

Women of the Old Testament



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An Emmaus Bible Study Course

INTRODUCTION

*'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son,
made of a woman, made under the law...' Galatians 4:4*

The ultimate purpose of God is bound up in His Son. He was born of Mary into the nation of Israel and the women of Old Testament times will be studied alongside the emergence and development of that people and nation, establishing the significance of their lives in the unfolding purposes of the Lord.

Starting with primeval times in the Garden of Eden and ending with the sophistication and corruption of an oriental palace - from Eve to Esther - we will see our counterparts in the Word of God. The Bible speaks strongly through its characters and although the everyday life of Old Testament women might bear little resemblance to our technological global age, their duties and dilemmas were no different from our own and their strengths and weaknesses will be easily recognized. But pre-eminently, their God is our God and His mercy and longsuffering, His reproofs and His rewards, can be the same to ourselves as it was to them.

When you have read through each lesson carefully, write down your answers to the questions then use the back arrow ↶ at the top left of your screen to return to the website menu. Click on '**EXAM FORM A**'.

Complete this Form, including your answers and click '**SUBMIT**'.
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Chapter 1 PRIMEVAL HISTORY - CREATION Eve - 'Life-Giver' - Genesis

a. Creation Chapters 1 & 2

The great central truth of Genesis is life - life through the word and power of Almighty God. And the divine record of the beginning of all things culminates in the creation of the parents of the human race. 'Let us make man in our image...male and female created He them,' 1:26-27.

The creation of Eve differed from that of Adam. She was made like him in the image of God and she was equal with him in dominion, provision and commandment, vs.26-29, but the method and purpose of her creation was quite distinct from that of the man.

Adam stood alone before God, 2:18-20. Amongst the animal kingdom nothing answered to Adam's need for a companion and this was 'not good' - so God brought woman into being, created specifically for the man. She was to be his counterpart and his complement, without whom he was unfulfilled and incomplete. Eve was literally part of Adam, built from his rib - not fashioned from the dust, not breathed into by God - she came out of Adam and his life became her life.

'And God brought her to the man,' 2:22. This was His gift to Adam, who immediately recognized Eve as the completion of his joy. Here was the perfect companion; able to share in the dignity and responsibility of dominion and able to enjoy with him the beauties and provisions of paradise. But more than that, for in the woman God had created a being who in *herself* would give pleasure and happiness; thus marriage was ordained by God in the Garden of Eden.

b. Probation 2:15-17

The physical beauty of Eden had the added dimension of a spiritual harmony and peace. No anger, fear, doubt or confusion marred the daily life of animal or man and Adam and Eve walked in undisturbed fellowship with their Creator - yet they had been placed under trial. Adam and Eve, as moral beings, had to be tested by God. Just as their physical and mental attributes were provided for, so their moral faculties needed exercise to develop and mature, 2:16-17. Adam and Eve were no puppets. They could understand, deliberate and make a choice, 2:19-20.

Made in the image of God and endowed with the gift of free will, the first man and the first woman had the choice of life or death - holiness and life through obedience, sinfulness and death through disobedience. One simple command had been given to them by the Lord, 'but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.'

c. Temptation and Fall 3:1-7

God's command had raised no problems for Adam and Eve. It was simply a prohibition, but Satan cleverly made it a problem by raising a question, a doubt in Eve's mind. 'Did God really say...?' 3:1 NIV. The woman had always accepted that everything said or done by the Lord was for their good and blessing, but now the woman began to question God's love and her mind became occupied with that single restraint, to which she added another restriction 'and you must not touch it,' which was simply untrue, cp. 2:17.

Doubt had been planted, now for the seeds of discontent, vs.5. God was keeping them from becoming like Him! The Lord had given them permission to eat freely from every

tree in the garden save one, and Eve began to feel a sense of deprivation. She wanted more than she had been entrusted with - more food, more pleasure, more wisdom. The sweet taste of independence beckoned as well as the tree, v6.

Eve succumbed long before she reached out for the fruit. The moment she allowed Satan to question the love of God and to plant doubts in her mind, she began to lose confidence in the goodness of God and the truth of His word. It was only a step from that to outright disobedience. She drew her husband into the web of sin and death and without a word of protest, Adam - who was not deceived, took the fruit from his wife and shared her fall. Immediately, shame replaced innocence and Eve's privileged destiny was marred for ever by Satan's deception, her own impulsiveness and her lack of dependence upon God and His word.

d. Banishment 3:8-24

For the first time, the prospect of meeting the Lord brought fear to Adam and Eve. Trees given for pleasure and refreshment must now provide a hiding place from the presence of God. But the Lord sought them out and gave them the opportunity to explain. 'What is this you have done?' reflected the sorrow of a Father's heart and was a loving appeal to the one who had doubted His goodness and wisdom.

But the questions brought no repentance or self judgment, rather accusation and self justification. Adam blamed 'the woman you gave me' and Eve blamed the serpent. Both told the truth but shifted the responsibility away from themselves and Eve's first sorrow was to see her husband, who should have taken the lead and exercised his authority, lay the blame for his own disobedience on herself.

