so wonderful, for He chooses to change history by using men and women who will cooperate with Him. Next let us consider Deborah as-

II. A PATRIOT.

A patriot is one who loves his or her country, and zealously supports its interests. The people of Israel were sick and tired of the 20 years of slavery to Jabin, and they crying out to God for help. The way God spells relief is DEBORAH. She was God's answer to their prayers. A godly woman can be the best weapon a nation can have. We know that Eve was God's answer to Adam's prayer, and that females have been the answer to the prayers of men all through history. Deborah is an example of the fact that God may also answer national prayers by raising up a woman.

Deborah was the real source of inspiration and leadership, and this is acknowledged by Barak the general in verse 8 where he says to Deborah, "If you will go with me I will go: But if you will not go with me, I will not go." Barak was a man of faith, but he was not going after 700 iron chariots without the presence of Deborah. She was obviously a

charismatic personality that gave confidence and assurance to all who were with her. He needed someone special, for he was taking on a well drilled army with the best and newest fighting machines. He was fighting with men out of training, and with nothing but homemade weapons. He needed her to motivate his men.

Deborah was no Cleopatra, eager to reign over men and dominate them. She was eager to inspire them to do the will of God, and gain freedom from their enemies that they might more effectively live for God and His purposes. She aroused her nation from its lethargy and despair. She awakened in them a determination to be free from their bondage. Without her the victory would never have been attempted. Deborah is proof that a woman may be the best national advisor. For a woman to be on the supreme court of our land, or to be in the president's cabinet is no problem for those who see how God has worked in the history of His people. History and the Bible make it clear that patriotic women are a vital part of any nation that is blessed by God.

Deborah went from settling personal disputes among God's people to settling international disputes. All through history God has used women, not just in the home and the church, but in the public arena of politics. It is not for all, or even most women, but the point is, when God calls women to get involved in major political ways, they have a tremendous impact. Never underestimate the power of women to change the course of history. Deborah's leadership reversed the history of Israel, and instead of living as slaves, they had 40

years of peace and freedom because of her.

In our own land we enjoy enormous blessings because of patriotic women. I think of just one group that God has used so uniquely in our land. The Quaker women have always been treated as equals. They receive the same good education, and the same freedom to use their gifts. The results are that this small group of women have had a profound influence on all Americans. They were a major force in fighting slavery, and in building institutions for care and education. They provided the first battlefield nurses. Lucretia Mott became one of the greatest women leaders of the 19th century. She and other Quaker women, like the Grimke sisters were the first Americans women to speak out in public and win for women the right to express themselves in public. Then came Susan B. Anthony whose labors led women to gain the right to vote. Quaker women were the first to do many things in our land to benefit the whole nation. Their theology allowed them to enter into the freedoms of our nation, and they expanded those freedoms for all. The third area of Deborah's wisdom is that she was-

III. A POETESS.

Judges chapter 5 is considered one of the first pieces of literature ever written, and Deborah was its author. One of its famous lines is, "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It is a poetic way of saying that the universe is behind what is good, and that nature itself will fight the forces of evil. Women did write parts of the Bible. It was mostly

songs like those of Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament, and Mary and Elizabeth in the New. A number of scholars are convinced also that Pricilla is the author of the book of Hebrews. That may never be determined, but what is determined is that God has, and does, inspire women as well as men.

Deborah was something of a female Solomon. She was wise in discerning what was right, and people respected her judgments. She also had his creative gift of writing songs. This is patriotic song of Israel, which records and rejoices in the Lord's guidance to bring victory to them. It is of interest that women have always enjoyed equality with men in the area of writing poetry and songs. History is filled with women who have excelled in this area of creativity. Some of our most patriotic songs were written by women. America the Beautiful was written by Katherine Lee Bates, and the Battle Hymn of the Republic was written by Julia Ward Howe.

Many of the songs we sing to praise God, and to express our faith, are songs that God has given to us through the minds and pens of women. This is a vast field of study on its own. As Deborah's gifts were used to bless God's people in her day, so the gifts of women have blessed the whole family of God all through history, and will continue to do so until history ends. The point of all this is not that women should go away singing, "Anything you can do I can do better," but that they rejoice with men in the God who loves and uses both sexes to bless His people, and through them the people of the world.

10. DEBORAH THE DELIGHTFUL Based on Judges 4

I have enjoyed war stories and war heroes since I was a small boy watching the news on the movies screen in the local theater. I never realized, however, that not all of the heroes were men. I heard of Joan of Arc when I got into the upper grades of school, but I never had the concept of the heroin in my mind until recently as a retired pastor. The history of the women warriors on the battlefield has not been available until recent years when female historians have brought them to light. Even those in the Bible have not been known because they are overshadowed by the great male warriors of the Bible. It has been my delight to discover that women have played a major role in defending the freedom and value system of America and of the people of God through history. One of the most outstanding is Deborah.

Here we have a woman who rose to the top in a day when all the world around here was filled with masculine brutality. Her story takes place between the years 1209 and 1169 B.C. Life was one war after another, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Moral standard were so low that even the godly people did things that would be a disgrace in our day. Almost nothing was unacceptable. The masses of people were following pagan practices and were not different from the pagan people around them. But in the midst of this awful period of history we suddenly come to chapter 4 of Judges, and to our surprise a woman is in charge. No woman

had been a judge of Israel before and none came after her. She was a one of a kind female, and she was able by her God-given gifts to rise to the point of being the leader of God's people. Israel had been oppressed by the cruel Canaanites for twenty years. They were devastated and were crying out to God for help. This is when we begin to get the story of this delightful leader named Deborah. In Judges 4:4-10 we get some basic facts about her.

She was a prophetess.

She was a wife.

She was a leader of Israel.

She was a literal judge who decided disputes.

She was a messenger of God's word to men.

She was a partner with the male commander of Israel's army.

In Chapter 5 we see also that

She was a poetess and a singer.

She was a mother-5:7.

What this marvelous women illustrates is that a woman can do it all. She can be a wife and a mother, and still be a leader and public servant. She can have both a private world

and a public world where she can be successful. God delighted in this unusual woman and used her in a unique way to bless his people. Lets look at the ways she was used of God by some of the roles she played.

1. AS PROPHETESS.

This means God used her as a spokesperson to communicate his message to others. You do not choose this, for it is God's choice as to who is going to give his word to others. God does not discriminate against women and use only male instruments to communicate. The role of prophetess is found in both the Old and the New Testament. Miriam the sister of Moses was a prophetess as we read in Ex. 15:20. It is of interest to note that Miriam was also a poetess and singer like Deborah. It makes me feel that women who are closest to God will be channels of joy and song for others. Much, if not most of the poetry and song by which believers have praised God all through history has come to us through gifted women. Others called prophetesses are Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14, Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14, Anna in Luke 2:36, and the four daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9.

These women received direct revelation from God, and this enabled them to announce what God was going to do. They were the only people who could know the future and tell others what was going to be. They were extremely valuable when it came to knowing how a battle was going to turn out. Anyone can be brave in facing a battle if they know ahead of time that they are going to win. Deborah knew that the forces

of Israel could now overcome the enemies of Israel, and so she was a pure delight to Barak the commander of the army of Israel. So much so that he says in v.8 that he will not go to war unless she comes with him. Here is a male warrior who refuses to enter the battlefield without this female by his side. Because she knew the future she was a picture of faith and confidence, and he and his men needed that. She was to the army of Israel what Joan of Arc was to the forces of France. She gave them motivation and confidence to fight with assurance of victory.

We see God's sense of humor in this whole setting, for Sisera the enemy commander has 900 iron chariots at his side, and Barak has Deborah at his side.

The name Deborah means honey bee, and this was the weapon that gave him courage. He was going head on against 900 iron chariots with a honey bee at his side. It was the bee verses the iron beast, but here was a bee with a sting for her foes and honey for her friends. Those who messed with this bee were stung into defeat, and those who followed this bee were blest with the sweet honey of peace for the next 40 years. She is called a mother in Israel, and a mother is one who nourishes and encourages her children. This is what Deborah did, and that is why all the people delighted in her.

2. AS JUDGE.

Most prophetesses were not the leaders of the land. They

were gifted to communicate the message of God, but they were not gifted with the wisdom to settle disputes and to be the ultimate authority in governing the people. Deborah stands out as extremely unique in this sense. Being a judge in the time of Judges was equivalent to being the king or the president. She was the supreme court, the legislature and the President all rolled into one, and this made her one of a kind in history. Most all of the other judges of this period were known for their leadership in battle. They were great with the weapons of warfare. Deborah was great with the mind. She was an educator who helped people in unique ways that made them delight in her caring spirit. No other judge did what she did.

The people of Israel came to her to settle disputes, and so people had confidence in her just like they had in Solomon later because she was obviously wise and fair. They trusted her judgment for she was a woman who was committed to do the will of God, and she sought God's guidance for her decisions. In the midst of so much ungodliness her court was an oasis of godliness. It was so rare to have such a wise woman judging the nation's people at that time, but in our day there are many women in our courts as judges, right up to the Supreme Court of the land. We even have a Jewish woman by the name of Ruth Bader Ginsburg as one of our Supreme Court justices. Women have always been capable of being educated and rising to the top of any profession, but they never had the chance through much of history. That is why it is a delightful surprise to find a Deborah in the day of the Judges rising to the top.

She just illustrates that God has never been opposed to using women for the highest purposes in his plan for the world. If they are rare in olden times it is because they never had the opportunities that they have today. The important thing to recognize is that it has always been acceptable to God to have a woman in the highest places of leadership. The people were open to it in the day of Deborah, but when the society looks down on female leadership then it is not possible for them to rise to such positions. Today there are many female leaders because we live in a culture where they are free to use all of the gifts God has endowed them with. This has not always been the case even in Christian cultures. There is still the feeling among many males that is threatening about a woman leading them, and so the story of Deborah is often ignored and not taught in Bible classes.

