

13 Practical Lessons Drawn from the Lives of Bible Characters

Life's Lessons

Written for Our Instruction!

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'Written for Our Instruction'

"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."

1 Corinthians 10:11-13

Introduction

WE CAN LEARN much from the successes of others, and we can learn from their failures as well. Not only can we learn, but we *must* learn. Learning what to do and what not to do. This series of lessons focuses on some of the characters of the Old Testament. From them we learn that we must (1) avoid over-confidence, (2) refrain from self-pity ("woe is me"), (3) realize that temptations and trials can be endured and (4) that God will provide.

Lessons

- 1– UNQUESTIONING FAITH: **ABRAHAM** – Doing the difficult and unthinkable
- 2– A RESOLUTE MIND: **DANIEL** – Facing persecution
- 3 – RISING TO THE OCCASION: **ESTHER** – Risking your own safety for others
- 4 – PERSISTENT PRAYER, FAITHFUL COMMITMENT: **HANNAH** – Keeping difficult promises
- 5 – DOING WHAT YOU CAN WHERE YOU ARE: **JOSEPH** – Putting up with injustice
- 6 – A DETERMINED SPIRIT: **RUTH** – Putting your life in God's hands
- 7 – THE SCARS OF FOOLISHNESS: **SAMSON** – Suffering the consequences of one's actions
- 8 – BEAUTY WITH DISCRETION: **VASHTI** – Unwilling to compromise morals
- 9 – A LIFE-CHANGING ENCOUNTER: **JACOB** – Being transformed by the working of God
- 10 – A PEBBLE IN THE SHOE: **HAMAN** – Letting little things bother you
- 11– LISTENING TO BAD ADVICE: **REHOBOAM** – Rejecting good counsel
- 12 – LOST VALUES: **ESAU** – Living only for the present
- 13 – A POOR CHOICE: **LOT** – Judging by appearances

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UNQUESTIONING FAITH

ABRAHAM

Abraham is one of the most outstanding characters of the Old Testament. He was the first Hebrew patriarch, the son of Terah, a descendant of Noah's son, Shem. His childhood was spent in Ur of the Chaldees, a Sumerian city. His name Abram, meaning "father is exalted," was later changed by God to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." God called Abram to migrate to Canaan, assuring him that he would father a vast nation. His faith and obedience were tested by God on numerous occasions. He is mentioned in the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11 and is held up as example of "faith at its best." Why so? Just look at his life.

ABRAHAM'S HUMANNESS SURFACED AT TIMES, BUT HIS FAITH PREVAILED

He concealed the fact that Sara was his wife. Gen.12:11ff, 20:1ff

He yielded to Sarah's urging, and had a son (Ishmael) by Hagar. Gen.16:2-4

He laughed at idea of becoming a father in his old age. Gen.17:17

HIS FAITH TESTED

WHERE am I going?

He was told to go to an undisclosed land, leaving his homeland and all of what was familiar. Gen.12:1

He obeyed, not knowing where he was going. He "walked by faith." 2Co.5:7

WHEN will I possess the land?

He was told that his descendants would inherit the land. Gen.15:18

After twenty-five years, all he owned was a burial plot. Gen.23:20

He was told that it would be 400 years before his descendants inherited the land. Gen.15:13-16

He looked for a city (permanent abode built by God). Heb.11:13-16

HOW can I have a great number of descendants?

God promised it. Gen.17:6, 19

By his servant, Eliezer? No. Gen.15:2-4

By Ishmael? No. Gen.17:18-19

But by a son yet to be born by Sarah. Gen.17:19

WHY offer up Isaac?

God commanded the unthinkable. Gen.22:1-11

Abraham believed that somehow God would provide. Heb.11:17-19

HIS FAITH HAVING BEEN TESTED, WAS 'REFINED'

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. James 2:21-24

His works made his faith complete (perfected).

Thus he is the "father of all who believe."

OUR FAITH IS BEING TESTED DAILY, AND WE MAY BE PRONE TO ASK

WHERE will my life with Christ take me?

Wherever we go, we need to put our trust in the Lord; and walk by faith.

Assured that God loves us and seeks our good. Mat.6:25ff

Cognizant that He is aware of our situations. Mat.10:31

Casting our cares and anxieties upon Him. 1Pe.5:7

WHEN will God do these things?

Remember, God does not work according to our timetable.

We can become impatient about trials ending, and problems being resolved.

Exercise patience. Heb.10:36, Rom.5:3-4

HOW will God bring about the answers to my prayers? How will He take care of me?

Put your trust in God's promises. He spoke worlds into existence, surely he will take care of His own children.

His promises will be fulfilled. Heb.6:17-19a

WHY has God commanded some things and forbidden others?

Rest assured, God knows what is best. 1Tim.4:8

God does not owe us an explanation.

We owe him unquestioning faith. Rom.9:20-21

Remember, our wisdom is limited by knowledge and experience. Job.38:1-7

WE NEED A FAITH LIKE ABRAHAM'S

Galatians 3:9 *"So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."*

We must have unquestioning faith and be "Christ-like."

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:26-29

Yes, Christians are heirs according to the promise.