So judgment was declared. God's word consigned the serpent to a life of degradation and hostility. Adam's work would become 'painful toil' as he wrested the necessities of life from a ground cursed through his own sin and forbidden now to yield its fruits, save by hard labour. The judgment on Eve was more personal, involving her body in the pain of childbirth and her soul in her changed relationship to man, v16. The supremacy of the man over the woman would become the rule, rather than the willing subjection of the woman to the man in mutual love and esteem. Finally, both man and woman would be subject to death - returning to the dust from which Adam had been created.

But Adam named his wife, Eve - life. His faith embraced God's promise that the human race i.e. physical life, would be guaranteed through the woman. And ultimately spiritual life, spoiled by the deception of Satan and the disobedience of Adam and Eve, would be restored by the seed of the woman - the Incarnate Son of God.

Before their banishment from the garden God clothed the man and woman in animal skins - His mercy and goodness providing a covering for their shame and adequate clothing for a hostile environment. Eden, with its tree of life, could be their home no longer, 3:22.

Eve, always remembered as the one who *was deceived* and who fell, must be a warning to all who act independently of God. Satan's subtle words to the woman denied the word of God and without reference to either her husband or the Lord, Eve reached out and took the fruit which promised everything she felt she was missing. But the one thing missing in Eve's life at that moment was humility - had she been clothed with *this* grace neither fig leaves nor animal skins would have been necessary.

e. Motherhood 4:1-16

Cain (possession) and Abel (emptiness) reflect the joys and sorrows of motherhood. Cain brought new life, he was a gift from God and Eve rejoiced when he was born. But somehow, Abel brought an awareness of the frailty of life and Eve began to understand what was involved in their sin.

Abel grew up to be a man of spiritual understanding, 4:4, in contrast to his brother Cain. He refused the word of God and murdered Abel, not in a sudden fit of jealous anger but with cold calculation, as he gave way to the power of evil pressing into his heart and mind, v7, cp.1 Peter 5:8. So the ultimate consequence of their doubt and disobedience came with awful reality to Adam and Eve as they experienced the double tragedy of bereavement and separation, v16.

Eve never forgot the death of her second son nor the guilt of Cain, 4:25. God had said, 'In sorrow you shall bring forth children...' 3:16 and Eve learned, as all mothers learn, that the birth of a child can sometimes be only the beginning of the sorrow.

f. Conclusion

Eve, the first woman and mother of all living, mirrored in her life and experiences the feelings of every woman, the cares and joys of all mothers. The contemporary viewed in antiquity, the past reproduced in the present.

Eve undervalued her surroundings and her position in the order of creation. The one who was given, in her own being, such glorious privileges, reached out for something more. She allowed herself to be deceived, thoroughly deceived, closing her eyes to all she had been granted to enjoy, opening them specifically to the one thing forbidden. Humility, dependence, acknowledgement of her need would have protected her. But Satan knew his prey and his poisoned tongue found its way into the woman's mind - open and ready to listen, and acted upon her nature - impulsive and eager.

Could Eve have imagined where her independence and disobedience would lead? Ultimately it was to the graveside of Abel where she learned that death inflicts its agony on the living. Her firstborn, condemned as a fugitive and banished to the east of Eden, taught her that a mother's love cares not whether the child is worthy of it. In the exile of Cain, Eve too was marked - with sorrow.

But God 'Who is rich in mercy' Ephesians 2:4, gave Eve another son and the birth of Seth (appointed one, compensation) brought her renewed faith and fresh hope. Her faith was to be justified, for Seth was the ancestor of many righteous men, 5:7 ff., and Eve's union with Adam was blessed by many children, 1:28; 5:4. Faithful to each other, enduring family trials and sorrows, Adam and Eve supported and loved one another as God had ordained. For marriage was established in Eden by divine institution and is neither a Christian custom nor a legal contract, not a restriction on happiness, but the way of blessing.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

Genesis 2:18-25 cp. Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:31-33.

1. Marriage ordained by God in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:1-7 cp. 1 Tim 2:14; 2. Cor 11:3.
2. Unlike Adam, who was not deceived, Eve was thoroughly deceived by the serpent.
Genesis 3:6 cp. Ephesians 5:21-24; 1. Peter 5:5-8.
3. Eve's lack of humility and submission led to her downfall. Gen 3:16-19 cp. Rom 5:12; 8:22.
4. God's judgment on Adam and Eve.
5. Genesis 3:14-15, 20 cp. Hebrews 2:14-15; I John 3:8.

The restoration of spiritual fellowship through Christ and the destruction of Satan.

CHAPTER 1 EXAM EVE

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The great central truth of Genesis is
 - a. nature
 - b. the family
 - c. life
 - d. good and evil

2. Eve was God's gift to Adam; she was created to be
 - a. a mother to bear his sons
 - b. his completion and joy
 - c. a partner for his youth
 - d. a comfort in his old age

3. Adam and Eve were moral beings; God tested them with
 - a. a special task
 - b. a simple command
 - c. a problem to solve
 - d. a challenge to overcome

4. Satan raised a doubt in Eve's mind and she began to question God's
 - a. wisdom
 - b. power
 - c. love
 - d. righteousness

5. Eve's disobedience had its roots in
 - a. Satan's deception
 - b. her own impulsiveness
 - c. her lack of dependence on God and His word
 - d. all of the above

6. God's question, "What is this you have done?" Genesis 3:13, reflected
 - a. his sorrow
 - b. his anger
 - c. his surprise
 - d. his regret

7. Adam's response to God's charge, Genesis 3. 11, was to
 - a. blame the Lord
 - b. blame his wife
 - c. blame their easy life
 - d. blame the serpent

8. Cain killed his brother Abel
 - a. by accident
 - b. in a sudden fit of rage
 - c. because of a family feud
 - d. with a calculated hatred

9. Eve was thoroughly deceived by Satan; she should have
 - a. asserted her rights
 - b. acknowledged her need
 - c. thought things through
 - d. ignored the serpent

10. Marriage was established in Eden by the Lord and is
 - a. a Christian custom
 - b. God's way of blessing
 - c. a legal contract
 - d. all of the above

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Eve's disobedience of God's Word had disastrous consequences. What is your attitude towards God's Word?