There are still those who will not let a woman teach men, but this is folly if the woman is the best qualified to teach, which is often the case. John Macarthur is a well known Bible Teacher of our day, and he says this in a message about Deborah:

"Just because we think a woman can't or shouldn't do something, doesn't make it so. Now let me add that I'm actually very conservative when it comes to woman's work. I'm not always comfortable with some roles women take on and I believe there are some jobs they shouldn't do. But just because I think that way it doesn't limit who God can use for whatever purpose he has in mind. Deborah led Israel not because there were no men who would do it but because, from God's perspective, she was the most qualified. You see it did

not matter if Deborah was a man or woman because it was God working through her not the other way around.

"God will use you today not because of your gender or your age or your position or your abilities but based on your submission to him. That's why Paul could write in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." God will use any of us if we will let him. The problem is we often hinder God by our obsession with titles and positions. Who cares if you are a man or a woman? Who cares if you are an elder or deacon? Who cares if you have a graduate degree from a Bible College or barely finished high school? Who cares if you are articulate or shy? We do. God doesn't."

3. AS PARTNER.

Many women feel that they need to oppose men in order to become equal, and they make the battle of the sexes their focus. This is not what we see in Deborah. She used her wisdom to cooperate with the male leaders, and this unity of the sexes is what led to victory and blessing for the people of God. Any woman is at her best when men admire her and gladly follow her leading. There was no desire of Barak to dominate Deborah, and he did not go all to pieces with a deflated male ego when Deborah said that a woman would get the honor he might have had by killing the commander of the enemy forces. Jael got that honor, but Barak was just delighted to be a partner with women who were used of God. Deborah actually told Barak that he did not need her and

that he could win the war without her. She did not try to dominate him either. She was humble in her leadership and sought for no glory but the glory of God. It was this ideal relationship of male and female leadership that God blest. Deborah makes it clear that strong female leadership is based on partnership and full cooperation with male leadership. A woman who wants to lead in hostility to men is not wise in the long run, for God blesses unity of the sexes.

Barak could have said that he was not going to take advice from a woman who had no military experience. She came up with the hair-brained scheme of calling an army together who had no decent weapons to face a vast enemy who had the best weapons in the world. He had every right to be skeptical of her plan, but he had respect for her as a woman of God and he knew she would not come up with this idea unless God had given it to her. Had he not believed in her being an authentic messenger of God he would not dream of following her lead. Here was a man who had full confidence in a woman's word as being the very word of God. He had more confidence in her than he had in himself, for he would not fight without her at his side. Rare is the man who will listen to a woman in an area where he is supposed to be the expert. He delighted in Deborah, however, for she was clearly God's spokesperson.

Matthew Henry comments, "Some struggles, we may suppose, that brave man had made towards the shaking off of the yoke, but could not effect it till he had his commission and instructions from Deborah. He could do nothing without her head, nor she without his hands; but both together made a

complete deliverer, and effected a complete deliverance. The greatest and best are not self-sufficient, but need one another." She had the greater faith, but she needed male leadership to get the job done. We see the perfect unity of male and female leadership in this relationship. Everyone has to delight in such a rare and beautiful partnership. Some want to accuse Barak of being a wimp for needing Deborah, but God honored him as a great man of faith in Heb. 11:32. His faith in Deborah was faith in God, for he believed her as a true source of the word of God. He would not be in the great faith chapter if his trust in Deborah was not pleasing to God.

If you study the history of women in warfare, it is surprising how often women join men on the battlefield just to be encouraging partners. During the Civil War it was not uncommon for a wife to go with her husband into battle. There are examples of soldiers who, like Barak, refused to go to war unless their wives could come with them. Keith Blaylock refused to go without his wife, and so the recruiting officer allowed Melinda Blaylock to be sworn in as his brother, and listed her as Sam. Many women have insisted that they have the right to fight along side of the men. Since it was not officially permitted the women usually had to disguise themselves by dressing as men. They were willing to give up their identity in order to be partners with men. It is estimated that between 500 to a 1000 women fought in the Civil War disguised as men. Several even rose to the rank of sergeant without being discovered. Many were discovered and discharged, but some managed to maintain their disguise all through the war. Others were allowed to remain even when it

was known they were women. Here, for example, is the record of one woman.

"Goodrich, Ellen Her father disowned Goodrich when she announced that she intended to join her fiancée in the war. She fought by his side for three years and was wounded in the arm by a minnie ball. She nursed her fiancée when he was ill and married him a day or so before he died."

Deborah was not a warrior, as far as the text would indicate, but she was there as one who could give the commander and the soldiers moral support. She did not go into battle and kill the enemy, but stood with the commander overlooking the battlefield. She was delighted, however, when Sisera, who was the commander of the enemy forces, was killed by the hand of a woman named Jael. Deborah had predicted that a woman would have this honor, and when she wrote her song of praise that is recorded in Judges 5, she gave praise to Jael for her role as female partner in defeating the foes of Israel. God had used two woman as partners in delivering His people from the oppression of the Canaanites.

It was rare for women to play the roles that Deborah and Jael played, but the important point is that they were honored for these roles in Israel. The Word of God does not hide them, but exalts them. That is all that should have been necessary for people of future generations to know in order to recognize and reward female partnership in the battles for freedom. Unfortunately, custom and tradition has always been allowed to be more powerful than God's revelation. The

result has been that it has taken many centuries before woman could get the honor and recognition they deserve as equal partners with men in warfare.

Dr. Mary Walker was a Civil War doctor who wore men's clothing and carried two pistols at all times. She fought for freedom and saved many lives. She was captured and spent four months in an enemy prison. She was scarred physically and emotionally, but she continued to serve her country, even though she was resisted constantly because she was a woman. She was of such a benefit in the war that she was rewarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1865. But it was rescinded in 1917. She refused to give it back and wore it until her death in 1919 at the age of 87. It was 58 years later before the U.S. Congress posthumously reinstated her medal. It was restored by President Carter on June 10, 1977. She is the only woman in the history of American warfare to receive the Medal of Honor. My point in sharing this is that she was not honored while she lived, and she died alone and penniless with the feeling of being rejected by the country she served. This was due to the Bible record not being the basis by which people are measured and respected. Had the record of Deborah been respected, Mary Walker would have been a great heroin in our culture, and children would have been singing of her service to our nation.

The record of Deborah is in the Bible because God inspired it to be there. It was real history, and God ordained history. It is there for an example of how God uses women as well as men in the highest roles of leadership. They are partners in every realm of life, and those who let the Word of

God be their guide will delight in them and give them the honor they deserve, just as God gave honor to Deborah the delightful leader of His people.

11. Jael the Assassin Based on Judges 4 and 5

Assassins are never heroes in the history of Americans, for they are always those who seek to kill our presidents whom we admire. This is not always the case in other nations. The Jews, for example, have some assassins who are heroes in their history. Two of them are Hakim and Bet Zuri. They were sent to Egypt to kill Lord Moyne, who was the British Minister of State and the man who shrugged off a German offer to free a million Jews: "But what would I do with a million Jews" Their was justifiable hatred toward a man who would refuse to save the lives of a million people, and they targeted him for death. They succeeded in their mission, and though they were captured and hung, they became heroes of the Jews.

There are many heroic assassins in history. It does not sound like a noble profession, but it can be the very tool of God to bring judgment on those who are ripe for judgment.

This is the case with Jael who assassinated Sisera while he was sleeping in her tent. It may not sound as noble as most assassin stories, but it was just as effective. Sisera has been the oppressor of Israel for twenty years, and finally God gave Israel a female leader who motivated the army to go to battle with this powerful commander of 900 iron chariots. He was watching his army being wiped out and so he leaped off his iron horse and high tailed it to a safer place, he thought.

He headed for the tent of an old friend, but Heber the Kenite was not home. His wife, however was completely hospitable. Jael invited him in and treated him like royalty. She assured him that he had nothing to fear. "Come on in." she said with a cheerful voice. It was just what he needed-a place of refuge. He did not hear the message behind the voice that was, "Come in said the spider to the fly." He was totally taken in by her friendly manner, and was confident she would protect him and even lie about him being there to lead any pursuers astray. She even gave him milk instead of the water for which he asked, for she knew this would help put him to sleep. Then when he was all comfy in bed and fast asleep, she took a hammer and tent peg and drove it through his temple and nailed him to the ground.

By that act of assassination she became a heroine of Jewish history. Deborah and Barek sing of her heroic deed in their great song in Judges 5. In 5:24 she is called the most blessed of women. But this act which made her so famous and praised also made her one of the most controversial persons in the Bible. The debate is over whether she can be considered

honorable or horrible because of the way she carried out her plot. She did not face her foe and strike him when he could defend himself. She lied to him and deceived him. She broke all the codes of hospitality, and so many consider her a terrible person and not a heroine at all. Before we defend this woman as a biblical heroine we want to look at the negative perspective first.

I. THE NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVE.

We all know it is not fair to shoot an unarmed man, and it is not fair to shoot him in the back. There are rules for a fair fight, and it appears that Jael never read the manual for fair fighting. She broke all the rules in the book, and this means she is not to be admired. She is better off forgotten, and many have done just that so that millions of people have heard the Bible expounded all their lives and never once heard of Jael the female assassin. She killed a man in cold blood while he was sleeping, and this is never justifiable. Many feel her image is blotted with the foul taste of treachery, and is no model to be put forth for praise.

Rev Dr Susan Durber had done some great research on this issue and she quotes this sermon preached in 1876, which gives a typical Victorian view of Jael.

