

Breaking Through to THE NEW YOU!



LESSON 1

“YOUR PURPOSE IN GOD’S CREATION”

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 2:4B-7, 15-24

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that Adam was named after the dust of the ground, from which he was formed, as illustrated in Genesis 2:7.

This thought is continued in Genesis 3:19, which reveals that we were made of dust and when we die it is to dust that we will return.

In this sense, we are no different than the *“grass of the field, which springs up, flourishes but for a moment and then withers and falls”* (Isa. 40: 6-8).

Yet there is something precariously different about humankind because when God formed Adam He breathed life into him in a way that life was not given to the rest of His creation.

In fact, the literal translation of Genesis 2:7 is that God breathed the **“BREATH OF LIFE”** into man.

Adam did not just have a physical life but he also possessed a soul and a spirit life that could commune with God, who is a Spirit (John 4:24).

As we study this lesson, we will seek to emulate our faith and become the people God originally designed us to be as His valuable creation.

IN THE BEGINNING

From the beginning, God records our superior worth from the rest of Creation when He establishes open communication with man.

It appears, from the record in Genesis 3:8, that God would regularly walk with Adam in the garden during the evening when they would fellowship and talk together.

Yet, scientists have calculated the worth of the human body as only a few dollars in currency, for we are only made of common elements from the earth.

The reality is that the body is only the outer shell, which houses our priceless inner life of soul and spirit.

Our soul gives us personality with emotions and thoughts, but it is our spirit that enables us to contact and commune with our Heavenly Father.

When Adam sinned it was his spirit that was deadened, and it is that dead spirit that has been passed on to the human race like a faulty gene.

That is why Jesus said that we needed a spiritual birth in addition to our physical birth (John 3: 3-8).

Just as the first Adam was the progenitor of the sinful human race, Jesus the second Adam, is the One who gives life to a new people of righteousness (Rom. 5: 12-21).

The hymnologist wrote, ***“Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew.”***

Indeed, we have received the treasure of the Holy Spirit into our physical bodies just as a clay jar might contain gold and precious jewels (2 Cor. 4:7).

Adam was chosen by God to be His image bearer and represent Him on earth.

Where he failed, we have been chosen as a part of the Church of Jesus Christ to be ambassadors, to work for God’s kingdom to come on earth, as it is in heaven.

Above all, we are not just dust of the ground, because we have been born again by the precious Word of God and given eternal life, such that when our physical

body dies, and returns to the dust, there is actually a release of our spirit, to spend eternity with Christ.

Question: How important is a believer's feeling of self-worth to his effectiveness as an ambassador for Christ?

THE GENESIS STORY

Genesis is the Book of Beginnings.

Genesis is a Greek word meaning **"BIRTH"** or **"ORIGIN"**.

The original Hebrew title, **"Bereshith"**, means **"in the beginning"**.

Genesis provides a dramatic account of the origins of mankind, the universe he lives in, the intrusion of sin into the world, the catastrophic effects of its curse on mankind (the Flood), and the beginnings of God's plan to bless the nations through His seed.

Most of the Books of the Bible draw on the contents of Genesis in one way or another.

The unembellished way in which Creation is revealed in the Book of Genesis has captivated the minds of biblical scholars for ages.

This Book has been a stumbling block for those who have approached it with preconceived notions and biases.

In anachronistic or out-dated fashion, many have tried to substitute it for the theory of evolution; but this reflects their basic misunderstanding of the purpose and meaning of the biblical story of creation.

Wise men realize that scientific theories and biblical credos or philosophies do not compete with each other and cannot replace each other.

Genesis is written with the presuppositions that God exists and that He has revealed Himself in word and deed to Israel's ancestors.

Because of the importance of lineal offspring, Genesis is divided by its generational genealogies.

Adam is the first of the generations of Israel.

The Book does not argue in favor of the existence of God; it simply asserts that everything exists BECAUSE of God.

The Book of Genesis is believed by most theologians to have been written by Moses.

Certainly, no one was better qualified to record with literary accuracy the traditions and the record of the Israelite nation.

Moses' communion with God on Mount Horeb, and throughout his life, would have given him direction for the task of providing a theological and historical foundation for God's covenant with His chosen people, the Israelites.

Archeological and scientific discoveries in the 20th and 21st centuries continue to confirm the truth outlined in the Book of Genesis, from the discovery of Abraham's birthplace of Ur and proof of a catastrophic flood over all antiquity, to the understanding of mankind's DNA makeup.

Question: How would you present your argument that God DOES exist?

GOD'S CARE FOR HUMANITY - Genesis 2: 4b-7

There are times when we may find it difficult to believe that God cares for humanity.

Our world is filled with negatives that pummel us; sickness, natural catastrophes, starvation in third-world countries, and political upheavals, just to name a few.

That is why the account of the creation of man in the Book of Genesis is so essential to our faith.

Through this Biblical account, we learn that God not only cares for man, but He created man to **'mirror'** Him!

The Biblical account of Creation establishes that God took great care to form man.

He created man out of the dust of the ground and blew His own breath into him.

The word "formed" describes the work of an *artist*.

God's breathing the breath of life into man transformed him from a simple creature among many creatures, into a very special part of creation.

God literally deposited His spirit into man and man became a living soul.

In the unfolding of this portion of God's creation, we see that though God is sovereign over all the universe, He seeks to specifically bless mankind by bequeathing to him a portion of His majesty.

Question: How does God show His care for humanity?

MAN'S STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S CREATION - Genesis 2:15-17

Though all of creation has a role to play – the oceans house the fish of the sea and provide moisture to renew the cycle of life; the plants provide sustenance and habitat for the fowl and the animals; the cycle of the moon and the stars in earth's rotation keep the ocean's tides at bay – there is no greater role in creation than that of man.

Man was formed and placed in the Garden of Eden with a specific purpose – ***“to dress it and to keep it”***.

One of the primary ways God has revealed His nature to us is through the world that He created for us.

From the beginning, man was placed in a perfect setting.

The entire earth is man’s resource, and meant to be carefully managed and maintained.

God has called His creation ***“very good”*** and has placed it under our rule for His glory and our benefit.

We have been instructed to tend it, cultivate it, conserve it, reshape it, mine it, and consume it, with the certainty that each of us will give a full accounting to God for what we do with and to His world.

The Garden of Eden contained every plant and herb known to us today, including ***“every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food”***.

We can easily envision the beauty of this Garden from the Verses of Scripture that describe it.

Adam was challenged to learn from the creatures that God put in his charge, and to discover the wisdom and wonder of nature.

But the perfection of “garden life” included our being sheltered from knowledge that would be harmful to us.

Among the trees that God created there was ***“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”***.

It was this tree whose fruit was forbidden to Adam.

Eating from this tree would unleash his experience with good and evil.

The potential for catastrophe was so great that God expressly forbid the consumption of the fruit of this tree.

On the other hand, Adam could eat freely from the fruit of the *“tree of life”*.

This tree apparently promoted and preserved life, and was intended to keep Adam (and Eve) in a blissful state.

Both trees were located in the middle of the garden, probably in close proximity to each other, which set the stage for Adam and Eve’s test of obedience.

If Adam overstepped his bounds and disobeyed God, he would be attempting to manipulate life – the life that God had created.

Question: Is it possible a piece of fruit to alter a man’s thought process?

MAN’S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - Genesis 2:18-24

God desired that man would be the caretaker of all Creation.

As Adam began to function as God’s representative over His dominion, He became aware of his solitude.

God decided to create a corresponding helper for Adam, a female of equal importance.

They both had the same nature, but what man lacked, woman provided, and what she lacked, he provided.

The end result was **ONE FLESH**, the complete unity of man and woman in marriage.

Adam and Eve became a spiritually unified couple, living a life of integrity without sin.

It was not yet necessary to outline family order and headship, because their obedience to the Lord had not yet been breached.

Thus God ordained marriage – the joining of man and woman together to form a complete spiritual body.

24Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

The implication in this Verse is clear – **MARRIAGE INVOLVES ONE MALE AND ONE FEMALE, WHO JOIN TO BECOME ONE FLESH.**

In creating man, and then providing man with a helper to complete him, God demonstrated His absolute and undeniable love for mankind.

Question: Many states are moving to recognize homosexual relationships as marriages. Is it possible to reconcile democratic law with theocratic rule?

CONCLUSION

Man was predestined to be a mirror reflection of his Creator.

The magnitude of our purpose was defined in Genesis when we were given the responsibility to be caretakers of all of creation.

The destiny of humankind is determined by our commitment to God’s charge to “cultivate” the ground wherein we stand.

Students of God’s Word must refocus our purpose and our plan as God’s caretakers of His kingdom.

There is hope for mankind if the Christian community will return to the basics, and acknowledge that we are made in the image of God, and for **HIS PURPOSE.**

Our partnership with God and with each other must remain our primary focus.

Our fellowship with the Creator gives us accessibility to the Father of which no other in creation can boast.

What we do with that relationship is up to us!

LESSON 2

“YOUR POWER TO START OVER”

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 6:5-8, 7:1-5, 17, 23, 8:14-16, 9:1

INTRODUCTION

There are many in opposition to Christianity who point to God’s wrath as a contradiction to His supposedly loving character.

They say, “How can you say that God is a God of love when you read the account of the flood?”

God’s wrath is not like the anger that humans often exhibit.

We often vent our rage in a vindictive and selfish way that may dispel our emotion but do little to promote true justice.

But by contrast, God’s wrath is always based on His justice and His righteous character.