Chapter 2

PATRIARCHAL HISTORY - THE FAMILY

Sarah and Hagar - Mothers of Isaac and Ishmael - Genesis

1. Sarah

Introduction 11:27-31; 12:1-9

At the very beginning of the history of Sarah, the two most important factors of her life are brought simply but vividly to our notice -

- i. 'she had no child' 11:30
- ii. '...and Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south' 12:9

In a review of the lives of some Old Testament characters, the Hebrew epistle tells us 'these all died in *faith*'. Sarah was amongst those named and her life story recounts, not only the trial of infertility and the pressures of a nomadic life style, but the heartache and struggles of her soul, as she gradually realised that faith, and grew in the knowledge of the living God.

b. Canaan and Egypt Chapter 12.

God's promise to Abram that he would become a great nation, was dependent upon his obedience to God's word, vs1-2. Abram was never promised a settled home in the land - he and his household were to move from place to place, travelling within Canaan, living in tents.

But although denied what many would consider the two most precious possessions for a woman, a settled home and a family, Sarai accepted her nomadic life style. Loyal, supportive, she never questioned her husband's exercise and obedience to the word of God. She created a *home* wherever they settled, in which every member of the household was included in a covenant relationship with God and trained for the varied experiences of life, 17:9-13; 14:14-16; 18:7.

Friends, family had all been left behind in Ur and Haran and there could never be any fellowship with the idol worshippers of Canaan. As Abram built his altars and called on the name of the Living God, Sarai learned that they must walk alone in the land, with their faith in God and their trust in His promises, cp. Genesis. 14: 22-23.

But times and circumstances changed, '....and Abram went down into Egypt', v10. Where now was the man of vision, the man who built altars and called on the name of the Lord? The daily grind of a terrible famine and concern for his large household had sapped Abram's spiritual vigour and dulled his vision of the living God. Famine, fear and lack of faith drove Abram out of the land, only to give rise to another fear because of the beauty of Sarai. Abram had not yet learned to trust God for the immediate as well as the ultimate and his independent action led him further away from God into a dilemma which gave rise to compromise, involving Sarai in real moral danger. Her feelings are not recorded, only her obedience to Abram's command. But through the grace and mercy of God, Sarai was protected from any wrong relationship in Pharaoh's court, v17 and Abram was reproved by Pharaoh himself, 'What have you done to me?' v18.

c. The promise of a son 15:1-6; 16:1-6

'...and Abram went up out of Egypt....to the place where his tent had been at the beginning,' 13:1-4. The experiences which followed Abram's restoration and return to the

land prove that he was again the man of courage and vision. Although his nephew chose to settle in the cities of the plain, Abram pitched his tent in the plains of Mamre, still viewing and discovering the extent of his promised inheritance, 13:14-18. Later, he was to do battle for his nephew Lot, receive a special blessing from the king-priest Melchisedek and refuse all reward from the king of Sodom, ch14. Yet with all these successes and encouragements, the questions and the doubts about the future were still there - for Sarai was childless, she was unable to produce an heir, 15:2-3.

Abram's boldness in battle and strength in witness was reflected in his faith. When God promised that he would have a son and descendants as numberless as the stars - '...he believed in the Lord.' v6. But it was not so for Sarai. Had God mentioned her name? Did He mean that she should be the mother? Why was the promise so long in being fulfilled?

Every marriage must have its times of crisis. But for Sarai, her infertility was a continual crisis, and when the promise to Abram brought no immediate fulfilment Sarai pressed for her own solution to the problem. Her persuasive words convinced her husband that perhaps this was the way the heir should be born.... But even though prompted by love and concern and the desire to see God's will realised, any action independent of God's guidance and direction will bring its own related problems - all three people involved suffered the spoiling of relationships - and the birth of Isaac eventually brought about the permanent exile of Hagar and her son, Ishmael.

d. Sarai becomes Sarah Chapters 17; 18:1-15

It was 24 years since Abram and Sarai had arrived in Canaan and about 14 years since God had made a covenant with Abram concerning the inheritance of the land, 15:18. God now confirms the covenant by giving Abram and Sarai new names and establishing the rite of circumcision.

Abram - exalted father, becomes Abraham-father of a multitude.

Sarai - my princess, becomes Sarah - *the* princess, royal in her own right as a mother of nations.