"How are we to regard this deed of Jael? There seems to me to be no doubt as to the answer. Her act was one of vilest treachery with scarcely a single extenuating circumstance. . . . We are in no way bound to find excuses for the act, because it

is recorded in God's Word. . . . Nor need we feel any compunction at speaking thus strongly, because Jael appears to have been a special instrument in the hands of God for bringing to pass a deliverance for Israel. . . . We must confess that Deborah actually praised this horrible act of Jael's. But the words of Deborah are not the words of God. . . . The song of Deborah is the utterance of human passion and human weakness, not of divine unswerving justice and strength."

Dr. Durber goes on to point out that this was the teaching in the textbooks of the time. William Smith's Concise Dictionary of the Bible from 1865 made it clear that there could be no justification for her act. I was reading the famous commentary by Keil and Delitzsch when I came across their perspective: "Such conduct as that was not the operation of the Spirit of God, but the fruit of a heroism inspired by flesh and blood; and even in Deborah's song it is not lauded as a divine act." There are some strong feelings against admiring and praising this female assassin.

A Doctor Lord de Tabley wrote a long poem titled Jael back in 1893, and in it he implies that Jael had ambitions to get notoriety, and that was the motive for her treachery. He wrote,

**"And in his sidelong temple, where bright curls
Made crisp and glorious margin to his brows-
So that a queen might lay her mouth at them
Nor rise again less royal for their kiss-
There, in the interspace of beard and brow,
The nail had gone tearing the silken skin;**

**And, driven home to the jagged head of it,
Bit down into the tent-boards underneath;
And riveted that face of deadly sleep."**

This was a poetic description of what the text says, but then he decides to make a judgment of the motive behind Jael's act. He wrote,

**"This woman was a mother, think of that;
A name which carries mercy in its sound,
A pitiful meek title one can trust;
She gave her babe the breast like other wives,
In cradle laid it, had her mother heed
To give it suck and sleep. You would suppose
She might learn pity in its helpless face;
A man asleep is weaker than a child,
And towards the weak God turns a woman's heart;
Hers being none. She is ambitious, hard,
Vain, would become heroic; to nurse babes
And sit at home, why any common girl
Is good enough for that. She must have fame;
She shall be made a song of in the camp,
And have her name upon the soldier's lip
Familiar as an oath."**

Now we need to look at her defense and focus on-

II. THE POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE.

The first line of defense is that those things that are not acceptable in daily life are a normal part of life in warfare.

You do not lie and deceive people as a way of life or you are a villain of the worst kind. But if you are a commander in time of war you do all you can to deceive the enemy. You set up an ambush if possible and kill them before they have a chance to fire back. We say all is fair in love and war, and though that is not an absolute, it has much truth to it. In war it is kill or be killed, and so the primary rule is get them before they get you, and this may call for all kinds of deceit and trickery. This is what we see Jael doing to Sisera. She has a plan to kill him, and the best and safest way to do that is to lure him into a sense of security where he will take a nap. Who would expect this housewife to try and take down an experienced man of war, who has killed many a man in hand to hand combat?

It is folly to criticize a woman for doing what a woman does best in such a situation. She is not alone in using her feminine charms to lure a man of war to his death. Another of the great female heroes of Jewish history is Judith, and she did the same thing as Jael. She deceived a warrior leader into thinking she was a friend, and that she would be willing to share some sexual favors. She was exceedingly beautiful, and he was captivated by her beauty. He gladly allowed her to have a time in private with him where she got him drunk and cut off his head. She thereby saved her people and became a heroine. Assassins are not held to the same code of ethics as are the non-assassin. Any woman doing what Jael or Judith did in time of peace would be arrested as murderers in the first degree. But in time of war they did what no man could do, and that is why they are heroines.

Someone has beautifully summarized the famous story of Judith that is told in the Apocrypha. I believe it was the Rev Dr Susan Durber

"Book of Judith opens with Assyrian emperor Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of the Near East. As his forces mount the invasion of Israel, the town of Bethulia is besieged by his foremost general, Holofernes. The pass defended by the town is strategically vital: if Bethulia yields, the whole country will fall into his hands. Ground down by famine, the populace begs the city's elders to surrender, and they agree to do so within days should the Lord fail to rescue his people. When Judith, a respected widow, hears of this, she summons the elders to a meeting and upbraids them for their lack of faith. Who are they to set time-limits on God? She herself undertakes to save the city within five days, although she will not reveal her plan. However desperate the situation may seem, she avers, God shall overcome.

Divinely inspired and fortified by prayer, she departs for the Assyrian camps. There, claiming to have foreseen Bethulia's doom and offering to reveal a stratagem for taking the city, she is welcomed. Holofernes himself, much smitten with her remarkable beauty, invites her to a banquet after which he intends to seduce her or failing that, rape her. When he retires to his bed in an alcoholic stupor, they are left alone in his tent. Judith takes up his sword and decapitates him. With his severed head she steals back to Bethulia. When its general's corpse is discovered, the Assyrian camp is thrown into confusion. Meanwhile, displaying the head to the Israelites, Judith encourages them to seize their advantage by

a rapid surprise attack. They are victorious. From start to finish, Judith is a self-reliant heroine."

"Judith led the community with a feminist anthem written specially for the occasion.

**'The Lord Almighty has thwarted them by a woman's hand
It was no young man that brought their champion low;
no Titan struck him down,
no tall giant set upon him;
but Judith, Merari's daughter,
disarmed him by her beauty.'**

This female assassin has suffered the same criticism as Jael. The history of art has portrayed her as a femme fatale who used sex to allure poor Holophernes to a violent death by her betrayal. She is pictured as a cold hearted man killer. She is seen as no more than a cut-throat prostitute. The critics cannot bear to face the truth that a woman can, just because is a woman, be used of God to do what a man cannot do. It is true that their sexuality and beauty can lure men to do evil, but they can also lure the enemy into a state of carelessness so they can be defeated. God has used women for this very purpose. God delights in using the weak to defeat the strong. When women are his best tool that is what he uses.

The men these women killed were cold blooded killers who had no compassion on people. They violated all the rules of humanity, and anyone who could rid them of the planet would be honored with songs of praise. You notice that both of these women went for the head. They were not taking any chances that their victim would recover. The Encyclopedia

Judica tries to make Jael more justified in her deception by claiming Sisera had sex with her 7 times, and so she was an abused woman getting revenge and justice. There is nothing in the text to support this, but it does illustrate my point. When you are dealing with an evil person who kills and abuses others, there comes a point where justifiable homicide is in order. Korean and Filipino women who kill for the purpose of freedom are seen in a positive light, and any of us would see them that way if it was our necks being saved by their courageous acts of assassination. These stories of heroic female assassins are well known in the Philippines and in Asia, but are hardly ever preached on in the Western nations. We have not needed women to be deliverers and so we look down on the very concept.

In the Eastern world Jael gets more honor than Deborah, and Deborah gives her more credit than she gives herself in her song. The song of Deborah is probably the primary reason that we must take a positive view of Jael. It was gruesome, as was the cutting off of the head by Judith, but they were agents of God's judgment and they are praised in Israel and celebrated. It is going against the revelation of God to say these words of praise are not God's word. If we can pick and choose what parts of the Bible are truly God's Word and which ones we say are just the flesh speaking, then we have returned to the day of Judges where every man did what was right in his own eyes. We must accept the song of Deborah as God's authentic Word. She was God's spokesperson of the day. She predicted that a woman would kill Sisera, and when it happened she praised God and the woman he used to fulfill

the prophecy. It takes a great deal of audacity to claim that these two women who dominate this chapter are not pleasing to God in all that is recorded here. Reading in our own opinion is not expounding the Word. To expound it is to explain what it says and not to explain it away and reject what it says.

Read it again in 5:24. "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women." I do not read it saying cursed be Jael for not conforming to my ideas of what is fair for women to do in times of warfare. I do not read it saying how terrible that such an act of treachery should be honored. I do not read it implying that Jael should be sent to jail for her brutal assassination. I read it clearly saying "Most blessed of women be Jael." I have written my own poem to honor this woman so honored by the Word of God.

**Seldom does one hear a tale
Like that of the women whose name was Jael.
It was by faith she did prevail
Over Sisera, a powerful male.
All hail to Jael,
Who with hammer and nail,
Did this wicked male impale.
She was female and frail,
But she did not quail, nor sit and wail,
And let the opportunity go stale.
Her true intent she did wisely veil,
And showed no fear with face gone pale.**

**It was a victory of grandest scale
When this evil man she did derail
And did his oppression forever curtail.
She won the day and did not fail
When she worked out every detail,
And conquered the foe with hammer and nail.**

She had Sisera pegged from the start. He was a man who abused women and used them as things. We know this from his own mother's testimony. She wonders why he does not return from the battle and she speculates that he is delayed because of the great spoils and the women they are taking, as stated in 5:30. He was a man who took women as spoils of war and made them sexual slaves. Jael knew the ways of such a pagan leader and she was not about to let the chance slip through her hands to let him live and abuse more women. She may have known some of his captives from previous battles, and she saw herself as a liberator of woman by this assassination. There is no way to know all that motivated her to do this deed, for that is as hidden as was her hatred for him when she treated him as a favored guest. Such secrecy and deceit are valid weapons of warfare.

Those who criticize her make their sexism apparent, for they do not criticize men who used these same weapons to be successful assassins. One of the other judges did the same thing and you will find that he is honored for his cleverness. His story is in chapter 5:12-30. He lied and deceived the king of Moab who was Eglon. Then when he had him alone under

the pretense of wanting to tell him a secret he plunged a hidden knife into his stomach until it came out the other side. This enemy was brought to his death by clever deception, and he is a hero in Israel. Jael does the same thing and men want to say she was not a hero for doing it under the conditions of such deceit. Such critics know nothing of the rules of war. They expect her to have found a more pleasant way to have dispatched this bloody tyrant. The fact is she had only this one chance to kill him and rid the world of a most cruel man. She took it and God's people considered her a heroine. And so do all who accept the Word of God, which gives her honor.