When He judges people and nations, it is not because He feels hurt, but because justice needs to be applied.

We serve a God of righteousness who must come against evil and wickedness.

Unlike our anger, which often leads to more bitterness and strife, God’s anger always results in a righteous outcome.

God’s judgment will always ultimately produce peace.

God is patient, and slow to anger, because He is not willing that any should perish.

But even the patience of God has its limits.

God cannot allow sin to go unchecked forever, and when He must deal with evil, His wrath comes swiftly.

In the Story of the Great Flood, we see our God of justice, who can no longer overlook the sins of mankind.

Yet we also see our God of grace, who, because of His love for man, will not utterly destroy mankind, but instead provide an opportunity for man's fresh start.

A COMMISSION WITH PURPOSE

The story of a worldwide catastrophic flood has been preserved in considerable detail by many of the world's religions.

This religious tradition as recorded in Genesis was confirmed by archeological discoveries in the nineteenth century.

But while other accounts record the flood as a rivalry between "the gods", the biblical version sees the flood from a moral perspective.

The entire Story of Noah is replete with explicit reference to the beginning and the end of the "**evil inclination**" of the human heart.

The Story of the Flood is a composite that divides the narrative into three components:

- 1) The commission to Noah to build the Ark,
- 2) The destruction of all flesh outside the ark by water,
- 3) The sacrificial worship by Noah after the Flood (chapter 8).

The Flood narrative points out God's power and freedom over His creation, and reveals His deadly anger over sin.

But it also points to God's gracious redemption in the light of judgment.

In the Noah narrative, we see the reconciliation of two aspects of God's character.

We see His justice and His mercy working side by side to cleanse the world of sin but show mercy toward the sinner.

Question: Is man's system of justice tempered with mercy?

GRACE AND GOD'S COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH MANKIND –

Genesis 6:5-8

In the Story of Noah, we see that mankind had succeeded in degrading God's Creation.

With the advent of man's sin, every thought of their hearts was focused only on evil.

When God saw the extent of man's wickedness, it grieved Him!

In other words, it broke His heart.

Creation had become a tool of Satan rather than a means of glorifying God.

It was expedient that the entire generation of sinners must die to purge the world of evil.

But there was one man in this corrupt society who walked with God and was still in communication with Him.

The Lord found favor with Noah and spoke to him, warning him of the coming judgment.

With this warning came explicit instructions for the construction of an ark – a boat in which he, his family, and all animal life would be preserved.

Noah and his sons labored for 120 years to complete the grand design of this great ship made of gopher wood and pitch or bitumen.

Since it had never before rained upon the earth (the earth was watered by a great mist prior to the flood), Noah would have had to withstand the ridicule of the surrounding community while he obeyed God's command during those 120 years.

God's grace was made evident in His divine plan to preserve Creation through the bloodline of Noah.

Though God would have been justified in unleashing His anger against all Creation and destroying it completely, His love for mankind moved God to begin a new relationship with mankind tempered by His grace.

Question: How does the story of the flood bring comfort to those who desire to begin life anew with a 'right relationship with God'?

THE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S GRACE - Genesis 7:1-5

It was clear, with God's mandate for Noah to preserve all the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air, that the application of His grace would benefit all of creation.

Though the earth would be destroyed, it was not for reason of a flaw in Creation, but of a disobedient and consequently flawed humanity.

God included every bit of Creation in His preservation plan, that not only mankind but all of Creation might begin anew.

When Noah and his sons completed the Ark, they waited with anticipation, as the animals, two by two (unclean) and seven by seven (clean), entered the great ark constructed of pitch and gopher wood.

From this day forward, the distinction between clean and unclean animals became a major point in the Levitical order.

God Himself orchestrated the loading of the Ark, and when His preservation of Creation was accomplished by way of the ark's cargo, the Lord Himself sealed the door (7:16).

God, viewing Creation from on high, where His panoramic vision encompassed all the ages from Genesis to Revelations, applied grace to our evil and condemned world, knowing that man's redemption was already accomplished through the planned sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

That's grace!

Discussion: The definition of GRACE is 'undeserved favor'.

Discuss how the power of GRACE can influence a man to repent.

A STORM SHELTER - Genesis 7: 17, 23

The Genesis story states that every person and animal on earth, **"in whose nostrils was the breath of life"** and **"all that was in the dry land"**, died (7:22).

2 Peter 3:6 puts it even more plainly – **"Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished;..."**

Genesis clearly establishes that more than a generation of mankind perished, and a world that was significantly different from ours was also washed away.

There is great symbolism in the ark.

Here we see God's marvelous provision of a **"shelter in the time of storm"**.

The Ark represents God's desire to rescue the perishing through the application of His mercy.

In the Ark we have the assurance that we serve a God who cannot and will not forsake the righteousness of even ONE man.

Those who **“find favor”** with God find in the story of Noah the assurance that **“He will neither leave you nor forsake you”**.

Discussion: Compare the story of the flood to our baptism in Christ.

THE GOD OF A “SECOND CHANCE” - Genesis 8:14-16, 9:1

With the emergence of Noah and his family from the ark, life on earth is seen not as merely starting over, but as the beginning of a new covenant relationship established by God with the human race and the world of nature.

The **NEW COVENANT**, established here in Genesis and later solidified by Mosaic Law and tradition, obligated all men to recognize God’s prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual sins, and theft.

The perpetual sign of this new and lasting covenant was the **“bow in the clouds”** that appears after the rain.

Theologians have understood this **RAINBOW** to be representative of the archer’s bow; God’s weapon put aside or **“HUNG UP”** in the clouds as a symbol that the battle of the flood is permanently over.

When Noah landed and finally left the Ark on Mount Ararat, it was to enter a new, fresh world, a world in which the pattern and responsibilities of man’s life would change.

Noah and his family entered into a new way of life.

Before the flood, man was vegetarian, but after the flood, God gave Noah flesh to eat.

Human government was instituted as the responsibility of man to govern man, and the institution of capital punishment for murder was established, since murder was the ultimate denial of the worth and value of human life.

It was man's appetite for evil, which gave birth in the Garden of Eden that had provoked both the flood and the curse of the ground.

While the flood did not remove man's proclivity for evil from his heart, God lifted the curse because of Noah's sacrifice.

Sacrifice would be the means by which this new covenant relationship would be established, until the ultimate sacrifice would be made with the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Question: Will mankind's appetite for evil ever become quenched?

CONCLUSION

Just as Noah was given the chance to **"BEGIN AGAIN"** in a new world with a new lifestyle, we as believers in Christ's redemptive power are brought into a totally new experience in Christ.

We are called out and challenged to live the rest of our earthly life apart from evil human desires...and through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, to live a life in line with the Will of God.

God's judgment no longer strikes man down because of sin, but instead provides an escape from eternal death for those who look to Christ for redemption.

Lesson 3

YOUR SOURCE FOR TRANSFORMATION STUDENT'S COPY

BIBLICAL TEXT: EXODUS 3:1-12

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a time of great turmoil.

All over the world, nations are realizing that weapons are not sufficient to protect the borders of their country from attack.

A new enemy has arisen...one who looks like you and I, yet is willing to sacrifice his own life to take the life of another.

In this horrific climate, we are challenged to press forward in our spread of the gospel, without fear of reprisal.

Will we meet the challenge?

The world has always faced turbulence and even mayhem.

And in spite of the threat against life and limb, those called to the mission field have shown great determination and progress through each era.

The Romans persecuted the early Christians until the Emperor Constantine granted them religious freedom in A.D. 313.

During medieval times, Christians struggled against temporal rulers as they spread across all of Europe.

When the Muslims invaded the Holy Land, European nations united together to fight in the Crusades.

And in the Dark Ages, monastery monks, often the only educated people of their communities, carefully preserved Christianity. They meticulously chronicled and kept great libraries of the ancient manuscripts.

The spread of the Gospel has continued in spite of Christianity's own internal struggles as well; through the split of the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, the formation of the Eastern Orthodox religion, and in spite of the many new denominations which have sprung up in the 20th and continue to formulate new doctrine in the 21st century.

Through all of these struggles, the central theme of God's message has remained – We are God's people, His covenant race, and we are under His protection.

God promises that if we shall uphold our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world, He will deliver us out of all of our troubles.

In the Book of Exodus, we see the formation of this eternal covenant between God and the Israelites, which would later, in the New Dispensation, be extended to all those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world.

AN ACCOUNT OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

The Book of Exodus is a record of the departure of God's people from exile in Egypt, but more importantly, it presents the account of God's people as His **CHOSEN** people.

In Exodus, we read the account of God's covenant with humankind and His continued mercy toward the Israelites in spite of their disobedience.

Exodus is a record of revelation and response.

Every bit of the Book is a deliberate assertion that God comes to His people and will forever rescue and guide them.

The entire narrative, from the covenant or legal scripture references to the symbolic or liturgical references, are all together expressions of this essential and central confession of God's faithfulness to mankind.

The sequence of Exodus is a continuation of the story of the ancestors in Genesis, which strains forward to the moment when God would make His presence known to all His people.

The twelve tribes of Israel, whose numbers had swelled into the millions as God had promised Abraham, now found themselves enslaved in Egypt by a Pharaoh who feared them because of their sheer numbers.

It was the fulfillment of this prophecy to Abraham that led to the next fulfillment of God's promise to supply His chosen people with a land of their own - the Promised Land.

The circumstances that led to Moses' exodus from the protection of Pharaoh's court to the uncertainty of a life as a nomad in the family of Jethro are evidence of God's careful orchestration of His plan to liberate the Israelites.