With the new names came the promise of a son through Sarah, which brought such a flood of praise into the heart of Abraham, that he laughed with thanksgiving and joy. The name of his son, Isaac, (meaning 'laughter') would reflect forever the elation Abraham felt at that wonderful moment. When the news was conveyed to Sarah by the visit of the three men (one of whom was the Lord from heaven), she laughed as well. But *her* laughter was that of unbelief and cynicism, which was immediately challenged by God, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' The years of waiting were now over, the Lord's time had come, 21:1-2.

e. Reproof and Fulfilment Chapters 20 & 21.

But before the conception and birth there was the terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with the involvement of Lot and his family and yet another deception by Sarah and Abraham concerning their relationship, 20:1-2. Their fear of man was always a snare to them both and on this occasion Sarah was reproofed as well as Abraham by the local king, v16. The command given to Abraham, 'Walk before me and be thou perfect,' 17:1, was not an easy option for this man of God. Even men and women 'commended for their faith', Hebrews 11:39 NIV, still had their own particular weakness to overcome.

The birth of Isaac brought great joy and satisfaction to Sarah - denied motherhood for so long, she was filled with thanksgiving that she had been able to give her beloved husband a son. No longer a reproach amongst women, she shared her happiness with all who

knew her and the great celebration that Abraham prepared at the weaning of his son reflected *his* joy at the growth and development of Isaac.

But the occasion was marred by the derision of Ishmael, Hagar's son, and this could not be overlooked. It was time for them both to leave. Sarah's attitude may seem harsh, but God gave His approval - there could never be two heirs and the servant's son could not be brought up alongside the son of Sarah, the freewoman.

f. Conclusion

Sarah lived for another 37 years - God's grace and mercy is abundant, not only the gift of a son in her old age, but the gift of many years to enjoy his company, to see him grow into manhood, 24:67. When she died, Abraham bought a piece of ground in Hebron, the only part of the land which he ever possessed - there to lay his beloved Sarah to rest.

Their marriage had been a long one, surviving trials, crises and disappointments. Both Abraham and Sarah had their moments of weakness, times when they let their partner down. Abraham did not always shine with vision and commitment, he did not always do the right thing..... When they left Ur of the Chaldees at the commandment of the Lord, they were a young couple, sacrificing close family ties and travelling into the unknown together - very romantic, very soul stirring. But the actual sacrifices came later, as they often do. The realities of married life are the commonplace and tedious, only once did Abraham come home a hero from his battle with the Canaanite kings! Sarah faced those realities, for with all her faults and slowness to come to faith, she remained steadfast and loyal to her husband and her marriage - in spite of the demands and disappointments. Sarah was always there, ready to support, eager to please.

'And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her' - his lovely wife, lifetime companion and friend.

2. Hagar

a. The birth of Ishmael 16:1-16

Sarai's overwhelming desire to see the fulfilment of God's promise of a son led her into a situation which had unimagined and unforeseen consequences - she persuaded her husband to take Hagar as his wife. The end result was a success in that Hagar became pregnant, but the resentment, anger and bitterness which developed between the two women pronounced its own judgment on the folly of Sarai's action.

Hagar was unable to control her feelings of superiority over Sarai. Instead of rejoicing on Sarai's account that she would be giving her the child she had always longed for, Hagar reacted by despising her mistress for her inability to conceive. 'Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up....a maidservant who displaces her mistress', Proverbs 30:21-23. So Sarai found, even before the child was born, that her favourite and favoured servant had become a thorn in the flesh and misguided efforts to help along the purposes of God had worked against the whole household.

If Sarai's behaviour and Abram's response appear severe and unkind we should remember that Hagar was not without blame, v6. No doubt she had intimately shared her mistress's sorrow and disappointment as the months and years went by with no sign of the promised child. To be given Sarai's beloved Abram in order to produce an heir was a tremendous privilege and could have resulted, humanly speaking, in an even closer bond between the women. That Sarai was wrong in devising the scheme cannot excuse Hagar for her thoughtless and insensitive treatment of the woman who had suffered the deep sorrow and reproach of childlessness.

Away in the wilderness, the angel of the Lord directed Hagar back to Sarai, v9. She was given discipline and then encouragement, for God saw both her sin and her need. She was still Sarai's maid, still under her authority and had no right to behave as she had. But God was aware of her own sorrow, and the son she would bear would always remind her of His care - Ishmael, 'God hears'. Hagar's response of obedience and acknowledgement of the presence of God brought her back to the care of Abram's household. No recurrence of the enmity between her and Sarai is mentioned and Hagar bore the promised son to Abram, who named the child as the angel of the Lord had decreed.

b. The exile of Ishmael Chapter 21:6-21

Isaac, meaning 'laughter', was the name given to Abraham and Sarah's son, 17:21; 21:6 cp. Psalm 126:2-3. But Ishmael's laughter at the weaning feast, v9, reflected mockery rather than joy and Sarah's response, although extreme, was of the Lord. From the time of Ishmael's conception, Hagar's behaviour and Sarah's treatment of her had sown the seeds of discord. There could be no other solution to the problem than for Abraham to acquiesce to his wife's demand, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son...' cp. Proverbs 22:10.

Abraham was deeply distressed. His love and concern for *his* son, cp. 16:15; 17:23; 21:11; 25:12 had grown over the years and had wrung from his heart the plea to God for a blessing on Ishmael, when the birth of a son through Sarah was promised, 17:15-22. God knew the sorrow that Abraham felt - He gave assurance concerning his purposes for Ishmael and told Abraham to obey Sarah, for this time she spoke according to the will of God. The circumstances of Ishmael's birth had been prompted by the flesh and not the Spirit; now all involved were reaping its sad but inevitable harvest.