Keep in mind that our citizenship is in heaven. Phi.3:20

Labor to have faith at its best: perfected by testing.

Our humanness may surface from time to time, but our faith must prevail!

A RESOLUTE MIND

DANIEL

As a young man of nobility he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and was taken from Judah to Babylon after the battle of Carchemish. The Babylonians sought to remove all vestiges of Daniel's nationality and religion. For this reason, they sought to change the name of Daniel to Belteshazzar ("may Bel protect his life"). He was trained in the arts, letters, and wisdom in the Babylonian capital. Eventually, he rose to high rank among the Babylonian men of wisdom. He had outstanding physical attraction. He demonstrated at an early age propensities of knowledge, wisdom, and leadership. In addition to his wisdom, he was skilled in dream interpretation. Throughout his entire life he demonstrated an unshakable faith in his God. It took courage to resist the temptations and threats which confronted him repeatedly. He remained faithful because he had a strong faith and a resolute mind.

DETERMINED NOT TO BE DEFILED

:8ff *"made up his mind."*

God responded by giving him great abilities :17 (wise :20)

God revealed the interpretation of king's dream, thus sparing Daniel and his friends. 2:17-19

Result of "making up one's mind": The king is pleased.

SHADRACH, MESHACH & ABED-NEGO ALSO DETERMINED

Faith put to the test. 3:8-13ff

Made up their minds. 3:16-18

God sent an angel to spare them. 3:28

Result: God is praised by king NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

MADE UP HIS MIND TO FEARLESSLY INTERPRET

Courageously interprets the king's dream of a "tree". 4:11-17 (18-19ff)

Warns king Nebuchadnezzar 4:27

Result: God is praised by the king. 3:34,37

Courageously interprets the "handwriting on wall" to Belshazzar (Bel protect the king).

Hand wrote. 5:5, (meaning: 25-28)

Courageously rebukes the king. 5:22-24

Result: BELSHAZZAR is slain. 5:30

MADE UP HIS MIND CONCERNING PRAYER

Prayed knowing the decree against it. 6:7,10

Put his trust in God while in the lion's den. 6:22

Daniel made up his mind, and did not change it for anything.

Result: God praised by king DARIUS. 6:25-27

LESSONS

We, also, out of necessity, must associate with unbelievers and ungodly people.

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world." 1 Corinthians 5:9-10

We, also, live in a "foreign" land (our citizenship is in heaven).

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Philippians 3:20

We, too, have those who are opposed to prayer.

When he prayed he glorified God in spite of the opposition (and when we do, we glorify God).

The temptation to adopt the attitude of "when in Rome do as the Romans do" is great.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2

To hide one's faith for purposes of self-preservation violates what Jesus said:

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Opportunities to do good often come during difficult times.

"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." Philippians 1:12-14

Being determined (making up one's mind) is half the battle. Limping between two opinions is not good.

"Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him ...'" 1 Kings 18:21

Be determined not to be defiled, at all cost. It is absolutely vital. Moral and spiritual defilement are fatal.

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1

Give an inch, lose a mile. Compromise, like blackmail, knows no limit.

But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Hebrews 10:38-39

We need to conduct our lives consistent with our high calling.

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3

"For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body." 1 Corinthians 6:20

RIISING TO THE OCCASION

ESTHER

Esther (a star). The Persian name of Hadassah. (myrtle), daughter of Abihail, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Esther was a beautiful Jewish maiden. She was an orphan, and had been brought up by her cousin, Mordecai, who had an office in the household of Ahasuerus, king of Persia—supposed to be the Xerxes of history—and dwelt at “Shushan, the palace.” When Vashti was dismissed from being queen, the king chose Esther to the place of honor, on account of her beauty, not knowing her race or parentage. On the representation of Haman, the Agagite, that the Jews scattered through his empire were a pernicious race, the king gave Haman full power and authority to kill them all. The means taken by Esther to avert this great calamity from her people and her kindred are fully related in the book of Esther. The Jews still commemorate this deliverance in the yearly Festival of Purim, on the 14th and 15th of Adar (February, March).

– Smith’s Bible Dictionary

THE CHARACTERS

King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) 1:1-2
Queen Vashti 1:19 (who was dethroned)
Mordecai 2:5-6
Esther (Hadassah) 2:7,17

THE OCCASION

Mordecai, at the gate of the palace, hears about a plot to kill the king. 2:21
He informs Esther, who tells the king, identifying Mordecai as the informant. 2:22
Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman. 3:1-4
Enraged, Haman seeks to exterminate all Jews. 3:6-9

RIISING TO THE OCCASION

Mordecai asks Esther to intercede.
A difficult request. 4:7-8,13-14
It could mean death (4:11), but she agrees. 4:15-16
Esther succeeds in gaining a hearing before the king.
She invites the king and Haman to a banquet, but doesn’t reveal her request. 5:1-4
She plans a second banquet at which time she will divulge her request. 5:8
Haman is intoxicated with his good fortune, yet is outraged at Mordecai’s conduct. 5:9-14
The king, unable to sleep, is read the account of Mordecai the informant. 6:1-2
He decides to reward Mordecai. 6:3
Haman, supposing he is the one to be honored, recommends a generous reward. 6:4-10
Esther holds a second banquet for the king and Haman. 7:1
Esther reveals her identity and tells the fate of her people under the edict. 7:3-4
She names Haman as the culprit. 7:6
Haman begging for his life, is thought to be assaulting Esther.
Haman hanged on his own gallows, which were prepared for Mordecai.