God issues the call to Moses on Mount Horeb, also referred to as Mount Sinai to lead His people out of bondage and into the Promised Land.

Tradition has it that Mount Horeb is located in the southern range of the Sinai Peninsula known as Jebel Musa.

According to the Targum of Onkelos, Moses had left the flock of his father-in-law Jethro in search of more choice grazing for the family herds, when he encountered the Presence of God, in both a visible and auditory manifestation.

The story of Moses, from his birth to his encounter with God on the mountaintop, and his return to the Hebrew nation that bore him, displays God's careful choice of leadership to fulfill His promises.

Moses flees his family ties in a foreign land with strange gods, for the land and the God of his ancestors.

For the first time, Moses is at home among a people whose ancestors are *his* ancestors, and he finds out that he is at home in the land of the God of his fathers.

Question: How much influence do ungodly people have over us?

A FATHER COMMUNICATES WITH HIS CHILDREN - Exodus 3:1-6

The First Verse of the Third Chapter of Moses unveils the circumstances of Moses' call by God.

Forced to flee Egypt for committing murder, Moses is tending sheep at the base of Mount Horeb for his father-in-law, when his curiosity is engaged by a bush that is burning, but is not being consumed.

Moses decides to investigate this phenomenon and climbs the hillside for a closer look.

Fire was a symbol of God's presence, as the Israelites would later experience when they would witness His descent upon Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18)

When Moses drew near the bush, he heard the voice of God call his name, not once but twice.

In this confrontation, Moses is immediately aware that it was God who was calling him, and he responds, "Here I am!"

Then came God's clear instruction to take off his sandals, a symbol of his corruptible life.

These may have been the same sandals that had been defiled in Pharaoh's palace where images of false gods lined the corridors.

These may have been the same sandals Moses had worn when he killed an Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

God commanded those sandals to be removed that Moses might stand in the presence of incorruption – in the very presence of God – on Holy ground!

The ground was not holy by virtue of its nature, but because of God's presence.

The removal of Moses' sandals was a gesture or sign of worship and obeisance to the Lord.

When Moses heard the voice of the Lord, identifying Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, scripture records that Moses hid his face.

In that moment of direct communication with the God of his ancestors, Moses, out of fear, could not look upon the face of his Creator.

Question: Can shame over sin keep a person from repenting?

The Plan of Deliverance is Unfolded - Exodus 3:7-10

When the promise to Abraham to multiply his seed had been accomplished in Egypt, God heard the cries of His people over their suppression, slavery and death at the hand of a cruel Pharaoh who has enslaved them for his own selfish purposes.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians had grown to fear the Hebrew Nation for their sheer numbers, which now registered in the millions.

Nothing their cruel taskmasters had tried, in an effort to discourage their expansion as a people, worked.

Even when the midwives were ordered to kill all the male children at the moment of birth, the Hebrew nation still continued to multiply.

It is here in Exodus, that the story of deliverance and triumph become God's chief emphasis, and the great confrontation between the gods of the Egyptians and the

God of Moses serve to prove, not only to Pharaoh, but to all the Hebrew nation, that the God of Abraham is the One True and Living God.

God's plan to execute His promise to lead His people to a land flowing with milk and honey began to unfold, first with the reunion between Moses and his true ancestors.

Cast by fear from the courts of Pharaoh for defending a Hebrew against an Egyptian, Moses has now extradited himself to the desert, where he finds shelter in the camp of Jethro.

After forty years of training in the courts of Pharaoh, Moses spends another forty years of his toilsome life as a shepherd in the Sinai area, gaining valuable knowledge of the topography of the area, not knowing that God will use these forty years as a "training" session for his future wilderness journey with the Israelites.

Leading his father-in-law's flock in search of new grazing land, Moses sees a strange phenomenon on Mount Horeb that draws him to investigate further.

It is here that God calls Moses to be the liberator of His people from the hand of their oppressors.

God tells Moses that He is aware of the plight of His people, and that He plans to rescue them from Egypt.

The true concern of our God is expressed in the words "*I have come down*" (3:8), an idiom which describes God's divine intervention.

God promised, not only to deliver them, but to take them to a good and spacious land very different from the Midianite desert.

In His call to Moses, God clearly demonstrates His abiding love for His people.

The plan to multiply their seed being accomplished, God now speaks to Moses as One with authority and power to overcome what Moses views as an impossible obstacle.

Question: Is God still helping believers overcome impossible obstacles today?
Explain.

EMPOWERED BY THE CREATOR - Exodus 3:11-12

“Those whom God calls, He equips.”

This was the lesson that Moses would learn when he finally confronted Pharaoh.

Moses’ hesitancy at accepting God’s charge to go to Egypt was clearly a flesh response, for in his spirit, he would come to know that no one else was better prepared to execute God’s plan of action.

Moses was a Hebrew by birth and would be accepted by the Hebrew nation;

He had been trained in Pharaoh’s court and understood the structure of the Egyptian hierarchy and their dependence upon the Hebrew slaves;
And he had spent the last forty years of his life learning the rugged topography of the wilderness that the Hebrew Nation would call home for another span of forty years.

Who else was better equipped to lead God’s chosen people to their Promised Land?

Still, Moses looked upon the outward man when assessing his abilities.

He was only a murderer who had escaped death himself by God’s grace; an outcast from both the Hebrew and the Egyptian nations, a handicapped man who stuttered profusely.

How could he, Moses, argue on the Lord’s behalf with any man who had the power of a Pharaoh?

We hear Moses' fleshly doubts as he allows his emotions to control his spiritual response to the Lord, *"Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"*

But we must reiterate again that whom God calls, He equips.

No one likes confrontation and conflict.

But it is imperative that God's chosen people, especially His leaders, know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord will prepare us for every battle.

From Moses, to Samson, to David and all of the Old Testament patriarchs, we see that time and again that the Lord provides dutiful and disciplined leaders to outline His strategies and accomplish His work.

Whether the task is great or small by man's measuring stick, each minute detail of God's plan for mankind is carefully executed with a call to the right servant of God.

There is no task too small to warrant His command and protection.

Question: How does God empower the believer?

CONCLUSION

Psalm 46 reinforces the Exodus proof that we serve a God of refuge, strength and help.

Verses 1 through 3 proclaim that God's protection provides reassurance in a tumultuous world.

In Verse 4 through 6, we read that God's presence provides an immovable defense in a hostile world.

And in Verse 8 through 10, there is the affirmation that God's peace deserves our worship and praise throughout the world.

Our track record 'with the Lord' and His display of faithfulness to us through all of life's trials should be all the inspiration and motivation we need to serve Him in spirit and in truth for all eternity.

What God has claimed He WILL do, He HAS done, and continues to do.

"He, who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it!"

God remains in control and takes care of His own.

This is the great hope for all believers today, especially when we find ourselves in the minority among people who do not know the Lord.

Lesson 4

“YOUR JOURNEY AS ONE OF GOD’S PEOPLE”

BIBLICAL TEXT: DEUTERONOMY 29:2-15

INTRODUCTION

A contract is a legally binding agreement between two parties.

One obligates itself to another, pending the delivery of some commodity or service.

The other, in turn, agrees to certain terms of payment and length of relationship.

In language that’s pure and simple, two parties agree that, “if you do this, I’ll do that”.

While our legal system recognizes only those contracts that are written, signed by both parties and witnessed, either by a notary or legal representation, there are a multitude of situations where you and I have entered into verbal, unwritten or “handshake” contracts that, if we are men and women of our word, are just as binding.

In childhood, we had our first exposure to the very nature of a contract.

Mom and Dad would say, “If you’ll be good, we’ll tell Santa to bring you a special gift.”

Perhaps a little later in life, it went like this, “If you’ll clean your room, take out the garbage and do the dishes, I’ll give you money to go to the ballgame.”

Although these agreements were not notarized or written, they were just as binding.

IF we performed our obligation, THEN we received the reward for our efforts. The primary components of any contract or agreement are simply, **“IF YOU”** and **“THEN I”**.

As we search the Scriptures for examples of this **“IF YOU...THEN I”** arrangement between God and his people, we find that this two-way dialogue is quite a common practice.

God spoke to Abraham and said, *“If you will leave home and go into a strange land, THEN I will bless you; I will multiply your seed and you will become the father of many nations.”*

When God gave the Israelites the first written contract in the form of the Ten Commandments, He promised, *“IF YOU will keep my commandments, THEN I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey”.*

During the days of the prophet Malachi, God made yet another binding contract with His people when He said, *“IF YOU will bring all the tithes into my storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, THEN I will pour you out a blessing, that you won’t have room enough to receive it.”*

In Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, Jesus enters into a contract with God’s people and says, *“IF YOU will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, THEN I will see to it that all these other things will be added unto you.”*

He further punctuated His contract with this clause, *“IF YOU will deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me, THEN I will sign you up as one of my disciples. If you labor in my vineyard and get weak and tired and worn out, THEN I will give you rest.”*

In Deuteronomy, we see that this **IF-THEN** covenant between God and the Israelites was the foundation for our new relationship with the Father.

Nothing was left to chance or speculation as God clearly defined His expectations and His rewards for all mankind.

Question: Should Christians file bankruptcy to escape debt?

THE MAKER OF THE COVENANT

Deuteronomy is a book designed to proclaim the faith of the Israelite community.

It has been described as a manual for future kings of Israel; a historical prologue that identifies the Lord, specifies what He has done for His people, outlines the stipulations of His covenant with His people, and catalogues the blessings for those who keep the treaty and the curses for those who violate its principles.