There have been women of other cultures that did what was similar to Jael, and they are honored for their courage. For example,

**Tomyris, Queen of the Massagetae
(sixth century B.C.E.)**

Ruler of the Massagetae, a tribal people who lived east of the lands of Persia, Tomyris is most famous for her defeat of Cyrus the Great, the powerful king of Persia. When Tomyris's son was captured by Cyrus and committed suicide, the queen promised Cyrus "more blood than he could drink." After her troops had destroyed the Persians in battle, she cut off her enemy's head and put it into a bag filled with blood, thus fulfilling her vow.

The role of women in warfare has been varied and so not

all of their role is in the killing of the enemy, but much has been in the role of spy and deceiver in order to help men defeat the enemy. Some have been very clever in saving their loved ones who otherwise would have been killed. God's providence worked through Michal, the first wife of David to save his life. We need to keep in mind that he was a major player in God's plan, and that it was essential for him to live and reign and be the bloodline to the Messiah. He was spared to be this by the clever acts of a woman who loved him. The whole story is found in I Sam. 19:11-17.

In Exodus 1:17-21, Hebrew midwives were able to outsmart the Pharaoh and save the lives of the Jewish baby boys.

Joshua 2:1-16 describes how Rahab, a prostitute, hid two Israelite spies and saved their lives by misdirecting the soldiers.

Some non-biblical examples of women of warfare show us that there have been many women in history who have been honored because of their ability to defeat an enemy.

**Amanirenas, Queen of Kush
(late first century, B.C.E.)**

Like Zenobia, this queen of Kush took advantage of unrest that distracted Roman troops from her realm, the kingdom of Meroe. The Emperor Augustus had recently attempted to tax the Kushites and Amanirenas, one in a long line of ruling Kushite women, took offense. With her son Akinidad, she attacked a Roman fort at Aswan, left the few survivors a

warning message about unwarranted taxes, and returned to Meroe with the bronze head of a statue of Augustus. This they buried under the threshold of Amanirenas' palace. When Augustus mounted the expected retaliation, under the general Petronius, the Romans were at first successful, but Amanirenas herself took the field against them and forced them to the bargaining table. She sent her ambassadors to the island of Samos, where they negotiated return of all conquered lands and the remission of the controversial tax. Amanirenas' title, Kandake, is thought to be the origin of the common woman's name Candace.

**Matilda, Countess of Tuscany
(c. 1046-1115)**

After all her brothers died or were killed in battle, Matilda succeeded her father, Bonifacio II, as ruler of a territory much larger than the modern Italian province of Tuscany. Supposedly, she was an athletic girl, who studied weapons and strategy with a soldier named Arduino della Paluda, learning to handle lance, pike, and battle-axe. She was also a linguist, and literate in an age when many nobles were not. This was a period of virtually unbroken conflicts between the Holy Roman Empire and the Pope. In these, she sided undeviatingly with the Papacy, even leading her own armies into battle to protect the various popes (most notably Gregory the Great) from division and deposition. Her steadfastness and her tactical skill left a lasting impression on the chroniclers.

These and many more examples make it clear that woman

can be anything that men can be in terms of heroic actions of courage in warfare. Jael was one of the women God honored by giving her assassination account in His Word. It could have been left out and who would be the worse? But he had it recorded so that we might see that women can be his chosen agents for terrible and well as wonderful tasks. They can even be godly assassins.

12. SAMSON THE SUPER FOOL Based on Judges 16

Charles Steinmetz was a puny little man less than five feet tall and a hunchback. He was not very impressive to look at, but he was a giant in intellect. When he came to the United States from Germany in 1889 he was considered a genius in the field of electricity. General Electric wanted him to come and work for them, but he refused to leave the company who had sponsored him as a poor immigrant. G. E. wanted him so bad that they bought the entire company to get him. They had a problem they had to solve. The problem was lightning. When it struck it melted power lines and damaged transformers and generators. They needed someone to study lightning, and to discover the secret to controlling it. Steinmetz was their man. He studied lightning and learned how to reproduce it. Then he developed the lightning rod that would send its power into the ground.

Lightning is a tremendous power, but even a little man like Steinmetz could learn how to control it by learning some of

the secrets of its power. Learning the secrets is the name of the game. That is why the world is full of spies. If you can learn the secrets of other nations, you have some control over their power. Much of the labor of life is to learn secrets. Nature has many secrets that keep science busy. Government has top secrets; business has trade secrets; alcoholics and gangs have their social secrets, and families have their dark secrets. People are fascinated by secrets, and that is why the paper and magazines sell like crazy. It is because they reveal the secrets of celebrities and politicians.

The story of Samson and Delilah have always been fascinating to many, and that is why it is a popular theme for Hollywood to develop. You can't ask for a more appealing theme, for it has love, sex, violence, and all of it revolving around the exciting story of probing for a secret. Delilah would never be known in history, but would have been just another obscure woman used by men had she had succeeded in discovering the secret that made Samson the most powerful man in the world. Here is the weaker sex winning a major battle in the war of the sexes because Samson, so strong in body, was weak in mind.

Clarence Macartney portrays Samson as the great joker of the Bible. His best joke brought the house down, and made a deep impression on everybody. Horse play was his specialty. He cared off the gates of Gaza and put them on the top of the hill. He is the equivalent of the present day superman and Halloween pranks. It use to be a standard prank to take people's gates and put them on top of a barn. Samson was a

showoff with his power. God endowed him with such superhuman strength. Samson is probably the best reason you need as to why God does not do this very often. Samson never got around to taking life seriously until it was almost too late. Life was all fun and games for him. He got his way with the Philistines and with women, and basically just lived a life of a spoiled giant.

It is hard to feel sympathy for Samson in his tragic fall, for the temptation was so weak that led to his fall. We could see how Joseph might yield to the temptation of Potiphar's wife. The need was there and the opportunity was ripe. She was very available and persuasive. All the ingredients were there for a fall, but he did not fall, and so he became one the of the greatest examples of the power of a loyal life. Samson, on the other hand, had little or no pressure. He had no sexual need unsatisfied, for he freely used prostitutes, and was sleeping with Delilah on a regular basis. She was not offering him anything he did not already have. He had nothing to gain by telling her his secret except to stop her nagging.

His behavior seems inexcusable, and if it was not for the gouging out his eyes and making him blind, it would be hard to feel sorry for him. His folly off sets so much of the good of his life that it is really hard to admire Samson, and think of him as an example to follow. He was a total abstainer from alcoholic beverage, but it seems superficial to exalt him for that. When we see he did not abstain from immoral sex, and from bloody and unnecessary violence. His gambling over a riddle led him to commit cold blooded murder to pay off his

gambling debts.

He obeyed the Nazarite vow and never cut his hair, but even this is hard to get excited about when we see him telling his secret to a woman who a blind man could see was out to do him no good. Samson was already blind before he lost his eyes, for he had become so worldly that he lost all sensitivity to the leading of God's Spirit. Samson was one of those men who could have any woman he wants, and anything he wants. He has life under his control, but you get the feeling he is an excellent example of why all the women in his life betray him. He is primarily a lover of himself, and not of the women. His love for them is basically his sex drive operating. That is not bad, but when that is all there is, it is not good. Women know when they are just being used. The first woman he loved and wanted for a wife betrayed him. She found out his secret about the riddle, and told it to the Philistines.

You would think Samson would remember how he had gotten burned, but when he got involved with Delilah it was something of a rerun. She was begging him for his secret just as his bride had once begged. Does he show any suspicion? Not at all. He is so gullible. He is so egotistical that he cannot conceive that any woman would want to betray him. He feels any woman he loves would rather die than lose his love. Samson is a slow learner, and the result is he has to learn the hard way. Experience was not his best teacher, for it cost him his eyes and his life. Delilah is betraying him for money. He is the strongest man alive and could give her plenty of money, and all the security she could ever want, and yet she is

betraying him for money. Obviously she saw through Samson. If he really loved her she may have told the Philistines to get lost, but it was clear to her that he was just using her, and so she would in turn use him.

This is not much of a love story if you have a high view of love. Love for sex, and money, and love for violence dominate the whole account. The tenderness, commitment, and loyalty of true love is conspicuous by its absence. Samson thinks Delilah is madly interested in him and every detail of his manly life. In reality, all she can think of is the rich garments and jewels, and the villa by the seashore that will be hers if she can get this sucker to open up. She is being selfish and cruel, and is using Samson, but she is no fool. She knows what she is doing, and she knows she is being used as a decoy and stool pigeon, but she is glad for the work. She reveals the power of the female over the male. Samson could carry away the gate of the city, but he could not prevent her from breaking down the gate of his defenses. Samson was the strongest man in the world, but he was defeated by the so-called weaker sex. Man has the physical strength, but woman has the physical beauty, and so there is a balance of power built into the male female relationship. Over all women probably get their way as often as men because of their power to move men by their beauty.

Sex is a great friend, but what a vicious enemy. It has brought more mighty men to defeat than any other single enemy. David, the bravest warrior, fell because of his lust. Solomon, the brainiest of all leaders, fell because of his love

for many women. Samson, the brawniest of men, fell because of his lust that blinded to an obvious trap. Bravery, brains, and brawn, will not protect a man from the beauty of the female. The only escape from the trap of being lured by lust is a love and loyalty to one woman. The best way to avoid being a super fool is to love your wife as Christ loved the church. The super fool status of Samson is gained, not because he chose to horse around with his great gift, but because while he was horsing around he was experiencing unconscious deterioration.