RESULT OF HER ACTIONS

Mordecai is identified as relative of Esther and is promoted. 8:1-2
King Ahasuerus works with Esther to mitigate his edict (it couldn’t be rescinded). 8:8
Jews are allowed to defend themselves. 8:11
On the appointed day, with the help of officials, the Jews kill their enemies. 9:3
The Feast of Purim* is instituted to remember the occasion. 9:19,26-28

LESSONS CONCERNING ESTHER

When in a position to aid others, she risked her own life.
She was aware of the fate of Vashti.

She was aware of the consequences of entering the presence of the king uninvited.
She approached the king, at her peril, with a request.
She made a choice, "casting her lot with God's people."
She devised a plan and carried it out.
She used her intelligence to masterfully save her people.
She (and Mordecai) used their power to establish the memorial as law.

LESSONS

We must not be naive: we're at odds with the forces of evil.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
Ephesians 6:11-12

There are those who are outraged at our refusal to bow down to the gods of this world.

There are those who want to remove any vestige of God and His Son from the minds of the people.

We must be willing to risk our well-being, if necessary. (4:16b)

Ridicule, rebuff, rejection may be our lot.

Persecution may well be the outcome of standing up for Jesus.

Aquila and Priscilla risked their necks. Rom.16:3-4

The 12 Apostles, Paul, Silas, Timothy (Heb.13:23) were imprisoned.

Stephen and James were martyred. Act.8,12

We must use our God-given intelligence in striving against those who are opposed to Christianity and God's ways.

"Shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves." Mat.10:16

"Sons of this age are more shrewd." Luk.16:8

We must look out for the interests of others. Phi.2:1-4

We must use our position in life to aid the cause of Christ in the furtherance of the gospel.

Each disciple has a unique situation in life.

We, like Esther, must rise to whatever occasion arises.

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*PURIM (lots)

The annual festival instituted to commemorate the preservation of the Jews in Persia, from the massacre with which they were threatened, through the plot of Haman. They gave the name, Purim, or "Lots," to the commemorative festival, because he had thrown lots to ascertain what day would be favorable for him to carry into effect, the bloody decree which the king had issued at his instance.

The festival lasted two days, and was regularly observed on the 14th and 15th of Adar. According to modern custom, as soon as the stars begin to appear, when the 14th of the month has commenced, candles are lighted up in token of rejoicing, and the people assemble in the synagogue. After a short prayer and thanksgiving, the reading of the book of Esther commences.

The book is written in a peculiar manner, on a roll called "the Roll". When the reader comes to the name of Haman, the congregation cries out, "May his name be blotted out," or, "Let the name of the ungodly perish." When the Roll is read through, the whole congregation exclaims, "Cursed be Haman; blessed be Mordecai; cursed be Zoresh, (the wife of Haman); blessed be Esther; cursed be all idolaters; blessed be all Israelites, and blessed be Harbonah, who hanged Haman."

PERSISTENT PRAYER AND FAITHFUL COMMITMENT

Hannah

(Grace)

One of the two wives of Elkanah, an Ephraimite who lived at Ramathaim-zophim. Hannah visited Shiloh yearly with her husband to offer sacrifices, for there the tabernacle was located. She was greatly distressed because she was childless while Penninah had sons and daughters.

HANNAH

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Penninah. 1Sa.1:2-5

A double portion was given to Hannah (who was childless) to console her, which provoked Penninah. 1Sa.1:6-8

HER PRAYER

During one of the religious trips to Shiloh, she prays for a son. 1:10

She vows to dedicate him to the Lord. 1:11

Eli, the priest, misconstrues her actions. 1:12-16

Taken back by the nature of her prayer, he says, "May God grant your petition." 1:17-18

HER FAITHFUL COMMITMENT

A son is born to her; he is named Samuel. 1:20

Hannah keeps her vow of dedicating Samuel to the Lord. 1:22ff

Later, the Lord blesses her with 3 sons, 2 daughters. 2:21

HER CHARACTER

She trusted in God.

She continued to worship even in her sorrow and disappointment.

She took her distress to the Lord in prayer ("fervent prayer").

Her faith is evident in her prayer. 1Sa.2:1-10

Hannah never forgot Samuel. 2:18-19

LESSONS

We need to emulate her sterling qualities of faithfulness in prayer and commitment.

We are to worship God faithfully and continually ("in season and out").

Not worshiping only if things are "going our way."

Not to turn away from God when things go wrong.

(Satan said Job worshiped God only because God was good to him.)

We are to trust in God, relying on His power and His strength. 2Co.1:9, 1Pe.5:6-7

We should not trust in our own wisdom and strength alone.

Fervent prayer conveys to God the depth of our earnestness. Jam.5:16b

Our word is to be our bond.