In Chapter 29, after the Lord identifies Himself as the maker of the covenant, God's power and privileges as covenant maker are given historical foundation by recounting God's wondrous deeds on Israel's behalf.

Moses once again takes the children of Israel to the foot of Sinai, that they might experience the awesome presence of the Lord God, hear the story of His wondrous deeds, and commit themselves afresh to the principles of the covenant.

A covenant renewal is taking place, not only with those who are standing with Moses on that day, but with all future generations.

Moses reminds them that God's track record of protection, mercy and grace toward them should motivate them to be diligent in observing the covenant relationship if they want to succeed in everything (v. 9).

A contract has no value unless the terms of the agreement are upheld by both parties.

Thus the children of Israel are reminded of the ramifications of disobedience and complacency, and are charged to observe every word of the law.

In our lesson, Moses addresses all of Israel, which emphasizes the unity brought about by God's mighty deliverance of the nation from Egypt, and by her acceptance of God's covenant at Sinai.

The Israelites were uniquely God's people, the only nation on earth that had as its constitution the Word of God.

Moses words, then, held special significance for every Israelite.

As we study this covenant relationship between God and His chosen people, we will see what a flawless legal document it is!

Better than a written contract signed by two parties, it has stood the test of time, and remains valid even today, even though the only signatures are God's Spirit and man's heart!

Discussion: Discuss the covenant that the members of our church enter into with God and each other. How binding should it be?

READING THE FINE LINES OF GOD'S COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE
- Deuteronomy 29:2-9

Moses and the Israelites were on the plains of Moab, on the brink of marching into Canaan - the Promised Land.

The twelve tribes, descendants of Jacob, are gathered between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal – and the Levite priests had assembled themselves between the two mountains, with the Ark of the Covenant, to relay Moses' sermon to all the people.

It was an incredulous site – thousands upon thousands of Israelites assembled in this valley that ran between the two mountainous regions of Samaria, forming a natural amphitheater for their leader to address the people.

Moses knew this would be a sermon that the people would commit to memory, not just for their journey into the land promised to their forefathers, but for all future generations to come.

Moses was eminently qualified to speak for God.

He was more than Israel's human Lawgiver.

He was the founder of Israel's religion and mediator of the covenant at Sinai.

Through Moses, God set such a high standard for the people that all subsequent prophets lived under his shadow, never attaining the same level of leadership, until the coming of Jesus Christ.

Moses appeals to the people for a renewal of their "covenant obedience", carefully outlining the curses and blessings of the original covenant contract, so that the Law would not be incomprehensible or inaccessible to anyone.

Though it was of a heavenly origin, God had sent His message through Moses so that all could hear it and benefit from it.

No special interpreter had been needed to unveil the fine lines of this contract, and no man caught in an act of disobedience could claim a lack of understanding, for it was given to mankind in the simplest of heaven's language.

The Law had already been written down and the Israelites were familiar with its demands in the wilderness.

That's why Moses could say to God's people, "*The Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*" (30:14)

But this re-dedication of the hearts of the people to the Law of God was essential, that the people might understand and remember that the Lord is faithful to His covenant agreement.

Though their disobedience and rebellious mindset would keep them from fully understanding the implications of God’s saving works among the Israelites, this did not mean that they did not understand the miraculous elements of their past history.

They had experienced their deliverance from Egypt at the hand of Almighty God through His application of plagues;

They had marched through the Red Sea on dry ground and watched the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh’s army when the waters returned;

They had witnessed victory in battle after battle with the enemy;

They had spent 40 years in the wilderness without the need to replace clothing or worry about food; and now Moses was calling on them not only to remember, but to obey and prosper.

Question: How do our own past victories with the Lord help us to face our unknown future?

ESTABLISHING A TRADITION OF FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF WITNESSES -
Deuteronomy 29:10-13

Israel knew now that they would prosper to the extent that they obeyed the covenant contract.

In Hebrew, the words *“all of you are standing”* implies some sort of formal ceremony for renewing the covenant.

Moses puts emphasis on the present with the use of the words **TODAY** and **THIS DAY**; and reminds the Israelites that they are not entering into a new covenant, but committing themselves afresh to the Mosaic Covenant established at Mount Horeb.

The purpose of the renewal is for the Israelites to recommit themselves to the Lord that He would be able to confirm them as HIS people and Himself as their God.

In Moses' sermon to the Israelites, we see God's promise to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) unfolding.

God promised that if the people were obedient, He would give their descendants the land He had promised them.

Tradition is the passing down from generation to generation of our ideas, customs, and beliefs.

The survival of God's covenant would hinge on the established faith traditions of the Israelite people.

Question: What are you doing to establish a tradition of faith in your family? In your neighborhood?

GOD'S COVENANT WITH OUR DESCENDANTS - Deuteronomy 29:14-15

The scope of the covenant renewal was not just for the twelve tribes present in Samaria that day.

The intent of the renewal was to embrace all future generations of the twelve tribes.

The survival of the covenant relationship among the **unborn** would hinge on the obedience of the present generation.

The extension of the covenant to all future generations is proof of God's faithfulness to an obedient mankind.

When man comes into agreement with that covenant, the covenant relationship God has with each of His children carries great power for restoration and blessing.

Question: How confident are you that your example of Christianity will positively influence your next generation of family?

What changes will you make to ensure that your future generations are followers of Christ?

CONCLUSION

The Scriptures are filled with examples of God’s covenant faithfulness to those who believe and obey. **“IF”** you obey, **“THEN I** (the Lord) will maintain my contractual arrangement”.

This covenant contract is clearly outlined in God’s divinely inspired Word.

He leaves no room for speculation.

The terms of agreement that make up our contract with the Lord are clear and concise.

Yet, throughout the ages, man has been reluctant to uphold his end of his contract with God.

Man expects God to live up to His **“THEN I”** terms without our living up to the **“IF I”** terms.

We want to draw dividends without paying any premium; we desire to be on God’s payroll, but we don’t want to work.

We want the rights and privileges designed for God’s people, but we don’t want to assume any responsibilities.

Life is our discipleship training...our proving ground.

No man gets to the heart of the mystery of life or has in his hand the key which will enable him to unlock all the doors and difficulties of human experience, unless he gets to the point of understanding this – that it is all meant as training.

If we get it right down here, God will make provision for us in heaven.

If we could carry that clear conviction with us each day into the little things of life, how different the monotonous trifles of our daily life would become.

Unlike the Israelites who time and again forsook God, we would be able to apply His wisdom to every aspect of our lives with the same fidelity, and weather every storm.

There are no great principles for great duties; there are only little ones for little duties.

The same laws regulate all of our conduct.

Life is built out of the trifles and seemingly insignificant flakes of life that, piled upon each other, build a mountain up to heaven's summit.

Our character may be **MANIFESTED** in the great moments, but it is **MADE** in the small ones.

The application of the covenant relationship in our daily life is meant for discipline, and unless we use it for that purpose, however much we get out of it in our worship experience, we misuse it.

Like the Israelites, God is calling us to a renewed covenant relationship based on obedience.

Lesson 5
Your Legacy for the Next Generation
Student's Copy

Biblical Text: 2 Samuel 7:18-29

INTRODUCTION

Everyone wants to be part of something meaningful.

Our life's record is the legacy we leave behind so others will remember us.

Each of us is given a blank slate at the moment of our birth, and what we do with that opportunity will determine the course of our lives and the legacy we leave behind.

God looks with favor on those who fall into line with His will.

If our legacy is fraught with disobedience and a lack of repentance, the Lord will be far removed from us.

But if, on the other hand, we persevere in our attempt to be Christ-like and to carry the message of salvation as a good soldier of the Lord, He will be faithful to keep His covenant promise.

As we study David's prayer response following the prophet Nathan's message from the Lord, we can clearly see the qualities of character in David that made him precious in the sight of God.

It is no wonder that the Lord "found favor" with King David and promised never to withdraw His covenant blessing from him.

DAVID'S LEGACY

David was the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, and successor to Saul as king of Israel and Judah, anointed by Samuel at an early age as the next king.

The first victory in David's legacy is his victory against Goliath of the Philistine army.

This victory sparked Saul's jealousy of David, and caused David, not to retaliate, but to run for his life.

Instead, he became a member of a band of discontent Israelites.

When Saul died, David was made king of Judah, and Ishbosheth, the only son of Saul to survive the debacle at Gilboa, was proclaimed king of the northern area of Israel.

Ishbosheth was a weak character with little real following.

When the commander of his army, Abner, decided to join with David in Judah, Ishbosheth's power was broken and he was assassinated.

David then became sovereign leader of both Israel and Judah.

David's legacy records many battles, but in victory after sweeping victory, David proves himself to be guided by the hand of the Lord.

He enlarged the borders of the Israelite kingdom by conquering the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the Syrian centers of Zobah and Damascus.

In a short time, the nation of Israel, who had been almost prostrate at the death of Saul, became an empire of great power and wealth under David's reign.

The focus of this exposed Scripture in 2 Samuel 7 is David's prayer response to the Lord following revelations made through the messenger Nathan.

Nathan was a prophet who first became prominent in connection with David's desire to build a temple for the Lord.

At first Nathan had encouraged the king, who groaned over the fact that he lived in a great palace while the Lord resided in a temporary tent.

But then Nathan reported a vision to David in which the Lord revealed that He would establish a house for David in his descendants, and that David's son and successor would build a house for the Lord.

David's prayer response is a prose Psalm that consists of two parts – a burst of astonished thanksgiving and a stream of earnest petition.