This is a theme that many preachers have stressed about Samson. He was not even aware that he was going down hill, and was decaying inside before he lost his eternal power. Sibley wrote, "Premeditated evil has slain her thousands, unconscious deterioration has slain her tens of thousands." When an enemy comes charging at you doses of adrenaline begin shooting into your blood stream, and you will react to the danger. But when the enemy creeps up silently and unnoticed, you have no such aid. This is the way worldliness creeps up on the child of God. It comes so slow that we are unconscious that we are changing. We do not realize that we have left behind the serious commitment of another day. We become shallow in our spiritual life, and service for God gets pushed to the back burner, and we get caught up in the things of this life. Before you realize it you can be like Samson, and not even realize that the power of God has left you.

The fact is, nobody can spend all their time with the Philistines and not become like them. Samson was forever

finding his kicks with the Philistine women, and developing a sensual life style just like them. A Christian today who spends a lot of time with worldly people, but not like Jesus did to love them and show them a better way, but in order to enjoy their life style, will soon be one of them for all practical purposes. Samson is a shocking example of a man of God, but you would not have to look far in our culture to find many Christians who walk in his footsteps. The only difference is that the foolish Christian today is no where nearly as strong, but that does not keep them from being equally foolish.

The more one is like Samson the greater will be the danger. Samson means sunshine, or some say, "Sunny." He was such a cheerful, jolly, and fun loving guy that almost everybody liked him. He had his flaws, to be sure, but he was one of those guys so enjoyable to have around that his flaws were overlooked. This can be a curse, for it permits you to get by on your personality, and you do not stop to examine whether or not it is good to be liked by everybody all the time. You just fit in and take it as it comes. You get molded by your environment and circumstances. Strong as he was, Samson was not in charge of his life, but was at the mercy of the life he had chosen to get involved in. It is a paradox that the strongest man in the Bible is also a key example of weakness.

This happens frequently in history. Oscar Wilde is one of the great tragedies of the 19th century. He was brilliant and won highest academic honors. He was a marvelous writer and won highest awards in literature. He had charm, and he was kind, but he could not escape temptation to lust. He

wrote in his book DeProfundis, "The gods have given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease....Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depth in search of new sensation....I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I cease to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and I did not know it. I aloud pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace."

Samson's story is not an example to follow. It is an example of how easy it is to abuse and lose the gifts of God. Much of the tragedy of history is due to this. Samson could have been all we dream of being if we had his gifts. But there are many who have far fewer gifts and opportunities than us, and they dream of what they might do if they were us. Yet we may be just like Samson. We may be doing just as we please and letting our gifts be mere toys rather than tools by which we do the will of God. Let us not be April fools, or anytime fools, and especially not super fools by using our life and gifts only for self-pleasure. Let us be wise and use every gift and every opportunity to do that which pleases God.

13. RUTH THE RISK TAKER Based on Ruth 3:1-13

Fort Lee, which is now Charleston, West Virginia was under attack in 1791. Colonel George Clendenin assembled his men to ask for a volunteer to ride to Lewisberg over 100 miles away to get powder. They were almost out, and their survival depended upon a renewed supply. No one volunteered, for it was a suicide mission. Then a high pitched voice cried out, "I will go!" It was the voice of Anne Bailey. She was no ordinary lady. The Indians called her mad Anne because she took so many risks. She fought the British and the Indians, and would roam the countryside alone to learn the ways of the Indians. She got so good at being a scout that she was often able to outwit the Indians. This is she did it again. She got through and brought back the powder, and Fort Lee was saved.

If you go to Charleston, you will find a museum and a main thoroughfare named after this brave woman who took risks that no man was willing to take. Women have been risk takers all through history, and there are volumes filled with their exploits. Quite often their risks are related to their romance. Isabella of Castille defied her half brother King Henry IV of Spain. He wanted to marry her off to an old reprobate for his advantage. She threatened to kill herself before she would do it. She was only 18, but she out witted the king. She smuggled 17 year old Ferdinand into Castille disguised as a mule driver. They were married Dec. 19, 1469. Henry did all he could to make them miserable. He cut off all funds so they had to live in poverty. But their romance so captured the minds of the people that when Henry died the nobles united in declaring Isabella the Queen.

She went from poverty to riding a white steed to receive her crown. The risk she took for romance changed the course of history.

Pocahontas took the risk of being the first Indian to marry a white man. Her husband John Rolfe took her back to England. Their wedding brought peace to the settlers and Indians in America, and she became the belle of London, as people were fascinated with her uniqueness and charm. She contracted pneumonia, and she died, but her risk for romance gave her a place in history. Women have been daring, brave, and courageous in all the battles and conflicts of history. It was a woman by the name of Emily Bronte who wrote the famous lines-

**No coward soul is mine;
No trembler in the world's storm troubled sphere.
I see heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.**

Females who have had an impact on history usually have to take some sort of risk, and such is the case with Ruth. She also took a risk for romance. If you look at the radical differences between Ruth and Boaz, you will be better able to see the risks involved.

- 1. Boaz is a Jew, and Ruth is a Gentile. This is a radical form of intermarriage.**
- 2. Boaz is an Israelite, and Ruth is a Moabitess. These two nations were bitter enemies.**
- 3. Boaz is middle aged, and Ruth is quite young.**

4. Boaz is rich, and Ruth is poor.

5. Boaz has deep roots, and Ruth is a stranger and an outsider.

The potential for problems is great. Any marriage counselor today would look at these elements and rate this relationship as high risk. What we need to see, however, is that the encourager of this risky romance is a risk taker. Naomi risked leaving Bethlehem to go to Moab with her husband, and it was a costly gamble. She took the chance of letting her two sons marry Moabite girls. That too was a high risk, but it did pay off as Ruth became a committed believer in the God of Israel. She took the risk of going back to her hometown in emptiness and defeat. She faced the risk of ridicule and rejection. Naomi is one of the most courageous women of the Bible. Her courage and risk taking is what motivated Ruth to be a risk taker. The lives of these two women teach us some valuable truths about risk. First let's look at-

I. THE REALITY OF RISK.

It is a part of every life, and there is no escape from risk. If you think you can just do nothing, and, thereby, escape it, that can be the greatest risk of all. This epitaph illustrates the point-

**Here lies the body of Lester Lee
Underground.**

He couldn't decide which side of the tree

To ski around.

Any decision can be risky, but no decision can be the highest risk of all.

Naomi could see the risks of indecision. The harvest was over, and Ruth would no longer be going to the field daily to glean. She would no longer be taking her break with Boaz. Boaz could get so involved in his work that the romance between him and Ruth could fade. There was always the risk of someone else coming into the picture, and there was the risk of another relative deciding he would take over, and Ruth then would miss the chance to be with the one she really cared about.

There is always the risk of procrastination, which is not only the thief of time, but of all potential values from the trivial to the treasured. Richard Armour has put into poetry what we have all experienced in some way.

**One day a button's slightly loose,
The next its somewhat more so.
It loosens just a little bit
Each time I move my torso.**

**It hangs now by a single thread;
Its perilous, let's face it.
This button is a special kind;
I doubt I could replace it.**

**I ought to pull it off, I guess.
My wife should sew it on.
I wear it slightly longer, though-
That is, until its gone.**

Waiting until it is too late is not wise, and so we are often forced to take risks to make things happen, and that is where Naomi is coming from. This was the day of the Judges, and life was a risk because you never knew when someone could come and invade the land and enslave you. Even the everyday life of ordinary people was surrounded by risks. The reality of risk is especially evident in relationships. Love is always a high risk, for you invest a lot of yourself in a relationship of love, and that investment can pay off with great dividends, but it can also cost you a broken heart. It is just part of the reality of risk in life.

Naomi and Ruth both risked loving and getting married, and both lost their mates, and had to go through the agony of grief. Naomi had children, and saw both of her boys die fairly young. It is risky to become parents, for it is costly, and children, like everything else you love, can be lost. Every time you choose to love, or to develop any relationship, you are taking a risk. Chuck Swindoll said he has a woman in his church who was married for 48 years. She was planning their golden wedding anniversary already. She came home one day and found a note telling her that her husband had gone off with another woman. This may be rare at that age, but it is the risk of the real world we live in.

There is much we can do to minimize the risks of shattered relationships, but the fact remains that you always stick your neck out to some degree when you open your heart to anyone. That is the vulnerability of love. Mental health and stability can only be achieved by recognizing the risks of reality, and being able to pay the cost. In *Journey Out Of Nowhere*, Nancy Covert Smith describes how she, as a Christian and good church member, ended up in a mental hospital. While there she came to realize that the doors are locked, not primarily to keep the patients in, but to keep the world out. She says that 50 to 60 percent of the healing process, which takes place, was due to the fact that the world was locked out. The mentally ill need protection from the reality of a risky world. They need to feel safe and free from risks.

Only when they are ready to face up to the reality of risk again are they ready for the real world. Naomi and Ruth are amazing examples of strong healthy women, for with all of their sorrow, grief, and loss, they have not crawled into a cave to hibernate, and let the world pass them by. They are in there planning how to go out onto another limb, and risk getting hurt again. Healthy people recognize that the only way you can be happy in the kind of world we live in is to keep on risking, and sticking your neck out for the sake of love. The most realistic thing we can do in life is to face the fact that risk is a part of reality, and so we must go on loving and developing relationships. Ruth is no glutton for punishment, but she does relish the thought of being loved again, and so she is willing to face the reality of risk. Next let's look at-

II. THE RELATIVITY OF RISK.

Not even all reasonable risks are equal. Ruth took a risk going out to be a gleaner in the fields. She could have been rebuked, and run off as a stranger, or told to go elsewhere, and this would be demeaning. But the risk she took in boldly coming to Boaz requesting the role of the wife in his life was a radical risk. She could have been rejected, and had her heart broken. Boaz liked her, and he respected her, but he had not approached her with an offer of marriage. Her assertive behavior could have the effect of turning him off, and the whole thing could backfire, and leave her crushed.