Promises and vows are not to be lightly made.

"It is a trap for a man to say rashly, 'It is holy!' And after the vows to make inquiry." Pro.20:25

Promises are to be kept. It's tempting to "reconsider" promises made under duress.

We must not seek clever ways to avoid keeping promises.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Eli the priest

His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are worthless men. 2:12

He's a weak father. 2:22-25, 3:13

House of Eli is devastated by the death of his two sons. 2:33-34 (cf. 3:11-14)

Upon hearing the news of their deaths, Eli falls and breaks his neck and dies. 4:14-18

Samuel

God speaks to him. 3:1-21

Later he is made a judge in Israel.

He is commissioned to anoint Saul as king.

He is sent to rebuke Saul in the matter of the Amalekites.

He anoints David as king.

Born as a result of a barren woman's fervent prayer, he became great in Israel.

DISCUSS:

Ways in which promises and oaths are supposedly "strengthened" or "nullified."

DOING WHAT YOU CAN WHERE YOU ARE

Joseph

Next to the youngest of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), he was Jacob's favorite son by Rachel in his old age. Rachel later died giving birth to Benjamin (the youngest). Joseph's dreams, which indicated he would be superior to his brothers, angered them.

FROM BEING FAVORED TO BEING IN DESPAIR

His brothers turned against him. They wanted to kill him, but Reuben intervened. Instead, they sold him to some traveling Ishmaelites. Gen.37:26-28
Joseph was about 17 years old at the time. Gen.37:2
He was later sold at a slave market in Egypt to Potiphar. Gen.39:1

THE WAY UP

He became a successful and trusted servant. Gen.39:2-6
He was intelligent, industrious, energetic, reliable, and handsome.
Things looked up for Joseph. The Lord was with him.
He did what he could where he was. Gen.39:22-23

THE WAY DOWN

He rebuffed Potiphar's wife's continual advances.
Scorned, she falsely accuses Joseph. Gen.39:7ff (19)
He is thrown into jail. Gen.39:20
Things look bleak, however, the Lord was with him. Gen.39:21a,23
He did what he could where he was. Gen.39:22-23

THE WAY OUT

He earned the favor of the jailor and was made a supervisor of prisoners.
Gen.39:21-23
He interprets the dream of cupbearer and the baker. Gen.40:1ff
The cupbearer forgets the promise he made to Joseph. Gen.40:20-23
Two years later, Pharaoh has a dream (which no one could interpret); the cupbearer remembers Joseph. Gen.41:1ff
Joseph interprets the dream. Gen.41:25
Joseph is made prime minister. Gen.41:39-44 (He was about 30 years old :46)
The daughter of the priest was given to him as a wife.
She bore two sons: Manasseh ("causing to forget") and Ephraim ("God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.")
Joseph prospers. The Lord was with him.
He did what he could where he was. Gen.39:22-23

THE WAY HOME

His brothers are sent to Egypt to buy provisions during a famine.
Joseph had the opportunity to punish his brothers, but chose not to.
He offered forgiveness and sought to once again to be united with his father's house.
He became the means of preserving the family in Egypt.
He did what he could where he was.

JOSEPH SURVIVED BECAUSE

The Lord was with him.
He put his trust in God, rather than blame God or others.
He made the best of even the worst situation.
He did not seek revenge. Because he came to understand "the Lord was with him."
He did what he could where he was.

LESSON FOR US

To survive the up and downs of life one must:

- put their trust in God.** Pro.3:5
- not question God’s providence (ways).** Rom.9:20
- not turn away from God during trials.** Rather, they draw nearer to God. Jam.4:8
- make the best of bad situations.** 2Co.12:9
- not attempt to “pay back” those who harm.** (returning evil for evil). Rom.12:17

A DETERMINED SPIRIT

Ruth

A Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, whose father, Elimelech, had settled in the land of Moab. On the death of Elimelech and Mahlon, Naomi came with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, who refused to leave her, to Bethlehem, the old home from which Elimelech had migrated. There she had a rich relative, Boaz, to whom Ruth was eventually married. She became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David. Thus Ruth, a Gentile, is among the maternal progenitors of our Lord (Mat.1:5). The story of “the gleaner Ruth illustrates the friendly relations between the good Boaz and his reapers, the Jewish land system, the method of transferring property from one person to another, the working of the Mosaic law for the relief of distressed and ruined families; but, above all, handing down the unselfishness, the brave love, the unshaken trustfulness of her who, though not of the chosen race, was, like the Canaanitess Tamar (Gen.38:29; Mat.1:3) and the Canaanitess Rahab (Mat.1:5), privileged to become the ancestress of David, and so of ‘great David’s greater Son’ (Rut.4:18-22).

– SMITH’S BIBLE DICTIONARY

RUTH

Elimelech and Naomi, with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, sojourn in Moab because of a famine in Bethlehem.

Elimelech dies; Naomi is cared for by their two sons. 1:3

The two sons marry. Chilion marries Orpah, Mahlon marries Ruth. 1:4 (4:10)

Ten years later, both sons die having fathered no children.

Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. 1:7

She encourages her daughters-in-law to return to their families. 1:8

Orpah tearfully returns, Ruth is determined to go with Naomi. 1:16-18

Ruth determines to provide for them by gleaning in the fields. 2:2

She gleanes in Boaz’s field. The taskmaster informs Boaz of her presence. 2:6-7

Boaz treats her kindly, offers protection, and grants favors.

Naomi, informed of Boaz’ actions, devises a plan to have him redeem Ruth. 3:1-2a

Ruth, with determination, carries out the plan (actually a proposal).

Boaz is willing, but faces obstacles. 3:12

A close relative must relinquish the right of redemption. 4:1-6

Boaz redeems the land and Ruth. 4:9-10

Ruth gives birth to a son, Obed.

LESSONS FOR US

Determine to do something. “I will.”

Determination is the product of rational thought. 1:16-17

Firm decisions are the key to overcoming hardships.

Resoluteness is a prime motivator. 1:19

Determine to take charge. 2:2

Abstain from a “woe is me” attitude; don’t wallow in the mire of self-pity.

Do all that you can for yourself; don’t expect others to “bail you out.”

Look for solutions; don’t close any doors.

For the most part, life is what you make it.

Determine to be willing to work. 2:7

Don’t be “too proud to beg, too lazy to work.” (Cf. Luk.16:3)

Honest labor shows and builds strong character.

Carry your own burden. Gal.6:5, 1Th.4:11, 2Th.3:7-10

Determine to listen to wise counsel. 3:5

Take full advantage of wise counsel. Tit.2:3-5

Determine to respect what is right and honorable. 3:13

Rules, especially God's, must be followed. 2Co.8:21

Right of redemption was not circumvented.

Godliness has its reward here and hereafter. 1Ti.4:8b-9

Notes:

MOAB: area east of the Dead Sea with high rolling hills and good pasture.

GLEAN: a custom based on Deu.24:19-21 (Lev.23:22)

REDEEMER (*goel*). Since the rights of redemption belonged to the next-of-kin, *goel* came to mean "nearest kinsman."

THE SCARS OF FOOLISHNESS

Samson

The son of Manoah, a man of the town of Zorah in the tribe of Dan, on the border of Judah. (B.C. 1161). The miraculous circumstances of his birth are recorded in Judges 13; and the three following chapters are devoted to the history of his life and exploits. Samson takes his place in Scripture, (1) as a judge – an office which he filled for twenty years, (2) as a Nazarite, and (3) as one endowed with supernatural power by the Spirit of the Lord. Intelligent, witty, and strong, he was made weak by carelessness and indiscretion.

– SMITH'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

SAMSON

Son of Manoah (Danite) Jdg. 13:21-24

He was born in response to an angel appearing.

He was to be a Nazarite from birth.

He was sent to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines.

MARRIAGE TO A PHILISTINE

His proposed marriage to a Philistine woman. 14:1ff

His parents are concerned about such a union. 14:3-4

He encounters a lion along the road to Timnah. 14:5-9

The spirit of Lord came upon Him and he kills the lion (:6)

At the marriage feast he proposes a riddle. 14:10-20

Threatened, his bride-to-be presses Samson for the answer.

He tells her and she tells those who threatened her and her family.

The spirit of Lord came upon him: he kills thirty Philistines. (:19)

Later he returns for his wife. But her father had given her to another man. 15:1ff

Samson set loose some foxes with fire to run through the fields. 15:4-5

As a result there is death and slaughter. 15:6-8

Men of Judah appease the Philistines by handing Samson over to them. 15:9-13

The spirit of the Lord came upon him and he breaks the bonds and slays many.

15:14-15

Being thirsty; God grants his requests. 15:18-19

JUDGE IN ISRAEL

He judges Israel for twenty years. 15:20

EVENTS IN GAZA

Gaza was a stronghold of the Philistines. 16:1

He goes into a harlot; his enemy lie in wait. 16:2

On leaving the city at night, he tears off the locked doors of the city gate. 16:3

EVENTS IN THE VALLEY OF SOREK (NEAR GAZA)

He loves Delilah who lived there. 16:4-20

Her three requests concerning his great strength and how he may be bound to be afflicted, were purposely given three incorrect answers:

Seven fresh cords :7

New ropes :11

Weave seven locks of hair into web :13

Samson reveals his heart to Delilah. :16ff

His head is shaved while he sleeps; awakened he could not break the bonds.

The spirit of Lord departs. :20

The Philistines take him and put his eyes out.

He is taken to Gaza where he becomes a grinder in the prison. :21

DESTRUCTION OF THE PHILISTINES

His strength returns; he asks God one final request: *“O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”*
16:23-31

Brought into their temple to amuse the crowd, he causes the roof to cave in on himself and all the Philistines.

He killed more Philistines in his death than he killed in his life.

LESSONS FOR US

Marriage to an unbeliever is a cause for concern.

Great strength or ability can be a liability, if used improperly.

Unbridled passion can cause all kinds of problems.

Physical attraction is not enough in choosing a mate. (“She looked good to me”)

Sex outside of marriage leads to a downfall. (He went into a harlot.)