David slowly grasps the divine promise of God and turns his overwhelming gratitude into a prayer.

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

David enters the temple to pray, or more accurately, to **WORSHIP** the Lord for the prophetic confirmations received through the prophet Nathan.

The Lord has just revealed to David, through his prophet, that David's house will embrace the seed of the Messiah, and that *"He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

Now, following the prophet's revelation, we experience the wonderful burst of praise, which sprang from David's heart in response to Nathan's words.

Through the House of David, the Lord had now chosen to narrow the focus on the coming Messiah, casting Him before the Israelites with even greater brilliance, and further shaping the promise of His coming.

Though David could not yet understand the fullness of God's promise or the richness of the Lord's treasure to his house, he is overwhelmed by the promise that the Lord will continue to inhabit the praise of his descendants forever.

Life and experience and the teachings of the Holy Spirit will one day enable David to count his full treasure in the Lord; at this moment of worship, David is richer than even HE knows.

Question: How can we become more aware of the impact of our own actions on future generations?

AN HEIR WITH HUMILITY

David enters into the sanctuary, behind the curtain where the Ark of the Covenant resides, and sits in the presence of the Lord where his body is naturally absorbed by the presence of God's Spirit.

David begins to pray, and in his prayer, there is a tone of almost bewildered surprise at the greatness of God's gift.

His breath seems almost taken away, and his words are palpitating with emotion.

Even so, there is a plain pattern of thanksgiving in its unfolding.

It begins abruptly, as though propelled by the sheer magnitude of God's revelation and David's response to the gift of unmerited favor.

"I do not deserve it!" is man's instinctive answer to any lavish human kindness, and how much more to God's!

Hear David's great sense of unworthiness as he proclaims, *"Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"*

David's consciousness of his own unworthiness passes to adoring contemplation of God's astounding mercy, and the perpetuity of Davidic sovereignty in the far-off future.

David recounts the blessing of the Lord as though recounting it is the way to possess it more fully.

Then in Verse 20 comes another bend in his stream of praise and thanksgiving.

The more full a man's heart, the more conscious he is of the weakness of his words: *"And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant."*

The deepest praise, like the truest love, speaks best in silence.

David becomes aware of the inadequacy of his speech to God.

Question: When we praise God, how does He know we are sincere?

ACCEPTING YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NEXT GENERATION

David's horizon widens now as he embraces all of Israel.

His blessings are THEIR blessings.

He feels his own relation to them following the culmination of the long series of past deliverances, but at the same time, David loses his own self in joy over Israel's confirmation as God's people by his kingship.

Here we learn that true thankfulness regards personal blessings *by the way they impact others*, as David shrinks from the use of those blessings for his own selfish purposes.

David draws a clear parallel in his prayer between Israel and Israel's God, when he says, *"There is none like Thee"*, and that no nation on earth is like *"Thy people, even like Israel"*.

The two shall hereafter be inseparable.

Question: What steps are you taking within your own family to remove any separation between your family and God?

RESTING ON GOD'S PROMISES

In his spiritually restful state of adoration, David's prayer now takes new direction built on promise and winged by thankfulness.

All of the Verses of this portion of David's prayer are fueled by one thought, *"Do as Thou has said, Lord!"*.

God delights in the sweet monotony and persistence of our sincere prayers, when they express a fresh throb of our desire to align ourselves with His will.

Notice that David uses many of God's divine names in these Verses – Jehovah God, Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel, and Lord Jehovah.

Strong and sincere love delights to speak the name of its Beloved.

With each fresh utterance, another wave of blessedness passes over David's spirit as he thinks of God.

David repeats over and over again, *"Thy servant"*, as though he never tires of realizing his absolute subjection to his Father.

When God bestows the office of servant upon a man, He cannot help but respond to man's plea as His servant.

Then too, the phrase *"establish this house"* and *"for ever"* echo the promise that rings through the Verses of his prayer.

They show how profoundly David had been moved, and how he is laboring to familiarize himself with the astonishing vista of God's promise that has begun to open before his believing eyes.

God's promises should always be the basis and the measure of our prayers.

Our prayer must fit into the mold of, *“Do as Thou hast said”*.

There is no presumption in taking God at His Word.

We know that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And we know that we shall not receive His promises of blessings until we do ask.

Man must learn to stretch his desires to the width of God’s promises, and then to confine his wishes within God’s bounds.

Discussion: Think of a time when you were forced to adjust your prayerful desires to fit within the confines of God’s will.

How did you feel at first?

How did you feel a year later when you reflected back on the direction God chose for you?

CONCLUSION

The Lord has promised that His covenant blessings, promised to David and solidified through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, guarantees that no believer will ever be separated from Him.

“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.” (2 Samuel 7:16)

And like David, God’s faithfulness to us as His people will outlast our generations if our legacy of faith reflects our uncompromising journey with the Lord.

We must be living witnesses so that the future faith of our generations will never die.

LESSON 6

YOUR CALL TO CREATE A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Biblical Text: Isaiah 43:1-2, 10-13, 18-19

INTRODUCTION

All of us want a community that offers security and stability.

When our world is shaken by the negative impact of unpredictable events or our own poor decisions, we find ourselves clinging to the hope that our unpleasant situation will change for the better...in time.

We often feel a great sense of separation and loneliness when situations arise that work against our plans and dreams.

Sometimes these circumstances drive a wedge between our community and us.

When this happens, our immediate response should be to seek a solution that will bridge the gap and reconnect us with the familiarity of our community.

It is imperative that man chooses his *communities* wisely.

Every avenue that the world offers does not lead to security and stability.

But man can find perfect security in becoming a part of God's community, knowing that God holds the future.

As we seek a deeper knowledge of, and faith in God, we find hope in the promises that God gives to His redeemed people.

And just as importantly, we find rest in becoming a part of His covenant community.

A PROPHET WITH VISION

God's chosen people had become blind and deaf to God's law and were unable to fulfill their servant role.

One of the foremost of the Hebrew prophets, God sent Isaiah to herald the coming of a Savior because God loves His people in spite of their rejection of Him.

God called Isaiah to begin his ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (734 BC).

These years in Israel's history were a time of great struggle, both politically and spiritually.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was deteriorating politically, spiritually and militarily.

They finally fell to the Assyrian empire in 722 BC.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah looked as though it too would collapse and fall to Assyria, but it withstood the attack.

While this victory saved Judah from captivity like Northern Israel, their ultimate alliance with Assyria had a disastrous impact on their faith.

Every sort of Assyrian idolatry was introduced into the Judean culture.

No longer were they a chosen people, set apart from the world.

In the midst of this spiritual struggle and political decline, Isaiah rose to deliver his message to the people of Judah.

He would continue to prophesy through the era of Hezekiah, who cleansed the temple of Judah's false idols in a valiant effort to restore Judah unto God.

Isaiah's ministry spanned the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, and possibly Manasseh, a period of almost 50 years.

During this span of time, Isaiah’s message was that Judah should trust in the God who had promised them a glorious kingdom through Moses and David.

Isaiah urged the nation not to rely on Egypt or any other foreign power to protect them, for the Lord was the only protection they would need.

Discussion: What impact did Nelson Mandella have on his nation of South Africa? Our world?

Question: What stands can Christians take to draw attention to the importance of living a Godly life?

A COVENANT COMMUNITY

Through Isaiah, God’s favor and goodwill toward His people spoke comfort to all believers.

“Fear not, for I have redeemed thee!”

Isaiah introduced the Lord as the One who made Israel in the first place.

Then he called on Israel not to fear, no matter what lay ahead.

The new creature of God’s covenant is of *God’s forming*.

God sets apart all who are redeemed by the blood of His Son.

Those that have God “for them” need not fear who or what can be against them.

True believers are precious to God; His delight is in them.

This is exactly what Isaiah taught as he comforted the faithful with God's promise and dissuaded the covenant-keepers from all fears.

Our covenant with God provides a commitment to a relationship that allows His purpose for us to be fulfilled in our lives.

The word "**COVENANT**" has lost its meaning in today's society.

In Biblical times, the word covenant involved promise, commitment, faithfulness, and loyalty even unto death.

A "**COVENANT**" was considered sacred, and was therefore not entered into lightly, and a man was only as good as his covenant word.

In a society where national agreements, business contracts, and marriage covenants are routinely broken, it brings great comfort to know that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

Question: How can we use our covenant relationship with God to impact our community?

A PROTECTED COMMUNITY

The purpose of God's covenant is to bless us and move us into the destiny that He has prepared for us.

The covenant God makes with us offers blessings both here and eternally.

God's covenant has tremendous spiritual implications.

It is a bond that not only brings great comfort to the covenant partner, but it is also a declaration to those outside the covenant.

A good example is the wedding ring in a marriage relationship.

The ring is a symbol of the marriage covenant.

It is a constant reminder to each spouse of their covenant agreement, but it is also a declaration to the world that the person who has entered into this covenant is not available for other romantic or sexual relationships.

Likewise, we enter into covenant with God through the blood of Jesus Christ, and we are covered by that blood.

The blood of Jesus Christ gives a warning to every enemy, saying, “Hands off! This is not your territory.”

Covenant breaking, then, is serious.

We operate under the protection of a covenant God, and it is only when WE choose to break our covenant relationship with Him and live in disobedience to His will that we give opportunity for the enemy to steal our inheritance and destroy our destiny.

Question: In what areas of your life do you feel protected by God? Explain.

A WITNESSING COMMUNITY

In our covenant relationship with God, He chooses to employ us as His witnesses.