God was faithful to His word and did not abandon the son of the bondwoman. As He had seen and heard Hagar's sorrow and distress when she had fled into the wilderness before Ishmael was born, 16:11,13, so now He responded to the voice of the boy as he lay dying. In the depths of her sorrow, Hagar heard again the voice from heaven.

Bound up in the purposes of God through her son, Hagar had two unique and blessed experiences. Spoken to by name on each occasion, she received direction, encouragement, life itself from the God of heaven. Both times specific needs were met, direct commands given and special promises made. Through them all the grace and omniscience of the Lord was revealed - not in this case to Sarah, the princess, but to Hagar, a bondwoman. 'Thou, God, seest me...' 16:13.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

Genesis 21:1-7 cp. Luke 1:18-25,57-58. After Isaac's birth, Sarah shared her happiness with all who knew her.

Genesis 21:8-13 cp. Galatians 4:21-5:1. The son of the slave could not be brought up alongside the son of the freewoman.

Genesis 21:7 cp. 1 Peter 3:1-7. Sarah was always there, ready to support and eager to please.

Genesis 18:13-14 cp. Hebrews 11:8-13 AV. Sarah found it hard to believe but gradually her faith grew in the faithfulness and power of the living God.

Genesis 16:1-2 cp. Galatians 6:7-8. Ishmael's birth was prompted by the flesh not the spirit.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 2 EXAM SARAH AND HAGAR

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The two most important factors in Sarah's life were
 - a. her beauty and status
 - b. her jealousy and lack of faith
 - c. her childlessness and lack of a settled home

2. Sarah's obedience is mentioned specifically in
 - a. Romans 4:19
 - b. 1 Peter 3:6
 - c. Hebrews 11:11
 - d. Romans 9:9

3. The ongoing crisis in Sarai's life was
 - a. the constant change of location
 - b. the fear of going back to Egypt
 - c. her inability to give Abram a son
 - d. the threat of conflict with the Canaanites

4. When Isaac's birth was promised, Sarai
 - a. cried with joy
 - b. shared the news with Hagar
 - c. said she was too old
 - d. gave thanks to the Lord

5. Another woman gave birth to a son when she was old, her name was
 - a. Deborah
 - b. Naomi
 - c. Elizabeth
 - d. Joanna

6. Sarah's dismissal of Hagar seems harsh; it was justified because
 - a. a servant's son could not be brought up beside a freewoman's son
 - b. Ishmael laughed at his half brother
 - c. there could never be two heirs
 - d. Abraham had turned against Ishmael

7. When she became pregnant with Ishmael, Hagar
 - a. rejoiced for Sarai's sake
 - b. despised Sarai
 - c. became Abraham's favourite wife
 - d. made nothing of the situation

8. Ishmael's name would remind Hagar that
 - a. God is always near
 - b. God sees

- c. God hears
 - d. God understands
9. Hagar had two special experiences of the presence of God; they involved
- a. hearing her own name
 - b. receiving direction
 - c. receiving encouragement
 - d. all of the above
10. The Lord promised that Ishmael would become
- a. a brave warrior
 - b. a founder of cities
 - c. the father of a great nation
 - d. a man of wisdom and understanding

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

When God makes a promise, what is the main response He requires of us?

Chapter 3

PATRIARCHAL HISTORY - THE FAMILY

Rebekah - Mother of Jacob and Esau - Genesis

1. Rebekah - The Bride

a. Abraham's Command 24:1-9

When it came to choosing a wife for his son Isaac, Abraham knew that she would have to come, not from the Canaanites' corrupt and idolatrous people, but from his near relations. Someone from amongst his own family would be the woman of God's choosing, v7.

But the servant (taken to be Eliezer, cp. 15:2) had a problem. What if the young woman was not willing to leave her family? He was under oath to find a wife for Isaac, should he take his master's son to Haran? The instructions were clear - on no account was Isaac to go with Eliezer, back to Haran, v6. Abraham knew his son. He was an affectionate, amiable man, still mourning the loss of his mother and he might well choose to stay with his new found extended family, rather than bring his bride back to his father's house. But although the servant had some reservations, v5, Abraham had no doubts about the successful outcome of the journey, 'The Lord God of Heaven....He will send His angel before you....' Bound up in this journey were the eternal purposes of God for the blessing of all nations, 22:18. Nevertheless, Abraham confirmed that his servant would be free from his own oath if necessary, v8. Kindness and consideration for one whose faith was not so strong as his own - these things marked the 'friend of God', James 2:23.

b. The Servant's Request 24:10-27

Trusted with the riches of his master's house, 15:2; 24:2, and the future of his master's son, Eliezer arrived on the outskirts of the city. His concern to do the right thing is reflected in his prayer, '...show kindness to my master Abraham...' Eliezer took many precious things to Mesopotamia, v53, but the most precious was his high regard and deep affection for Abraham and Isaac.