Loving an evil person brings disaster every time. (He loved Delilah)

We are tempted through our own weaknesses. (His sensuality)

Faithful Christians can be laid low by indiscretions. (Blinded and enslaved)

A person set on evil intentions doesn’t give up after the first rebuff. (Delilah persisted.)

Deliverance from one trial is no guarantee against future trouble. (He had vowed to stop his retaliations.)

The scars of sin are borne for a lifetime.

MAY WE LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS

If we don’t, we are consigned to repeat them.

BEAUTY WITH DISCRETION

Vashti

Old Persian: “beautiful woman.” On the 7th day of a great feast which the king was giving to the assembled nobles of the empire and others, he commanded the seven chamberlains who served in his presence to bring the queen into the assembly. His purpose was to show the princes her beauty. The king’s command was met by Vashti with a mortifying refusal to obey. The refusal brought about a punishment severe enough to reestablish the supremacy which it threatened to overthrow. She was accordingly dethroned.

– USBE

Text: Esther 1:1-19

THE FEAST

Under the influence of wine the king calls for Vashti to appear at the feast.

It was a violation of national custom for the queen (or any respectable woman) to be paraded before a crowd of men for the purpose of being gazed at.

Vashti felt it was an outrage against a queen’s modesty.

She saw it degrading of her dignity as his wife.

Her refusal was unprecedented.

The King was angry over her refusal.

Concerned that a dangerous precedent might be set, he takes action.

Vashti is dethroned in disgrace by a special edict.
(But she stands vindicated in eyes of the godly.)

LESSONS FOR US

Drinking dulls judgment. Pro.31:4-5; 23:31-35

“When wine is in, wit is out.”

Drugs (including alcohol) reduces the effect of desirable inhibitions. Pro.20:1

Don’t seek to punish one who refuses to respond to an indiscrete request.

Better to own up to one’s own foolishness than to become angry.

Calls for a cheap, sensuous display of beauty still come from immoral trend-setters who disdain the principles of modesty.

Today’s media advocates improper behavior, adding fuel to lust.

Some clothing designers exploit a woman’s desire to be attractive.

Beauty without discretion is repulsive. Pro.11:22

Discretion must be maintained. 1Pe.3:1-5

Taste: judgment, discernment, reason, sensible. Tit.2:5 (“inward beauty”)

One is not to act like those “famous for beauty, infamous for immodesty.”

There are, and always will be, women who lack discretion (“sex symbols”).

Such exploit and seduce with feminine wiles.

(The daughter of Herodias, Salome, and her counterparts are around today.)

They are a disgrace to womanhood. Pro.11:22

Any stand for modesty has it’s “cost”– the opposition of those who don’t agree.

Vashti lost her crown, but kept her dignity and virtue.

Jesus taught “count the cost.” Luk.14:28-29

Proper adorning is precious in God’s eyes. 1Ti.2:9-10

1 Peter 3:4b “... holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves”

Godly men ought to encourage, support and approve women’s modesty, dignity and custom (approved of God).

In the providence of God, her refusal opened the way for events which kept the Jews from annihilation.

A LIFE CHANGING ENCOUNTER

Jacob

Jacob (supplanter). The second son of Isaac and Rebekah. He was the twin of Esau. He bought the birthright from his brother Esau, and afterward, acquired the blessing intended for Esau, by deceit. Jacob was sent from the family home to avoid his brother, and to seek a wife among his kindred in Padan-aram. As he passed through Bethel, God appeared to him. For twenty years he served Laban and prospered with the help of God. He returned from Padan-aram with two wives, two concubines, eleven sons and a daughter, and large property. He deceived Laban by not revealing his plan to leave, and was pursued by his angry father-in-law. After a night of wrestling with an angel at Jabbok, his name was changed to Israel.

– Source: Smith Bible Dictionary

HIS ENCOUNTERS

Encounters with Esau.

Encounter with Isaac.

Encounter with Laban.

Encounter with angels and the Lord. Gen.28:10-22

Encounter wherein he wrestled with a man (an angel) (God)* and prevailed. Gen.32:24-30

The design of this encounter was to revive the sinking spirit of the patriarch and to arm him with confidence in God, while anticipating the dreaded scenes of the morrow.

He contended with man and now, God. Through the encounters with God, Jacob became a changed individual: changed into the person whose faith and trust was in God.

His name was changed to Israel (the prince that prevails with God) Gen.32:28, Hos.12:4

Israel became the national name of the twelve tribes collectively. Exo.3:16

LESSONS FOR US

Deceitfulness produces problems.

“Taking matters into our own hands” and not leaving them in God’s hands is sure to bring grief and guilt. Rom.12:17-19

Some events in our lives will be “life-changing.”

God’s ways will prevail and we should accept and not question them. Rom.9:10-13

We should have courage to meet the trials to which we are subjected, knowing that God hears our prayers and watches over us. Joh.9:31, 1Pe.3:12

God allows us to ascribe to the effectiveness of our faith and prayers the victories which His grace alone enables us to make. Jam.5:16

DISCUSSION:

Name some other characters in the Bible who experienced “life-changing” encounters.