Ruth had a high capacity for risk. She risked her whole future to stick with Naomi. She risked her all to go into the unknown rather than take the low risk of going back to Moab. Now we see her ready to put all of her eggs in one basket again, and go out on a limb to win the man she loved. I have seen Christian women lose the man they love because they were not willing to take the risk of being bold like Ruth, and letting him know how she felt.

What we need to see is that risk is relative to the value that is to be gained. The higher the value the greater the risk we should be willing to take to gain that value. Love and marriage, and family were the highest values there were to Naomi and Ruth. This means the risk was one that was reasonable to them. A risk is an exposure to loss or injury. Nobody wants to suffer loss or injury, but if there is a reasonable chance the risk will lead to gain, then it can be

wise to take that risk.

This means that the reasonableness of risk is relative to the values of the individual taking the risk. Like the man who was arrested for speeding. He was asked by the judge if he had an excuse. "Yes your honor," he said. "My wife's church was having a rummage sale, and I was hurrying home to save my other pair of pants." That was a reasonable risk for him, and if we only had one other pair of pants, we might consider it reasonable for us as well. Ruth considered her risk very reasonable for her. She had faith in Naomi's mature wisdom, and her insight into human nature, and her grasp of the situation.

This was not a haphazard hair-brained scheme of a couple of emotional women. Emotions were, no doubt, at a high pitch, but the whole thing was well thought out. The close she was to wear for this encounter, the perfume, the timing of it, every detail was rehearsed to minimize the risk of blowing it, and to maximize the chance for success. When we look at this account with our Western eyes we see the risk as being somewhat risqué, and hazardous from the point of view of being inappropriate. To slip under the covers of a man asleep in the middle of the night all alone is not the kind of risk any mother, or mother-in-law, would encourage a girl to do in our culture.

Preachers and Bible commentators spend a lot of time trying to justify this whole female scheme. All we need to recognize is that you cannot justify what is a custom in one

culture by trying to make it acceptable in another culture where it is not the practice. There is no point in trying to make this an acceptable way for a young woman to approach a man in our day. In the first place, it is not a custom in our culture for farmers to sleep out by their harvest, nor is it a part of our culture that a relative has any obligation to marry a widow to produce seed in order to keep the name of his deceased relative alive.

There is no comparing of apples with oranges, and so all we need to do is recognize that what was happening was perfectly consistent with the godly people involved. Naomi would do nothing that would risk Ruth's reputation, or bring disgrace on the family name. Boaz was shocked to be awakened in the night, and to find a woman at his feet. This was not a routine occurrence, but he was pleased with the gesture, and the whole method of their approach.

It was risky, for there was affection between them, and this approach could have led to premature intimacy. That, of course, is the risk in developing any relationship. Naomi had confidence, however, that Boaz would treat Ruth with respect, because he did love her. His very love for her was the reason he would not lose the chance to be a gentleman, and be worthy of her love. He was deeply impressed by the need to get the legal questions settled so as to be free to have Ruth as his own. He would not violate the laws of the land. He had to respect the right of his near relative to redeem Ruth if that was his will. Ruth did not have the freedom to be his until he worked out an arrangement with the nearest relative.

Knowing Boaz as a gentleman, and a man in love, and a man who would not break the law and injure his relatives, make this far less risky than it appears to us. Naomi knew what she was doing, and Ruth took the risk of faith in her guidance. It was a reasonable risk. Ruth was not going after a raise or better working conditions. She was going for a partnership in the whole estate by marriage.

When she said to Boaz as he woke up, "Spread the corner of your garment over me," she was using familiar language of that day. It was, in fact, the same that God used to take Israel as his wife. In Ezek. 16:8 we read God saying, "I spread the corner of my garment over you.....and you become mine." At a Bedouin wedding, even today, the groom will say, "From now on nobody but me will cover you." To cover one with your garment is to possess that person intimately. It is the equivalent of a marriage proposal to ask one to cover you with their garment. Ruth was asking Boaz, "Will you marry me?" This was bold action based on confidence that he loved her.

It was a relatively safe risk, for she had plenty of reason to believe that Boaz loved her, and would be happy to have her for a wife. There were the complications with the nearer relative, however, and because he had the first chance to claim her, there was some risk involved. Ruth is putting all her cards on the table so Boaz can see and know where she is coming from. This gives him the motivation to fight for her with the assurance it is what she wants. The greater risk would have been to let him operate in the dark not knowing

her true feelings. You are almost always on the right path when you risk letting people know that you like them or love them. Next let's look at-

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RISK.

Since risk is inevitable, and the greatest risk may be in trying to avoid all risk, we have a responsibility to be risk takers. That is, we are obligated to have values and goals worth taking risks for, just as did Ruth and Naomi. Had they not been risk takers their story would not exist, and God's plan would not have been what it was. God's plan, and their place in that plan depended on their being risk takers.

They were risk takers for what was right, wise, and reasonable, and they were richly rewarded for their risks. Their very success, however, can lead us to a very wrong conclusion about risks. We can jump to the false conclusion that risks that are right will always pay off. If we mean by this, we will always have a happy ending like Ruth if we take risks, we can be very disappointed. Risks are just that, they are risky. If risks never led to loss, they would not be risks. Many times we can risk doing what is right and lose by it. In the play Gloria II by the Refreshment Committee we see her take a risk and refuse to compromise her loyalty to Christ, and it all turned out to her advantage, and she had a happy ending.

The fact is, however, that there is a good chance that your loyalty may cost you a heavy price. It is a risk many have

taken around the world that has led to persecution. The more you apply the truth of God's Word to everyday life, the more you risk the offence of the world. Jesus did not avoid rejection and hostility by His uncompromising stand against the legalism of the Pharisees. It cost Him his life. Many have risked their life to obey Jesus.

We are responsible to take risks for God's Will in life, and not just when it is going to pay off. We are not called to a risk free life, but to a risk full life. We are called to love, and love is loaded with risk. If it doesn't work, you are facing the risk of rejection, and this can hurt. If it does work, you face the risk of disappointment and loss of that love, and that hurts too. There is no escape of being hurt in this life. If you don't care, you suffer the hurt of not being loved. If you do love, you suffer the hurt of loving, and the hurt of loss of love. You will hurt one way or the other, but the Christian is called to take up the cross, and this means to take on the responsibility of risking the hurts of love.

Ruth and Naomi aided each other in being responsible for love. They took the risks necessary to see each other have fulfilled lives. The story has a happy ending because they took this responsibility of risks on themselves. In every story with a happy ending somebody has to take risks. God honors the risk taker. Look at Peter. He was the only disciple that denied Christ outright. He was the disciple who sank into the water, and needed to be rescued by Jesus. He was the only disciple who had to be rebuked by Jesus, and told to put his sword. Peter made more mistakes, and suffered more rebukes

than any other disciple. Why in the world would Jesus make him the leader?

The answer is simple. Peter was the only one who would risk his neck to follow Jesus into the place of His captivity, and then have to face the risk of denial. Peter was the only one who would take the risk of leaping out of the boat to come to Jesus on the water. Peter was the only one who would take the risk of drawing his sword to fight for the protection of Jesus. Peter was a risk taker, and though it is true that they reveal the reality of Murphy's law, his mistakes, because he was willing to take risks, make him the kind of person Jesus needed, and so it was with Ruth. She pushed open the door into the life of Boaz, and by her assertive risk taking pushed herself into the blood line of the Messiah. Ruth is only famous, and was only used of God, because she was a risk taker.

14. QUEEN OF SHEBA Based on I Kings 10:1-13

Emma Hart Willard founded the first permanent institution of higher learning for women in America. None of the usual courses for women were even offered. There were no cooking or needle work classes. Instead, she offered zoology, geometry, trigonometry, and other subjects thought to be beyond the grasp of the female mind. She was convinced that the female mind, if given a chance, could be equal to the male

mind.

She was number 16 of a family of 17 children. She was born on a sheep farm in Conn. in 1787. Girls were not allowed to get the same education as boys, but she studied her brother's books at home and became self educated. She became a teacher, and opened her own school. She gained quite a reputation. After her marriage to Dr. John Willard she opened a female seminary in her home. She went to the New York legislature, and she became the first woman to lobby in America. She pleaded for a state supported female academy. President James Monroe and former presidents Adams and Jefferson endorsed her proposal. It was approved as the first state charter for women's education. She went on to become the first woman to be admitted to the association for the advancement of science. In the last 20 years of her life she helped launch nearly 1000 schools for women. Women have reached enormous heights in the world of the intellect.

We want to focus our attention on a woman of the Bible who is probably the most brilliant of them all. We do not know if the Queen of Sheba was beautiful or plain, but the record is clear, she was a brain. No other woman is so involved with the issues of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, as is this Queen. The only other woman in the Bible who is portrayed as having such an eager mind to learn would be Mary of Bethany who sat at the feet of Jesus soaking in wisdom even greater than of Solomon. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the day of Jesus, you can count on it, she would have been there at His feet as well. Jesus said as

much when he selected this Queen as a powerful example of a wise light seeker. Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matt. 12:42, "The Queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." When Jesus is that impressed with a woman, she deserves our careful attention, for such a life as hers has an impact on time and eternity. Let's look first at-

I. HER POSITION.

She was a Queen, and not one who is merely a figurehead, but one who was actually the ruler of a people. In this sense, a Queen is simply a female king, and history has been full of women who have had the gifts to rule nations with wisdom and power. The Queen of Sheba is one of the most honored women of the Bible, for nothing negative is revealed about her. All is positive, and even Jesus holds her up as a great example.