The sign that Eliezer requested was linked to his knowledge of Abraham's household. Simply, sensibly, he prayed to be led to the woman who would be equal to the responsibilities of such an inheritance when she became the wife of his master Isaac. The prayer was hardly complete when Rebekah appeared; her swift and correct response to his request gave hope that the servant's journey had been successful. But there was no rush to confirm his thoughts - rather a quietness, a watchfulness, as he waited for the girl to finish her task. Eventually the right moment came. As Eliezer gave Rebekah the golden earring and bracelet he made the crucial enquiry, 'Whose daughter are you?'

Eliezer's immediate reaction to Rebekah's reply, was to thank God for His mercy to Abraham, 'I being in the way, the Lord led me...' v27. He knew that behind the practical details of the journey and its outcome had been the spiritual expectations and prayers of Abraham. No wonder this faithful servant 'bowed his head and worshipped the Lord' - his appreciation first and foremost not for the answered prayer, but for the God Who had led him.

c. Rebekah's Response 24:28-61

Eliezer and Rebekah were brought together by the sovereign will of God and yet bound into that sovereignty was the lovely thread of human kindness. Eliezer was concerned for his master Abraham, v12, and Rebekah for Eliezer, vs17-18. The servant's choice of a bride for Isaac was to have far-reaching results for the blessing of nations and it hinged,

humanly speaking, on the simple virtues of kindness and respect.

From the moment that Rebekah appeared at the well in Haran, her behaviour was without reproach. Her spontaneous respect for Eliezer and kindness to both man and beast would have refreshed the spirit of the servant as much as the water quenched his thirst. Rebekah may well have been a naturally kind person but the kind *acts* - habitual, impartial - refined and strengthened her lovely gift.

There was an urgency about Eliezer's visit which allowed no delay in either Rebekah's decision or departure, vs33, 54-57. But by the morning, Rebekah was already persuaded in her heart and mind that it was right for her to go with Eliezer. In reply to her mother and brother, the only answer could be, 'I will go.'

Rebekah had seen the riches of Isaac's inheritance in the precious things given to herself and her family. But more valuable to Rebekah than all the gold or silver, had been the words spoken from Eliezer's heart about his master and his master's son. As the servant told his story and the purpose of the long journey, she was able to enter into the whole situation. Through the faithful testimony of Eliezer, Isaac claimed Rebekah's heart and affection there in Haran - it was love linked to faith which brought her to him.

d. Isaac's Bride 24:62-67

The meeting of Isaac and Rebekah was in marked contrast to the activity and pressure of the visit to Haran. It was the quiet hour of evening and as the solitary man came from the way of the well Lahai-Roi, where God had provided in love and care for Hagar, 16:13-14, he was to find that God had provided for him, cp. Genesis 2:18. Ever sensitive to the occasion and the feelings of others, Rebekah veiled her beauty and stilled her natural vitality with a covering of dignity and tenderness.

Faithful to the end, the servant told Isaac everything he had done, the days of mourning were over and Isaac need grieve no more, his bride had come. '...and she became his wife, and he loved her..'

2. Rebekah - The Mother

a. Faith 25:19-23

Twenty years had passed since Rebekah had come from Haran. Twenty unrecorded years as wife and daughter-in-law and yet we can imagine her living and working as she had always lived and worked. Eliezer had recognised that whatever Rebekah did, 'she did with all her might' Ecclesiastes 9:10a. Trained well within her own family and given responsibility and appreciation there, she was quite at home in her new surroundings and competent from day one to assume her duties and status as wife and mistress of Isaac's household.

Abraham was still alive and would live on for another fifteen years, but Rebekah had within her the spirit of Leviticus 19:32-34 NIV, (which laws had yet to be given). 'Rise up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly...' and her concern for the stranger (alien) mirrored the mind and heart of her father-in-law, Genesis 24:17-18, cp. Genesis 18:1-5. Her spontaneous kindness and readiness to help Eliezer had proved her to be the chosen wife for Isaac and in those first twenty years (not long in the days of the Patriarchs) her natural charm and abilities would have been a blessing to everyone. But Rebekah, like Sarah before her, was childless; and although she and Isaac never sought their own solution to the problem, the shame and sorrow was no less severe than that experienced by their parents. It was characteristic of Isaac that he pleaded for his wife - conscious of the shame she felt at not becoming a mother. Prayers and faith were

to mark the conception of their children, who like Isaac himself, would be seen as not merely the fruit of nature but rather as a special gift from God.

Isaac's prayers were answered but the pregnancy brought its own problems. Rebekah, oppressed and overwhelmed, agonised, 'Can the promise of God be fulfilled like this? Why so much suffering?' 25:22. Now she herself is pleading with the Lord, laying before Him not only her questions but the physical pain, the mental turmoil - the whole essence of woman in the sorrow and joy of motherhood, cp. 3:16. The answer came directly to her from the Lord that there were two nations, two sorts of people within her body, struggling even then against each other. Contrary to the normal course of events, the elder would serve the younger, implying that the younger would inherit the birthright and subsequent blessing, 27:27-29; 28:3-4 cp. Deuteronomy 21:15-17.

b. Favouritism 25:24-28

The birth itself confirmed the prophecy which Rebekah had received from the Lord. As the twins grew and matured, favouritism led steadily to a situation which would end in the tragedy of a family separation. Isaac's easy, gentle nature was drawn to the son who was everything he had never been. 'A man of the field' - a skilled hunter, vigorous, emotional, able to provide the meat which Isaac loved so much - such a contrast to his own upbringing in 'his mother's tent'. Rebekah favoured Jacob, the younger son, who enjoyed home life and provided the company and friendship that her aging and almost blind husband was unable to give her.