Positively or negatively.

What are some “life-changing encounters” you have experienced?

In each encounter does a person have the freedom to decide how to respond?

F.Y.I.

JACOB’S SONS Gen.35:23-26

by **Leah**: Reuben (Jacob’s first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun

by **Rachel**: Joseph, Benjamin

by **Bilhah**, Rachel’s maid: Dan, Naphtali

by **Zilpah**, Leah’s maid: Gad, Asher

* The mysterious person is called an angel (Hos.12:4) and God (Gen.32:28, Gen.32:30; Hos.12:5)

A PEBBLE IN HIS SHOE

Haman

The son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He was the chief minister of King Ahasuerus. After the failure of his attempt to cut off all the Jews in the Persian empire, he was hanged on the gallows which he had erected for Mordecai. The Targum and Josephus interpret the inscription of him – “the Agagite”– as signifying that he was of Amalekitish descent. The Jews hiss whenever his name is mentioned on the Day of Purim*.

A LIFE FILLED WITH PARADOXES

Promoted but enraged. 3:1-5

His anger prompts a desire to destroy all the Jews.

Elation but full of anger. 5:9-13

His wife’s suggestion. 5:14

Elevated opinion of self, but frustrated at the lack of respect by Mordecai. 6:6-13

His wife’s prophetic statement.

Dined with the king and queen but was condemned by them. 7:1,7

Begging for life, his actions are misconstrued by the king.

He is hanged on his own gallows.

Planned extermination of Mordecai’s people, but his own house was destroyed.

His ten sons also are hanged. 9:13-14

His possessions are given to Mordecai, the one he hated. 8:2

A man who should have been happy, but was miserable.

A man who had success in his grasp and threw it away.

A man who had much to be proud of, yet his pride became his downfall.

LESSONS FOR US

Life’s little irritants, if not checked, can lead to big problems.

Harsh judgments by others need to be handled properly. 1Co.4:3-4

Spare yourself by not giving “the time of day” to some actions. Pro.19:11

Slightings by others need to be viewed as their problem, not yours.

Anger needs to be controlled. Eph.4:26-27

Often anger is a spontaneous emotion—it must be quelled early on. Pro.14:29

A gentle response can stem another’s anger. Pro.15:1

The only thing a hot temper will put one in is “hot water.” Pro.15:18

One needs to be slow to anger. Pro.16:32

Anger left unchecked can only lead to strife. Pro.30:33

Revenge is bittersweet.

What sounds so appetizing in the beginning usually turns sour.

Much can be lost in seeking to “repay” for what another person did.

Let God handle it. Rom.12:19

Hatred

Hatred is not wrong in itself. God hates. Pro.6:16-19

Hate is a strong emotion. It must be properly directed: Hate the things God hates. Hate for the right reasons.

An evil person put in the place of power presents a problem.

Pro.28:15, 29:4

An elevated opinion of oneself leads to a fall.

Not “may”, but “will”. Not “if” but “when.”

Pro.11:2, Rom.12:3, 1Co.10:12-13

When power “goes to one’s head,” devastation is not far off.

Pro.16:18, 18:12, 21:24

When one fights against God, he is sure to lose.

Act.5:38-39

LISTENING TO BAD ADVICE

Rehoboam

Son of Solomon, by the Ammonite princess, Naamah, and his successor. Rehoboam selected Shechem as the place of his coronation, probably as an act of concession to the Ephraimites. The people demanded a remission of the severe burdens imposed by Solomon, and Rehoboam, rejecting the advice of his father's counselors, followed that of his young courtiers, and returned an insulting answer, which led to an open rebellion among the tribes, and he was compelled to flee to Jerusalem, Judah and Benjamin alone remaining true to him. (A brief look at Jeroboam under Solomon's rule add clarity to Rehoboam's rejection by the Ephraimites.)

JEROBOAM REBELS AGAINST SOLOMON

As the chief officer in charge of the forced labor of the house of Joseph, he rebelled against the king for "building the Millo, and closing up the breaches of the city of his father David."

1Ki.9:22-23, 11:26-27

The prophet Ahijah tells him what God plans to do. 1Ki.11:29-39

Perceived as a threat to the monarchy, Solomon seeks to put him to death. He flees to Egypt.

1Ki.11:40.

Upon the death of Solomon, the Ephraimites send for him, and he was present when Rehoboam came to Shechem to be inaugurated as king. 1Ki.12:1-3

EPHRAIM'S CONDITIONS AND DEMANDS

Relief from forced labor and heavy levies. 1Ki.12:4

REHOBAM'S REPLY

Rejects the wise counsel of the older men.

Accepts the counsel of the young men.

"My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." 1 Kings 12:5

LESSONS FOR US

We need to listen. Jam.1:19

We often hear bad advice as well as good advice. We need to listen to what is best.

It may not be what we want to hear.

It may seem that we have to pay attention to the needs of others.

Heeding bad advice may provide what we want, but the consequences are not far off.

Pro.12:15, 13:10

We should never seek to harm those who seem to threaten our position or authority.