You will find no basis in the Bible for denying women the right to occupy any place of leadership they are capable of handling. Someday there will, no doubt, be great debate as to whether or not a woman should be President of the United States. The record of the Bible and history would be on the side of electing a woman if, in God's providence, a uniquely qualified woman would seek the position. There is nothing I am aware of in Scripture that would prohibit a woman from any position of power.

Israel was ruled by Deborah very well in ancient times, and by Golda Mier in modern times. Many Christian nations have had superb female rulers who have demonstrated that women can be superior in the wielding of great power. From the lowliest to the loftiest there is no station in life that is not sometimes held by a woman. This is a fact recognized by men, even in ancient times. Nine hundred years before Christ, Sabeian women were given high positions. The International Bible Encyclopedia states, "In almost all respects women appeared to have been considered the equal of men and to have discharged the same civil, religious and even military functions."

Some feel it is possible that the Queen of Sheba was motivated by this issue of equality to go and see Solomon for herself. She was a very wise and wealthy monarch herself, and she wondered if any king could be superior to her. We cannot lay this kind of motive on her, but there is no doubt that she brought with her very elaborate and extravagant gifts as an exhibition of her own power and glory. Solomon was greatly impressed with her, for he gave her a truly royal tour of his kingdom, and he shared with her all of his wisdom. There is not a hint of a prejudice bone in Solomon as if he was in any way offended by a female ruler. She was graciously accepted, and hosted on a level of equality.

A woman in a powerful position can be a blessing to all. As God raised up Deborah to ruler Israel, so every once in a while he raises up a woman so wise and effective as a ruler that all men submit to her superior gifts. Believe it or not, it

even happened to the Vikings. Norwegian law forbid the wife of the king to be called queen in 1363. But then came Margaret who in her sons name took over the throne of Denmark. She was a genius of a ruler, and so wise in her use of power of wealth that all of Scandinavia profited by her reign. Norway asked her to take over control of their foreign affairs. She managed to get her son on the throne of Sweden, and when she did she had become so indispensable that the Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians, in 1388 made her the ruler of their kingdoms. One nobleman of Sweden challenged this act, and went to war, but Margaret conquered him, and became the Queen of all three lands. For 434 years the union she established bore witness to the power and wisdom of an able Queen.

There are many such records of history where gifted women have done everything that gifted men have done. The lesson of the Bible and history is clear. When God endows a woman with gifts, she should be free to use those gifts for the benefit of man. Back in 1918 the king of Tonga, an Island in the South Pacific, died, and he had no sons. His 17 year old daughter was made Queen. She had become a Christian through the Free Methodist missionaries who had gone to the island. The result was a Christian Queen who established a kingdom where Christian morality became the law of the land. By her order alcohol was prohibited from the island. She won the love of the people for her wisdom. This is another example of how God has used women rulers for the power of good when they are in positions of authority like the Queen of Sheba. Next let's consider-

II. HER PERSISTENCE.

Jesus said that she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon. Scholars tell us that Sheba was about the size of Texas in far off Arabia, which at that time may also have included part of Ethiopia. The journey was between a thousand and 15 hundred miles. That may not sound like much to us, but try it on a camel sometime, and you will know why this woman should be known as the Queen of persistence. It was a daily grind for about 2 months.

The legend is that she tested Solomon before she made the trip to see him. She sent him a diamond with a crooked hole through it asking him to thread it. No needle could penetrate it, but Solomon put a small worm in one end, and let the worm crawl through the hole pulling the thread. She also sent a goblet that she desired him to fill with water taken from neither the earth nor the sky. Solomon was up to the challenge, and he had a horse gallop around until it was exhausted and perspiring, and from this dripping horse he filled the cup. When the Queen heard of how he met her challenge, she just had to see the man for herself.

It was an enormous undertaking to prepare the large caravan, and no one can know the obstacles she had to overcome to reach her goal, but she did it. She never turned back even though she had everything life could offer. She had wealth, power, prestige, and position, yet she pressed on, for the truly wise are those who know there is always more. Jesus says that she will condemn the Pharisees, for she will willing

to pay the price to find that something more, but they were not. The Queen of Sheba was a genuine optimist. An optimist is one who says, "I must press on, for the best is always yet to be." That was Paul's attitude, and that is the attitude of all who, like Paul keep pressing on.

The optimist is always persistent because they know there is always a goal out ahead worth seeking. Jesus said, "seek and you shall find," confirming the wisdom of those who are persistent. The Queen of Sheba could have sat in her kingdom and waited for the truth to come to her, but she was too wise and too hungry for the truth to not be a seeker.

In 1883 a distinguished group of scientists traveled to a small coral reef in the Pacific with all kinds of photographic equipment in order to get pictures of the total eclipse. Men and women have paid a high price to get scientific knowledge, and we can be grateful for their dedication and persistence. The tragedy is that people will not maintain ;that same persistence in seeking to know the Creator of the Sun, and the Source of all light. The Queen of Sheba is honored by Christ because she was persistent in her search for spiritual light as well as the physical.

She was rich beyond the imagination of most people in history, yet she knew that life did not consist in the abundance of her possessions. She never stopped her search when she found gold, but persisted on until she found God. Centuries before the three wise men, or kings, journeyed far to see the Christ child, this wise Queen journeyed far to the

promised land to know the God who sent the Christ child, and when Jesus grew up and read of her, she became one of the women who most impressed him as a courageous adventurer for God. Persistence in the search for God is the greatest of wisdom, and she had it. Next look at -

III. HER PERSUASION

She found even more than what she was seeking. She said the half was not told her, and she could not believe the half she had heard. This passage makes it clear that she came to learn about the God of Israel, and not just about nature and wealth. In 10:1 we see that she heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord. She came asking questions about God, and v.3 tells us Solomon answered all her questions. We can only conclude that she responded to this light with faith in God, or otherwise Jesus would not have used her as a great example. What good is seeking if one does not accept what is found? She did accept, and became a child of God's kingdom. She will be one of the fascinating personalities to know in heaven. Next look at-

IV. HER POSSESSIONS.

That she was wealthy there is no doubt. Many picture her caravan winding its way across the Arabian Desert as possibly the most spectacular in history. Bible scholars estimate the value of her gifts to Solomon to be nearly 4 million dollars. The wealth of this Queen, and that of Solomon was so great that their exchange of gifts opened up a whole new world of

commerce, and the century following their visit was one of commercial expansion. We are talking General Motors, and AT&T here. This is no mere social call and friendly gift exchange. It is a meeting of two world powers that can change the course of history, and one of these powers is a woman. She is a master of diplomacy, and one of the most successful in history in international relations.

She possesses one of the most charming personalities of the Bible. Jesus could not help but admire her, and the same goes for people watchers. Artists depict her as an elegant dignified woman. In Raphael's fresco in the Vatican she is depicted in a girlish figure. In 1891 Sir Poynter portrayed her as splendidly attired, and loaded with gorgeous jewels. The Koran dwells on the legends that surround her.

She possessed a marvelous mind of her own. She had to be very intelligent, for she came loaded with questions which indicates she was a student of life, and a philosopher. She also had to have considerable wisdom to be able to evaluate the answers she received. One suspects that Solomon seldom met with a female so able to converse on all subjects like this noble lady. We do not know if she had inherent wisdom, or if she was trained in order to possess such knowledge. All we know is that when women get the same chance as men to learn their minds can function on the same level. Dr. Harold Ockenga, father of modern evangelicals said that she deserves to rank with Socrates as a searcher for truth.

Show me a man with more degrees than a thermometer,

and I can show you a woman with the same list. Show me a man who can speak many languages, and I can show you a woman who can do the same. I have only scratched the surface in reading the biographies of the women of history, but I know enough to say with confidence, the female mind is equal to that of the male. Jesus says the mind of this Queen will set a standard for the final judgment of mankind. Jesus picks out this woman and holds her up as an example of one who responded in faith to the light that God gave her. She followed that light and, therefore, she will be justified in the resurrection, and her example will condemn the leaders of Israel who had the light of Christ in their midst, and yet refused to believe. This pagan woman will be saved, and these Jewish men will be lost.

No wonder the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus. These men thank God everyday that they were not Gentiles or women. But Jesus holds up a Gentile woman as their judge, and says, she is superior to all of you. You can count on it that sexual and racial prejudice were powerful causes of the cross. Jesus exalts a woman to a level of spiritual dignity and authority that was blasphemous to the Jews. Jesus knew that too, yet He did it, making it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the liberator of women. Jesus died in part because of his exaltation of womanhood. Any woman who feels inferior does not take her feelings from the mind of Christ, but from her culture, training, or her own poor self-esteem. She will not find it in Christ, for it is not there.

Jesus says that a woman will be the example by which men

will be judged. Her example is exalted to the highest level, and so Jesus puts a woman's life and faith on the level of equality with the greatest of men. Jesus is saying that the lives of worthy people, and their response to God's light become part of the standard by which the world is to be judged. This pagan woman's persistent search for truth will put to shame those who have the truth at their fingertips, but who will not lift a finger to grasp it. She wanted life's best, and never ceased to search until she found the living God of Israel. She illustrates the very essence of wisdom that says, the search is never over until we discover the best that God has given to man, and that best for us in the New Testament age is Jesus. Those who are truly wise will follow this Queen until they come to know the King of Kings.

15. ELIJAH THE PROPHET OF FIRE Based on I Kings 18:20-40

Elijah was the Luther of the Old Testament. He was God's man of the hour to begin a reformation and lead the children of Israel back to God. For about 50 years devotion to God had been decreasing. Ahab was now king in Israel, and he was more wicked than all who had gone before him. He married Jezebel, who was the daughter of the king of Tyre, and he let her erect altars to Baal all over the hills of Israel. She was a heathen to the core, and she tried to wipe out all worship of Jehovah by persecuting the people and killing the prophets of Jehovah.