Day by day, year upon year, hunting in the field, preparing meals at home, Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob - one parent monopolised one child. Esau was without the warmth of a mother's love and attention and Jacob felt the lack of his father's approval. The imbalance of family life led to a weakening of faith and a strengthening of natural appetites and abilities, setting in motion a flow of events which seemed to bring about God's will and yet in themselves were completely opposed to the mind of God.

c. Failure Chapters 25: 29-34; 27.

The family must have known of the prophecy concerning the sons, 25:23 and yet all were guilty of either anticipating God's will or ignoring it. Jacob made sure of the birthright by taking advantage of his brother; an opportunist, he was ready to use any means to get what he knew to be his. Esau was clearly not worthy of the blessings of the firstborn and showed his contempt by selling the birthright for a dish of lentils.

Isaac stuck by his preference for his son Esau and called for him to prepare a feast in readiness for a celebration and the formal ceremony of blessing. Rebekah overheard her husband's request and at that crucial moment her fears that Jacob would miss out overwhelmed any faith that she may have had in the over ruling power of God. Scheming replaced trust and instead of reasoning with Isaac, Rebekah deceived him. Cruelly, cleverly, she got the blessing for Jacob. This must be one of the lowest points in family histories - wife against husband, brother opposed to brother - and all because Rebekah and Jacob lacked faith in the promises of God and because Isaac and Esau refused to obey the word of God.

Rebekah no longer respected Isaac as head of the family, had he failed as a parent? Certainly, Isaac was never the father that Abraham had been - always concerned for the future of his children. His grief at the marriage of Esau to Hittite women marked Isaac as a sensitive man but his lack of action before the event displays a sad absence of discipline and prayer, 26:34-35 cp. 24:1-4.

Rebekah's scheme was successful but with results she could never have foreseen. 'Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my voice...' v13, and so it was. Esau's anger was such that Jacob had to flee for his life and although Rebekah anticipated only a short separation, it became a matter of years and as far as we know, she never saw her son again. She would reap what she had sown.

Just as Rebekah's response to Eliezer at the well in Haran was governed by her previous discipline and training, so her conduct during that critical moment in the tent was a direct product of the past as well. Years spent developing, not her faith in God and trust in His word but her independent spirit, natural abilities and above all, her favouritism for Jacob. She was ready to go to any lengths to obtain the blessing for him, even though she had been told by the Lord Himself that Jacob would have the senior position in the family, 25:23

Should we sympathise with Rebekah - ought we to criticise mother- love and the desire to have the best for her child? But Rebekah had two children and was only concerned for one of them. Jacob became her idol and took the place of God - Whose will she knew but Whose ways she ignored.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. Genesis 24:15-21 cp. Ephesians 2:4-7.

Eliezer's choice of Rebekah as Isaac's bride hinged, humanly speaking, on the simple virtues of kindness and respect.

2. Genesis 24:18-20 cp. Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:23-24.

Rebekah's kind *acts* strengthened her intrinsic gift. Whatever she did, she did to the best of her ability.

3. Genesis 24:55-61 cp. 1 Peter 1:8; 2:7a.

It was love linked to faith which bought Rebekah to Isaac.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 3 EXAM REBEKAH

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The most precious treasure Eliezer took to Mesopotamia was
 - a. a special gift of Egyptian gold
 - b. Sarah's personal jewellery
 - c. his love and respect for Abraham and Isaac
 - d. his own knowledge of his master's background

2. Eliezer prayed for a woman who would be
 - a. eager to leave her home and family
 - b. able to care for Abraham in his old age
 - c. beautiful and intelligent
 - d. equal to the responsibilities of a special inheritance

3. Behind the successful outcome of Eliezer's journey were
 - a. well laid plans
 - b. the expectation and prayers of Abraham
 - c. the hopes and prayers of Isaac
 - d. his understanding and handling of the culture

4. Bound into the sovereign will of God, in Eliezer's choice of a bride were
 - a. kindness and respect
 - b. humility and goodness
 - c. holiness and peace
 - d. gratitude and love

5. Rebekah came to Isaac, not having seen him; her love linked to
 - a. joy
 - b. obedience
 - c. faith
 - d. Meekness

6. When Rebekah remained childless, the one who prayed on her behalf was
 - a. Eliezer
 - b. Isaac
 - c. Laban
 - d. Abraham

7. Isaac preferred Esau because he was
 - a. a skilled hunter
 - b. lively and emotional
 - c. fond of venison
 - d. all of the above

8. Rebekah obtained the inheritance for Jacob by
 - a. reasoning with Isaac
 - b. bribing Esau

- c. deceiving Isaac
 - d. trusting in God
9. Rebekah's behaviour was the result of years spent in nurturing her
- a. independent spirit
 - b. love of Jacob above Esau
 - c. natural abilities
 - d. all of the above
10. Rebekah's idol was
- a. her husband
 - b. her own will
 - c. one of her sons
 - d. the blessing

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

When seeking to know God's will and faced with having to make a decision, what is one essential spiritual exercise we should engage in?