Our decision must not be based on the emotions of the moment. Eph.4:26, Jam.1:20

Pride can be our downfall. Pro.16:18

A gentle answer turns away wrath. Pro.15:1, 21:24, 29:23

DISCUSSION

The Egyptian influence upon Jeroboam in making the two golden calves.

LOST VALUES

Esau

The eldest son of Isaac, and twin brother of Jacob. The singular appearance of the child at his birth originated the name. Esau's robust frame and "rough" aspect were the types of a wild and daring nature. He was a thorough Bedouin, a "son of the desert." He was much loved by his father, and was, of course, his heir, but was induced to sell his birthright to Jacob. The next episode in the life of Esau is the loss of his father's covenant blessing, which Jacob secured through the craft of his mother, and the anger of Esau, who vows vengeance.

– SMITH'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

LOST BIRTHRIGHT

He sold his birthright for food when he was famished. Gen.25:29-34

LOST BLESSING

Jacob deceived Isaac and received the blessing intended for Esau. Gen.27:30-38
Afterwards, there was no way to change what Isaac did; no amount of tears could reverse what had been done. Heb.12:16-17

LESSONS

Does everyone "have their price?"

What will one give in exchange for their soul? Mar.8:34-37

Three avenues of temptation:

Lust of flesh, lust of eye, pride of life. 1Jo.2:15-16

Jesus was tempted by these three. Mat 4:1-10

In moments of weaknesses we are vulnerable.

Gal.6:1 **overtaken**: caught by surprise, causing a slip or lapse; not a wilful act.

As Peter, fearing being identified as a follower of Jesus, denied Him.

Our adversary is like a roaring lion. 1Pe.5:8

Some who lost sight of what was right.

King Ahab—His garden was more important than Naboth's life.

Judas—money was more important than faithful allegiance.

Ananias and Sapphira—notoriety was more important than telling the truth.

Demas—"Departed...having loved this present world." 2Tim.4:10

DISCUSSION

What will some do for fame?

What will some do to gain wealth?

What will some do to gain power?

What will some do to enjoy luxury?

What will some do to have an easy life?

What will some do to remain in the good graces of their families.

A POOR CHOICE

Lot

Lot was the son of Haran and nephew of Abraham. Lot, whose father died in Ur, traveled with his grandfather to Haran. Terah had intended to travel to Canaan, but stayed in Haran instead. When Abraham left Haran for Canaan, he was accompanied by Lot and Lot's household. After traveling throughout Canaan and into Egypt, Abraham and Lot finally settled between Bethel and Ai, about ten miles north of Jerusalem. Abraham and Lot acquired herds and flocks so large that the land was unable to support both. In addition, the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot did not get along. Thus, to secure ample pasture lands for their flocks and to avoid any further trouble, Abraham suggested they separate. Abraham allowed Lot to take his choice of the land. Lot took advantage of Abraham's generosity and chose the well-watered Jordan Valley where the city of Sodom was located. All in all, things did not look as good for Lot as they might at first glance appear when he chose to live in the well-watered Jordan Valley. Not only was the Jordan Valley attractive to herdsmen like Lot, but the riches of this valley were also attractive to foreign kings. Prominent among them was Chedorlaomer who, along with three other kings, captured and sacked Sodom, taking Lot as prisoner. Abraham, upon hearing of Lot's fate, gathered an army and rescued his nephew.

– HOLMAN BIBLE DICTIONARY

POOR CHOICE

Lot based his choice on outward and earthly motives.

He chose the best part of the country, that was convenient for his flocks and herds, and where he was most likely to increase his substance.

There seems to be a lack of concern about the inhabitants' evil ways. Gen.13:13

His choice produced monumental problems for him and his family.

The last mention of him finds him living in caves out of fear. Gen.19:29-30

POOR CHOICES

Choosing wisdom of the world over the wisdom of God. Jam.3:12-17, 1Co.118-21

Choosing friends and associates on the basis of appearance.

We are not to look at outward appearances. God doesn't. 1Sa.16:7

Choosing to judge others according to appearance. Joh.7:24

We are not to give preference to the rich and famous. Jam.2:1-4

A faithful believer in God cannot be identified by outward appearance. Rom.2:28

Choosing a mate on the basis of outward appearance.

Inward beauty is "soul-deep" unlike outward beauty which is only "skin deep."

1Pe.3:3-4, Pro.11:22, 31:30

Choosing worldly mates and friends thinking that they will not affect your spirituality.

1Co.15:33

Choosing activities based on "what I want to do" without regard for what is best.

Some things are not profitable and edifying. 1Co.6:12, 10:23

Choosing which religious acts to engage in based on the appearance of wisdom.

Col.2:20-23

Choosing to emulate those who achieve success by hurting others. Pro.3:31

LESSON:

Many choices we make incur life-long consequences.

Moses. Heb.11:25; Israelites. Jos.24:15; Saul of Tarsus (Paul the Apostle) Act.26:9

It's much easier to avoid consequences rather than attempt to disentangle oneself.

DISCUSSION:

What choices do you consider to be very important in living the Christian life?

What are some **hard choices** early Christians had to make?

What are some **hard choices we may have to make** as a Christian?