With Jezebel promoting it, and Ahab protecting it, Baal worship became popular among the people. There was a real danger that the people of God would be swallowed up in idolatry. Baal was a non-existent god, but he was having a great influence in the lives of people. Everywhere the people would go they would see altars to Baal. Jezebel put a great deal of wealth into these altars. Their beauty and the elaborate ceremony of the 850 false prophets appealed to the people. Certainly all of this worship must please God is what they thought, and almost unconsciously they began to think of Baal as their god.

It was time for God again to act in history and reveal Himself as the only true God. This He did, and as always, it was through a man of God with courage and conviction. Elijah broke into the atmosphere of human history like a comet. We have no story of his birth or background. His coming was as sudden and mysterious as was his going in the flaming chariot. Out of the blue he appears before Ahab. He said to him that there would be no reign for 3 years, and then he disappears. Now after 3 years of famine, during which Ahab searched the land for him, Elijah comes again and calls for a showdown that will settle the issue once and for all as to who is God. Will it be Jehovah or Baal? Ahab accepts the challenge, and so all the people and the false prophets gather on Mt. Carmel. We want to examine this great incident in the light of three characteristics of Elijah that qualified him for this great battle.

I. HE WAS A MAN OF CONVICTION. v. 21

As soon as the people are gathered Elijah comes and does two things. He charges them with compromise, and then he calls them to commitment. He says, "How long will you halt between two opinions? How long are you going to go limping back and forth between Jehovah and Baal? How long are you going to try and lean both ways?" This lack of conviction that leads to compromise is one of man's greatest curses. To halt between two opinions is to have no opinion. It is to decide for nothing. It is a position of folly when it comes to choosing one's loyalty to God. D. L. Moody said, "I firmly believe that more men are lost by indecision than by anything else." G. Campbell Morgan said, "I have a great deal more hope of winning that man who serves the devil well than the man who stays half-way between God and the devil, and does not know which to serve."

You can be a Democrat one year and a Republican the next. You can golf one year and bowl the next. You can work in an office one year and a factory the next. In politics, sports, and business, and many other facets of life, you can change your tastes, opinions and convictions, but when it comes to faith it is either Jehovah or Baal. It is either the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Baal of money, power, pleasure, or some other idol. It cannot be both, for you cannot serve God and mammon. To be undecided is the worst decision of all. Dante in his Divine Comedy has a place outside of hell, which he calls the Inferno of Contempt. It is for those "without blame and without praise." To be neither good or bad, nor hot or cold is the most dangerous thing in the world.

Elijah was no Mr. Facing Both Ways, but he was a man of deep convictions. His name fits him perfectly for it means "Jehovah is my God." He is a man of conviction and he calls the people to stop being undecided and make a commitment. If the Lord is God then follow him, and if Baal is God then follow him, but make a choice and stop trying to play both sides. It will not work in religion any more than it will work in sports. You have to choose sides. You have to make a choice and follow it. That is the message of the whole Bible. Decide who is God and then commit your life to Him.

There are always furniture stores that are going out of business and their signs scream at you that this is the last chance to get their bargains. If you wait until tomorrow it will be too late, and so act today and buy. They know that the hardest thing to do is to get people to make a decision. Their advertising is designed to get people off the fence and decide. The Bible uses this same psychology and says that today is the day of salvation. The time is now, for it may be too late if you wait. People have to make up their mind and make a decision and a commitment. The Prodigal decided to go home and committed himself to face his father rather than stay with the pigs. Elijah made his choice and he calls all of God's people to do the same. Choose God and make a commitment to Him. Next we see-

II. HE WAS A MAN OF COURAGE. v. 22-29

Elijah explained to the people what he had in mind. The 450 prophets of Baal were to take a bullocks, cut it up, place it

on the altar with no fire under it. He was to do the same with another bullocks, and then call on the name of Baal, and he would pray to Jehovah. The one who answered by fire would be the true God. The people thought this would be a fair test, and so Elijah turns to the prophets of Baal, and tells them to choose first, for they were many. It was as if he was saying, "You are the majority, and who am I all alone to go first?"

Elijah, of course, cared nothing about numbers. It made no difference to him, for God's reality and nature are not determined by the majority. Charles Churchill wrote,

**Can numbers then change nature's stated laws?
Can numbers make the worse the better cause?
Vice must be vice, virtue be virtue still,
Though thousands rail at good and practice ill.**

Elijah let the majority go first because he wanted to show just how wrong the majority can be. He gave them every possible advantage. Baal was the sun god, and so he let them start off in the brightness of the sunlight when their god would supposedly be strong and refreshed. He let them continue at noon when the sun was directly overhead with all of its scorching heat. If Baal was god, he could certainly spare a little fire at that time, but there was no answer.

The prophets began to get worried, and they began to go wild as they cut themselves, were screaming and leaping on the altar. People who serve false gods can be very sincere.

These men were as earnest as men could be. They were serious and they were risking their life to defend Baal. They would rather die than admit that their god was worthless and powerless. Men will cling to their false gods with all of their energy. They are dedicated to gods who don't even exist. There have been men of every age that have died for their false gods.

There is a tendency in our day to think that God is just called by different names, and if people are sincere all can be equally accepted. This is not biblical, for the Jehovah of the Old Testament and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament is the only God, and there is no salvation in any other name under heaven than that of Jesus Christ. God had to constantly warn the Jews that should not have any other gods but Him, but they were continually going after the idols of the heathen nations around them.

The prophets were not very polite in dealing with these false gods, and neither was Elijah. Elijah was not just having fun when he mocked the prophets of Baal, and told them to cry louder because maybe their god was sleeping or on a journey. He was very seriously trying to show the people the folly of worshipping anyone but the one true God who never slumbers nor sleeps, but who is ever in control of His universe. God laughs at the folly of the wicked 3 times in the Psalms, and Isaiah mocks the folly of the heathen over and over again. The literature of Judaism is filled with such mockery. Jeremiah says that the gods of heathen are like scarecrows in a cucumber garden. They cannot speak or

march or do anything either good or evil. The prophets thought it was better to be impolite and mock the idolatry of the pagans then to let people take them seriously.

The point of all this is that it is not sincerity and dedication in worship that counts, but the reality of the one whom you worship. Elijah let the false prophets go on praying until evening to show to the people that all the ceremony, dancing and shouting in the world will not make a religion true if the god of that religion is not real. The challenge of the Christian church to the rest of the world is not our claim that we have the most beautiful ceremonies or the greatest dedication, though that ought to be true, but that we alone worship the only true God. He is the God who made all creation, acts in history, and who gave His Son for our redemption. God needs men of every generation and every land with the courage of Elijah to keep this truth ever before the people. Next we see,

III. HE WAS A MAN OF CONFIDENCE. v. 31-39

After the utter failure of the prophets of Baal Elijah calls the people to himself, and he builds an altar of 12 stones to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. By it he calls attention to the fact that Jehovah was the God of history who had worked in miraculous events in the past. Then he asked them to pour 4 barrels of water on the offering and the wood. He asked them to do this 3 times and so there were 12 barrels to match the 12 stones. There was so much water that it filled the trench around the altar. All of this was to make sure that no one

could charge him with a trick of some kind. Tricks were a common practice of the heathen.

John Chrysostom speaking of later heathenism said, "I speak as an eye witness. In the altars of the idols, there are beneath the altars channels, and underneath a concealed pit. The deceivers enter these, and blow up a fire from beneath upon the altar, by which many are deceived, and believed that the fire comes from heaven. Elijah wanted to make sure that no one could doubt that what was about to happen was the direct work of God. But how could he have the confidence that God would answer? There he stood alone against all the false prophets of the land. Now it was his turn to pray down fire. He knows that if he fails he is a doomed man. They will rush upon him and crush him with the stones of his own altar if fire does not fall. How can he be so calm and confident in such a situation?"

The source of his confidence is found in verse 36 where he says, "I have done all these things at thy word." He was simply obeying the Word of God. That is the only way a man can hold his convictions when the majority goes the opposite way. That is the only way a man can have the courage to say, "Where he leads me I will follow." That is the only way a man can have the confidence to face great odds with a calm spirit. Elijah was doing what God told him, and he let God worry about the consequences. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed by the Germans wrote, "When Christ calls us to follow Him He bids us come and die." This is the secret of the courage and confidence of men of God through the ages.

They simply obey the Word of God and let the chips fall where they may.

When Martin Luther was summoned by the Emperor Charles V to come to the city of Worms, and be tried before a counsel, his friends tried to persuade him not to go for fear he would be put to death. But Luther was perfectly confident that he had the Word of God to back him up. He said, "If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs of its houses, I would still go there." You see why Elijah is called the Luther of the Old Testament. They both were leaders in great reformations against great odds, but they were both confident because they both based their actions on the Word of God. Their confidence was not in themselves but in God. They expected God to do what His Word promised.

Elijah expected fire to fall, and so it was no surprise to him when he finished his simple prayer of faith that flames fell and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and even licked up all the water in the trench. The God who made the sun did not need it for fire. He can send fire in the cool of the evening as well as at noon. It was a sight that left no doubt in the minds of the people as to who God was. There was a revival and the God of Israel was glorified. God went on working in history from Mt. Carmel to Mt. Calvary where His own Son became the sacrifice. Fifty days later on the day of Pentecost the fire of God fell again in the person of the Holy Spirit, and every since all the revivals of the people of God are due to this fire which falls from heaven on all who truly present themselves as living sacrifices unto God. May

**God help us all be people like Elijah with conviction, courage,
and confidence based on the Word of God.**