Who is better to declare His mighty works than those who have been the direct recipient of His blessings?

Only God’s people know the power of His grace, the sweetness of His comforts, the kind care of His providence, and the truth of His promise.

All of God’s servants can give such an account of what He has wrought or fashioned in them, and accomplished for them, as they lead others to know and believe in His power, His truth, and His love.

Exercise: List the blessings you have received from God, and formulate a testimony around those blessings. Commit that testimony, not to your head but to your heart.

A RECREATED COMMUNITY

When you enter into a covenant with God as a new believer in Jesus Christ, it is only the beginning of God's promise to you.

God desires that you would deepen your covenant relationship with Him.

In order to let go of your past and enter into this new and deeper covenant with the Lord, you must understand three things:

First, we must understand God's call.

You must be willing to let go of pre-conceived notions and expectations, and let God set your direction, completely.

When you yield to Him, you move into a new dimension of your calling, and it is a lifelong process.

Second, we must establish daily communication with God.

When the Lord extends His hand to us, we begin to establish a communication system of prayer and learning to hear His voice.

Third, we must KEEP the covenant.

The proper spiritual mindset is necessary to keep us from covenant-breaking events in our lives that allow the enemy to have access to our souls and separate us from God's will.

Question: What steps will you take to become a better covenant-keeper?

WATCH OUT FOR THE PITFALLS

The kingdom of Judah fought nobly against the Assyrians in a valiant effort to preserve their community of faith.

But their victory ended up a lesson in futility as they assimilated into the Assyrian culture through marriage.

Their temple became defiled with the idol gods of their godless neighbors, and in the end, this assimilation conquered them.

Man, by nature, has a strong desire to BELONG to a community.

He defines his community in many ways; through physical borders, custom, culture, and language.

All these give mankind a sense of purpose and meaning.

But if we are not careful, that which defines us will absorb us.

Question: Many races and nationalities celebrate their cultures with extravagant holidays [i.e. Kwanzaa, St. Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo].

What danger is there in allowing culture to take center stage in your life?

Culture teaches that it is important to relate to the past in order to understand the present and deal with the future.

It speaks to our head, not our heart.

But we hear the Lord saying, ***“¹⁸Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. ¹⁹Behold, I will do a new thing...”***

No Christian can deny that the Lord has done a **“new thing”** in the life of the African-American, and He is not finished yet!

If we will remain faithful, and permit no worldly cultures to distort our spirituality and our covenant relationship with God, He promises, *“**When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.**”*

Our prosperity as children of God is forever linked to our covenant faith. I

f we forbid our culture community to preempt God and our covenant community, we shall remain forever blessed.

CONCLUSION

Isaiah introduced the Israelites to the coming Messiah, whom God has empowered to establish justice on the Earth and redeem them from their sin of rejecting their role as God’s chosen nation.

He prophesied that now, through the wondrous work of love, God would bring redemption to mankind.

The Israelites would come to know God as their Savior and Redeemer.

Though the Israelites had not fulfilled their mission for God, He would keep loving them.

Isaiah taught them that we are not loved for what we do, but because God is gracious.

When all the former things had been put behind them, they would sing a new song of praise as God’s people, a song of forgiveness and joy.

We too, have the opportunity to “sing a new song”.

All those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are partakers of the New Covenant, which promises forgiveness and remission of the penalty of sin, justification and righteousness, being born again into the family of God,

assurance, sanctification unto the Lord, adoption as sons and daughters of God, and glorification.

Through the new covenant, we have the promise of being ushered into the Everlasting Covenant at the second coming of Christ, bringing God and humanity back into eternal covenantal relationship.

The promises of this life include everlasting life, immortality, an everlasting kingdom, which the believer inherits, an everlasting inheritance, everlasting love, everlasting joy, everlasting strength and an everlasting name.

These are amazing promises for us to grasp.

God has a destiny for each of us to fulfill in this lifetime, and He is longing to establish a covenant with each of us in order to facilitate that destiny.

LESSON 7

YOUR CALL TO LIVE UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

Biblical Text: Jeremiah 29:10-14, 31:31-34

INTRODUCTION

Man separates himself from God when he becomes predisposed to explore his own path, and reject the Will of God for his life.

It is during these times of separation that man suffers the ramifications of his poor choices.

Life's circumstances become difficult only when we cannot find a solution for our problems.

When this happens, our difficult circumstances point us directly toward God.

We have often heard it said, ***"Man's extremity is God's opportunity."***

And if we sincerely seek God and bring Him our repentant hearts and our deepest spiritual questions, He provides the answers through a renewed spiritual relationship with Him.

SURVIVING IN THE DARKNESS

Jeremiah was the premiere prophet of Judah during the dark days leading to her destruction.

His history spanned the first five decades of Judah's history.

He was called to prophetic action in 627 B.C., in the 13th year of King Josiah's reign, the last good king of Judah.

King Josiah's reign was the last ray of light before the darkness of idolatry and foreign intrigue settled over the Davidic throne.

Sparked by the rediscovery of a copy of the Mosaic Law in the temple, King Josiah embarked on a diligent effort to rid the nation of idolatry.

Though he succeeded in removing the outward forms, he was not successful in purging idol worship from the hearts of the people of Judah.

And when Josiah suffered an untimely death, the people immediately returned to their wicked ways.

The destruction and collapse of Assyria, of which Judah was a vassal state, was caused largely by the rise of another power – Babylon, who, under Nabopolassar formed the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Though the Kingdom of Judah had been successful in throwing off the yoke of complete Assyrian domination, their independence was ultimately shattered when the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians, and Judah became a vassal state of Babylon.

Though Habakkuk and Zephaniah flickered in Judah at that time, Jeremiah was the blazing torch who along with Ezekiel in Babylon, exposed Judah's dark sins with the piercing brightness of God's Word.

Jeremiah was the weeping prophet to a wayward people.

GOD TELLS JUDAH TO WAIT (Jeremiah 29:10-11)

When people are living under oppression, they feel an urgency to be freed from that oppression.

Judah was caught in the web of oppression under the rule of Babylon. And the people did not want to wait for their freedom.

Jeremiah's announcement of a long exile was countered by the false prophet Hananiah, who foretold of Judah's freedom within two years.

The people of Judah were eager to hear the good news foretold by Hananiah because they wanted desperately to return to their own homeland and rule. But God proved Jeremiah to be the true prophet of Judah when He removed Hananiah from the face of the earth and exposed him as a false prophet by having Jeremiah predict the very month in which he would die (29:1).

Jeremiah again reinforces his prophetic message of a long exile for Judah.

Judah would have to prepare for a long stay in Babylon; they would have to make the best of life in this foreign environment, plant gardens for sustenance, build houses, marry and have families, and settle down.

Instead of praying for Babylon's quick demise, the people were encouraged to pray for Babylon and seek its peace and prosperity.

Jeremiah delivered to Judah the difficult message that it was God's judgment that they would spend 70 years in exile.

Only then would God fulfill His promise to restore the exiles to their land.

Question: How does faith impact our level of patience?

REKINDLING YOUR FAITH RELATIONSHIP (Jeremiah 29:12-14)

Judah's seventy-year exile was part of God's plan to give Judah hope and a bright future.

God knew that suffering would draw them closer and cause them to rekindle their relationship with Him.

God's judgment through Jeremiah prompted the exiled nation of Judah to seek God wholeheartedly.

Life's circumstances became difficult for Judah when they could not find a solution for their problem of exile and oppression. But their disappointment and depression over their situation gave Jeremiah the open door to point them directly toward God.

God yearns to give us a future and a hope.

He has appropriated these things for every believer.

But we too have a role to play in receiving them.

Here in Jeremiah, God says that when we call upon Him, He will listen, and when we search for Him with all our hearts, we will find Him.

Question: How would you encourage someone who is going through a storm?

GOD PROMISES TO RENEW HIS COVENANT (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

God not only promised Judah a new beginning, but a New Covenant with His people.

This new covenant was expressly for the house of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and the house of Judah (the Southern Kingdom).

It would be unlike the covenant that God made with their forefathers during the time of the Exodus, because the people had broken that covenant.

Their sinful hearts had forsaken the holy standard of conduct set by God.

Therefore a complete change was needed.

God's new covenant involved an internalization of His law.

God's law did not change, only the method by which the law was applied changed.

Under the New Covenant, God would put His law in their minds and on their hearts, not just on tablets of stone as He did in the wilderness (Exodus 34:1).
"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts".

God's new covenant with Israel, the one that would be offered after 70 years of exile, would give Israel an *inner* ability to obey God's righteous standards and consequently enjoy His blessings.

This proclamation through Jeremiah was God's first promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This was the first difference noted between the Old and New Covenants ...that God would bestow His Holy Spirit upon all believers.

In Old Testament times the Holy Spirit did not dwell in all believers.

The second difference noted between the Old and New Covenants was God's provision for sin.

Under the Old Covenant, the sins of the people resulted in curses; but under this New Covenant, God would forgive Israel their iniquity and remember their sins no more.

When God *covenants* or agrees to do something, His commitment is built on a love that far exceeds human love.

God will sometimes even stick with the object of His affection sometimes in the face of outright rebellion or abject failure.

We see this demonstrated in the love He expressed to Judah, whose rebellion motivated God's New Covenant.

Paul described it to his spiritual son, Timothy, this way, *"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."* (2 Timothy 2:13)

Our New Covenant with God, through the shed blood of Christ for the remission of our sins, makes all believers recipients of His forgiveness.

The descendants of Judah would one day understand that under this New Covenant, God made provision for a Substitute...Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty required of man that the curses of the Old Covenant might be forever lifted.

Question: How does the Holy Spirit help us to live a righteous life under the New Covenant?

CONCLUSION

We must discover God's covenant plan for our personal lives.

Even those whose lives have been separated from God can repair the breach through repentance, and re-establish a new covenant with God.

The only way to rediscover God's purpose for our lives is to listen for His still, small voice, to search for Him with earnest, and when we find Him, to obey His commandments.

"Praise Ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed." (Psalm 112:1-2)

When we take delight in serving the Lord and living according to His Will, we are assured that He will be faithful to preserve His end of the covenant with us, and we shall be blessed for generations to come.

God's family album reveals our identity.

We know who we are because we know whose we are: we belong to God.

Those who have received His call, mercy and claim on their lives have committed ourselves to uphold the covenant agreement God has made with us.

And God will never break His end of the covenant promise.
His commitment is much like a parent's commitment to a child.

God tells His people, *“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?”* (Isaiah 49:15).

God has made a covenant with Believers today that is just as firm as His covenant with Judah.

He promises that He *“will put [His] law in their inward parts, and write it in [the] hearts”* of all who believe on His Son Jesus Christ.

His commitment is incomparable because He is without equal, and His unalterable and unbreakable covenant lasts for eternity.

LESSON 8

GOD'S PROMISE TO KEEP YOUR HOPE ALIVE

BIBLICAL TEXT: EZEKIEL 37:1-14

INTRODUCTION

When we face difficult times that last for a long while, our human frailty causes us to become discouraged, and we begin to wonder if life will ever get better.

Often, all hope is lost.

We're not talking about a temporary setback.

This is more of the permanent kind...the kind that lasts throughout a generation.

Such was the plight of the Judah – the Southern Nation of Israel.

God can restore hope to people who are in deep depression and despair.

Our suffering may not be eradicated, but we do have someone to turn to for comfort.

How else can you explain the joy of a severely handicapped Christian?

Hurts are a necessary part of every life.

And here's a revelation...*Comfort is never found in the absence of pain, but in the midst of it.*

Many hurting Christians believe that their walk with the Lord is not as it should be because of their intense pain.

But just because you don't feel comfortable, it doesn't mean that you are not being comforted.

Feeling comfortable and being comforted are two different things.

The first is a nice feeling but it tends to come and go.

The latter is a fact based on the ability of the Comforter, not on the circumstance.

God does not come and go.

“He will never leave you nor forsake you!” (Hebrews 13:5)

Those who have experienced hurt or suffering know that it gets tiring after a while.

The weary saint cries out, just like Paul, to remove the thorn.

Even Jesus prayed that the cup would pass from Him.

And it is precisely at these times that the God’s comfort is the most precious.

Peace is not the absence of pain.

We wouldn’t need the Lord if our life was one of unending bliss.

In Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones, we see that God will take the first step in restoring us to Him, and often He will do it by calling His faithful servant-leaders to minister to the hopeless.

MORE THAN JUST DRY BONES

The Book of Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi.

The name Ezekiel means **“God will strengthen”** or **“God will harden”**.

Like Jeremiah and Zephaniah, Ezekiel was a prophet-priest.

This Book was written during the time of Judah’s bondage to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar’s rule.

Many Bible students shy away from study of this prophetic book because of its perplexing maze of seemingly incoherent visions.

It seems to be a kaleidoscope of whirling wheels and dry bones that defy interpretation.

Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel's message focused on Judah's forthcoming destruction because of her sin.

His message fell on deaf ears until word of the city's destruction reached Babylon.

The fall prompted a change in Ezekiel's message.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's message centered on Judah's future restoration.

Most Israelites may have doubted God's promise of restoration.

Their present condition in Babylon gave no support to the revelation that this would come true.

Through Ezekiel, God stressed the fact of His sovereign power and ability to carry out His remarkable promises.

God wanted Judah to see that the fulfillment of His promise depended on Him, not on circumstances.

In order to accomplish this, God had to first take Ezekiel to the **"Valley of Dry Bones"**.

This great vision in the valley took its form from a despairing saying, which had become a proverb among the Jewish exiles, *"Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost."*

This saying puts the hopelessness of the mass of the exiles in an aggressive fashion, though the only sense in which living men could say that their bones were dried up, and they are cut off, is in a figurative sense.

They obviously regarded their national existence as irretrievably over.

This saying, *“Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost”*, gives us a glimpse into the despair that had settled on the Jews, against which Ezekiel had to contend.

There has been much dispute over whose dry bones these were.

As Ezekiel and the Lord visit this graveyard, we will see that the crucial question becomes not **“WHO”**, but **“WHAT?”**

God is about to demonstrate just **WHAT** His power can do...as He renews and restores these dead bones as a demonstration of His promise to renew and restore Israel.

THEM BONES, THEM BONES, THEM DRY BONES (Ezekiel 37:1-6)

Ezekiel is taken to the valley of dry bones, where God will communicate His prophetic influence, by bringing the prophet *“out in the spirit”*, or granting him a spiritual vision.

The first Two Verses set the panoramic stage for the vision about to be revealed.

Ezekiel finds himself in a valley **FULL** of bones, the bones of slain countrymen who had sought to defend their faith.

We can clearly visualize the strewn carcasses, lying on the hot desert sand, bleached white by the intense heat of the sun.

The sheer magnitude of the numbers of the slain creates a picture of devastation and despair.

Through Ezekiel’s vision, God creates a didactic reference for Ezekiel’s future prophetic journey, and through this Biblical record, we are able to visualize the wretched state of the Jews who were dispersed throughout the provinces of the Chaldean empire.

The question which rose in Ezekiel's mind was God's question, "*Can these bones live?*"

God challenges Ezekiel to think beyond man's comprehension.
Is it possible that the persons whose bones these are can return to life?

So Ezekiel answers with a noble utterance of faith and submission, "*O Lord, Thou knowest*".

With God all things are possible.

Presumption would have said, '**YES**'; unbelief would have said, '**NO**'; faith said '**THOU KNOWEST**'.

God commands Ezekiel to "*prophesy upon these bones*" and to declare by faith to his miserable countrymen that their state of death, however deplorable, is not hopeless.

God challenges Ezekiel to believe that He alone can restore these bones to life.

Question: Are you at the faith level that allows you to trust God no matter what your life's condition?
If not, what would it take for you to get there?

AN ARMY OF HOPE (Ezekiel 37:7-10)

Ezekiel is then ordered to be obedient and prophecy to the dead bones.

He puts God's restoration plan to the test, calling for the bones of his dead countrymen to live.

The bones respond to Ezekiel's command in perfect, step-by-step recall, following the process outlined by God.

We can sense Ezekiel's excitement as he witnesses the resurrection of this once dead army right before his eyes.

Then God prompts Ezekiel to finish his lesson in obedience, by calling the four winds to gather the souls of these men from all corners of the world to re-inhabit the bodies of these restored bodies.

THEY OBEY! and Ezekiel stands in awe of the great army that is now before him.

Using the dry bones of dead patriarchs of the Israelite nation, God has proven to this discouraged prophet that there is no limit to His power, and no circumstance that can hinder His promise.

Question: Consider what God has already used in your life to prove His power. How did it change your level of trust?

CAN ISRAEL LIVE? (Ezekiel 37:11-14)

The real question on Ezekiel's heart was, "*Can Israel Live?*"

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones represents the whole house of Israel.

These bones, quickened by Ezekiel in obedience to God's clear instruction, became a symbol of the impending restoration of the Jews from their helpless and hopeless state of captivity (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

Through this vision, God not only reinforced His covenant promise to Abraham's seed, but we can also extend the application of this vision to the condition of humanity and God's divine intervention which communicates life to a dead world.

From the lofty heights of heaven, God clearly views the world as dead in their trespasses and sins, the condition of every soul that is separated from Him.

Thus His vision to Ezekiel also reveals the necessity of the revival of the Church of Christ, when the slain witnesses shall rise and ascend to heaven; and of the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

God is in His most divine glory when He quickens dead souls!

Through this vision, God had now prepared His prophet.

Ezekiel would take the message of deliverance to the people of Judah without trepidation or vacillation, for God had proven to Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones that He was able to reach beyond man's hope and possibilities to confirm that He is Jehovah.

Ezekiel's experience of God's power and faithfulness was so sure and sweet that from this time forward, he would not doubt God, nor forget His grace.

Question: Statistics show that universal Church of Jesus Christ is shrinking in America.

Young adults are not being stirred to serve Christ in large numbers.

Whose fault is it?

CONCLUSION

Long years of exile in Babylon may have caused Judah to despair and wonder if they had lost their national heritage as God's chosen people, but the benefits of their exile were also apparent.

It was during this period of exile that God demonstrated His power to restore and preserve those whom He had chosen.

Lessons are seldom learned without struggle and sacrifice.

Judah had to learn that God can bring restoration, even to a seemingly hopeless situation.

Only then could their fear of God's abandonment give way to the realization that God was indeed with them.

Ezekiel was the instrument of God's teaching.

His obedience and great faith were tantamount to turning the people of Judah back to God.

Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones was a test of his own faith in God's ability to deliver His covenant promise to one day bring the children of Israel back to their Promised Land.

Our Biblical and our African-American history bear record that God always sends capable messengers/leaders to comfort His followers as they journey through difficult phases of His divine plan.

LESSON 9

GOD'S PLAN TO CREATE A RENEWED TRUST

BIBLICAL TEXT: PSALM 73:1-3, 12-13, 16-18, 21-26

INTRODUCTION

Long-term periods of difficulty will wear down even the strongest Christian.

We have all been in trying circumstances that seemed to have no end in sight.

During those times of 'testing', we sometimes feel that our chosen path of righteousness is a vain attempt on our part to achieve oneness with God, especially when the unsaved around us seem to be living a life of comfort and ease while we struggle.

Those who live outside of God's will may appear to prosper, but Jesus reminds us that, *"they have their reward"*.

Our reward is very different.

We are striving for a greater prize – the gift of Eternal Life.

The tested Christian must come to understand that the material things of this life are temporal and meaningless in comparison to the incorruptible blessings of God.

A PSALTERY OF PRAISE

The Psalms are a collection of psaltery or songs divided into five sections, and are the work of various authors.

Only a portion of the Book of Psalms claims David as its author.

Other inspired poets in successive generations added their contribution to the sacred collection, and thus, by Divine Providence, it reflects every phase of human emotion and circumstances than it otherwise could.

We do, however, owe most of this Book to David and his contemporaries.

Psalm 73 is the commencement of the THIRD BOOK of the Psalter; and it is entitled **A Psalm of Asaph**.

The composer, Asaph, lived under Babylonian captivity; and he published this Psalm to console the Israelites under bondage, who were suffering from great distress and misery while the ungodly Babylonians, who were much more wicked and corrupt than they, experienced great prosperity, and held them in bondage.

This beautiful Psalm was written by Asaph, a skilled musician and 'seer' (2 Chronicles 29:30) who was a Levite (Priest) and one of the leaders of David's choir (1 Chronicles 6:39).

Asaph is also credited with writing Psalms 50 and 74-83.

ASAPH means '**CONVENER**' or '**COLLECTOR**'.

His ability as a musician lead others to follow in his footsteps; three Scripture references (1 Chr. 25:1, 2 Chr. 20:14, and Ezra 2:41) refer to his musically inclined descendants, or more probably a class of poets or singers who recognized him as their master.

The Psalmist, Asaph, sings of God's goodness to His people, shares his own testimony of how much he was stumbled at the prosperity of the wicked, and describes their prosperous state and details his own temptation and the pain he suffered in consequence.

Then Asaph sings of his deliverance, and how the now dismal reversed state of the once prosperous ungodly man corrected his own false views.

Asaph ends his song with a wonderful proclamation of the great confidence he has in God, and the blessed consequences of serving the Lord.

Discussion: What does singing do for the Christian, especially in the face of adversity?

THE ENVY OF THE WICKED (Psalm 73:1-3, 12-13)

Asaph was a devoted Levite, ordained and authorized by God to perform special priestly functions.

The priests of the Israelites were set aside as men *“holy unto the Lord”*.

They were to be free from defect or infirmity and were subject to numerous restrictions and ceremonial obligations designed to protect their holiness.

It was the distinct duty of the Levite priests to guard the religious traditions of their forefathers.

Asaph begins his song with a declaration of the goodness of God toward the obedient in Israel, in spite of their captivity in Babylon.

Captives as they were, they still had many blessings from God; and they had God’s promise of deliverance, which must be fulfilled in due time.

As long as they kept a **“clean heart”** they would preserve their inward happiness, because they resembled God and would never be forsaken by Him.

This was the promise to which the Israelites clung tightly during their captivity.

But immediately following his statement of faith, *Asaph* makes a startling confession for a Levite priest whose image was to be one of perfection.

Asaph admits his own sin of envying the prosperity of the Babylonians who held them captive.

His confession sheds great light on the anguish of the captive Israelites.

Here was a priest, educated in the religious theology of their covenant with God, who had begun to weaken in his faith!

Such was the depth of despair to which the Israelites had plunged.

Question: In Exodus 20:17, the tenth commandment warns us against covetousness. How are we victims of our own desires?

Asaph says, *“My feet were almost gone”*.

He had nearly given up his confidence in God; it was as though God had pulled the rug ‘of faith’ out from under him, and he began to find fault with God’s dispensatorial conduct.

He thought the Judge of all the earth had failed him.

He was envious of the sinful and foolish Babylonians who displayed no reverence toward God and acted with abandon toward all vices and every temporal comfort, while Asaph and the Godly Israelites suffered in dire straits under the affliction of their captors.

He began to doubt whether there was any wise providence at all in God’s decision to keep them under the rule of these heathens.

We can sense the depth of Asaph’s cry as he says, *“I have cleansed my heart in vain!”*

Asaph had temporarily forgotten that life is ‘more than bread or meat’, and that there would be future rewards and punishments from above.

In his moment of weakness, he failed to realize that man could not bear permanent prosperity.

If men had uninterrupted comforts on earth, not one soul would seek preparation for heaven.

Human trials and afflictions, the general warfare of human life, are the highest proof of a Providence as benevolent as He is wise.

If the state of human affairs were different from what it is, hell would be more densely populated, and there would be far fewer inhabitants in glory.

There is reason to doubt whether there would be any followers of God upon the earth at all, if we endured nothing but temporal prosperity.

Surely, the lifestyle of the Babylonians was indeed proof of this.

Dutiful to his calling as a Levite priest, Asaph warns his beloved captives against the bad example of the Babylonians, and against being envious at the prosperity of the wicked.

Christians are subject to the same moments of weakness as the suffering Asaph.

When storms come in our lives and discourage us, we wonder why the wicked seem to live a life of ease.

But those who persevere know that *“all things work together for good, to them that are the called according to HIS purpose”*, and we are commanded to *REST in Him and WAIT*.

Question: How can we control the temptations of the flesh, such as jealousy and envy?

RENEWED THROUGH WORSHIP (Psalm 73:16-18)

We feel the pain of Asaph's anguish in Verse 16, as he confesses that he retreated in his despair to the only place he has ever found comfort – in the 'sanctuary' – where he communed with his Father.

There is no doubt that this Psalm was written during Babylonian captivity, so we must then ask, *"How can Asaph speak of the sanctuary?"*

There was no sanctuary in Babylon, and the sanctuary at Jerusalem had long been destroyed.

Our spiritual sense concludes that Asaph removed himself to a place of holiness, a special place that the Israelites had set aside for prayer and meditation.

It's no doubt that the captives had such places set apart to commune with God, to pray and to confess their sins before Him.

That which is holy unto the Lord is therefore His sanctuary, whether it is a house or an open field.

Instantly, upon withdrawing to that holy place of communion with his Father, Asaph feels renewed strength as his spirit is reunited with his Creator, the God of his forefathers.

In his almost desperate act of worship, the covenant promise comes flooding back to him, and the times when the Lord had hidden His face from them because of their sins, yet He had never utterly abandoned them to their adversaries.

Is it not reasonable to conclude that God will do what He has done before?

Suddenly, Asaph is assured in his spirit that the Lord will make his enemies his footstool.

Hear him as he cries with certainty, *"Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction."*

Asaph knows that affluence is a slippery path that few have ever walked on without falling.

A man CAN be faithful to God while holding great possession, but it is very difficult.

Asaph finds comfort in remembering that God is in control of the prosperous and wicked Babylonians and He will surely uphold His law of righteousness in due time.

The wicked will have their day of destruction! In the meantime, Asaph is strengthened by his worship.

Question: How does worship strengthen a Christian?

THE HUMBLE CRY OF THE BELIEVER (Psalm 73:21-26)

Asaph recounts his sense of grief at realizing his weakened faith.

He felt a sense of failure at allowing his mind to overtake him in matters of the heart.

The worship of God is always a matter of the heart.

Now Asaph testifies that he sees with clearer vision that his people are under the guardian care of the Lord.

As long as the Lord holds them in his hand, they shall never be cast down or utterly destroyed.

When the suffering, through which the Lord will console them, is over, Asaph knows beyond a doubt that there will be deliverance.

God will uphold His covenant promise to restore them to their own land and crown them with honor and happiness.

Believers today rest on that same promise of God's protection and favor.

God will guide by His Spirit those who seek His counsel throughout their lives, and when our righteous suffering is over we shall receive the reward of eternal life.

Till then, we hold on – though perhaps in moments of trial we too may sing songs such as, *“Pass Me Not, Oh Gentle Savior, hear my humble cry...”*

And like Asaph, we hold on as we confess, *“Whom have I on earth beside Thee, whom in heaven but Thee!”*

We ask no inheritance while here on earth.

We only ask that when we perish from this place, God is all the portion we need for immortality.

CONCLUSION

Life is full of trials that attack our spirit to discourage us.

The healthy Christian has developed a regime of worship exercise that keeps him fit and trim in the midst of his difficulties.

Through spiritual exercise, we are able to strengthen ourselves in preparation for the storms that lie ahead.

Asaph lost his way only briefly, because he had a regime of spiritual exercise that drew him back into a right focus with God.

The Levite priests were trained to turn to God in every crisis, which was why Asaph was able to bring his mind, body and spirit into that oneness with God once again.

In this life, trials will come, but a disciplined Christian who has exercised his mind, body and soul in the word of God will be able to withstand what lies ahead.

We must not allow ourselves to become discouraged by those who seem to be enjoying the temporary benefits of a life lived outside God's will.

God is faithful to deliver that which He promised to us.

When you feel that you are living your life of servanthood in vain, remember that the wicked who prosper have only a temporary blessing.

Perhaps your jealous spirit is just a warning that your "fuel tank" is running low and you need to return to your source of strength so the Lord can replenish your supply!