Chapter 4

PATRIARCHAL HISTORY - THE FAMILY

Rachel and Leah - Mothers of Jacob's Sons - Genesis

1. Rachel

a. Exiled to Haran 27:41-46; 28:1-5,10-22

Jacob's journey to his family in Haran bears no comparison with that of Eliezer many years before. Jacob's deceit and robbery had so angered his brother that it would only be a matter of time before Esau killed him; Rebekah warned her favourite, 'Now therefore, my son, obey my voice...' But obedience to his mother on a previous occasion had brought this situation about, 27:8, and her idea was for him to stay in Haran only a short time - just until Esau's resentment and fury had abated.

At last Isaac did the right thing, but only at the complaint and prompting of Rebekah, and sent Jacob to Haran to choose a wife from the family of Laban, Rebekah's brother. Forced to leave his home, Jacob could take no camels or riches for his bride. He left with only a shepherd's staff, 32:10, and the command and blessing of his father. In the course of his journey, God confirmed Isaac's blessing on his son, 28:3-4,13-14, and gave him something more. Jacob, through his sin, was an exile - an experience unknown to his father and grandfather - God assured Jacob of His presence and protection and promised to bring him back to his own land, v15. Jacob's response was typical of the man, 'If God does this....I will do that.' Ever the businessman, even with the God of mercy and grace.

b. Love and Marriage 29:1-30

After the trauma of the flight from home and the wonder of the vision at Bethel, Jacob's emotional outburst at the well was not surprising. God had kept His promise and led him to his family, perhaps even to the one who would become his wife. Only a month later, Laban (another astute businessman) realised what an asset Jacob would be to his household and approached Jacob on the matter of wages. Without it seems, asking the Lord for His guidance, cp. 24:12-14, Jacob made an agreement with his uncle - seven years work for the hand of his daughter Rachel.

If Jacob's love for Rachel is without question, v20, what of Rachel's feelings for him? Laban's young and extremely beautiful daughter was virtually traded for seven years labour on her father's estate and then, after the deceit of the marriage night, Laban demanded another seven years for her. In his eyes, she was a valuable commercial asset and as such was not expected to have any feelings. But subsequent events proved that Laban's treatment of his daughters was felt deeply by them both, 31:15; Jacob too, must share some of the blame for the unhappiness and bitter rivalry which was the outcome of this double marriage. Nowhere do we read of Jacob seeking the mind of God concerning Rachel; his overwhelming passion for a beautiful girl brought sorrow and suffering to the whole household.

Nevertheless, his love for Rachel was genuine, constant, enduring - it was a love that survived the trials of waiting, disappointment, demands and eventually death itself. Leah gave Jacob sons and daughters, love and respect, but it was Rachel he loved. 'And Jacob said to Laban, "give me my wife..."' 29:21. In life she filled his heart and after her death, no one, save her own sons could take her place. For Jacob, in life or death, Rachel was always 'his wife', 46:19.

c. Jealousy and Resentment 29:30-31; 30:1-24

Favouritism again reared its head, v30, and to compensate for Jacob's lack of real

affection for Leah, God blessed her with sons - to the chagrin of Rachel, who seemed unable to bear any children.

Many years later another favourite wife would suffer like Rachel, but we never read of her envy, only of her tears and prayers, 1 Samuel 1:1-20. However for Rachel, even the proved devotion of her husband could not make up for the lack of sons. She felt the reproach of her childlessness and was jealous of her sister. 'Give me sons, or else I'll die!' Petulant, childish, demanding - was this the woman that Jacob was still in bondage for? Her outrageous demand made even Jacob angry. He knew that it was God who had denied her children, but again, we see no enquiry of the Lord, cp. 25:21, only an agreement to use Rachel's handmaid as a surrogate mother.

Rachel's comments after the birth of two sons by Bilhah to Jacob, show us that she was desperate to get the better of her sister Leah. Not content with having Jacob's favour and love she craved for his children as well, and the names given to Bilhah's offspring reflect Rachel's inward struggles to come to terms with the fact that her despised older sister had already given her husband four sons.

Matters went from bad to worse. More sons were born to Jacob through Leah's maidservant and still Rachel was unable to conceive. The affair of the mandrakes illustrates the deep seated jealousy and bitterness between the two sisters which eroded Leah's spirituality - she traded 'love apples' (supposed to help in conception) for an opportunity to sleep with her own husband.

But in spite of Rachel's behaviour, God had mercy upon her and eventually gave her a son. Had there been any change of heart? Rachel named the baby, 'Joseph' meaning 'May God add' praying 'May the Lord give me another son'. Rachel had up to now, only ever mentioned God by the name Elohim - the Almighty. Here she speaks of Jehovah, the One who appeared to Jacob at Bethel, the One Who was his God and the God of his fathers, the personal God, 28:13; 12:1-3, 8.

d. Escape from Haran 30:25-43; 31:1-21, 25-35

i. Self help 30:25-43

With the birth of a son to his favourite wife and completion of his fourteen years service for Laban, Jacob felt it was time to leave his father-in-law's house and return to claim his inheritance in Canaan. His request for freedom to go home however, was met with fast and smooth talking by Laban. Flattery, false thankfulness to the Lord, persuasive words, all served to keep Jacob working for him; although Jacob had a plan in mind to use the next few years for his own advantage and profit. Yet again, rather than waiting on the Lord for blessing, Jacob used his own methods, v31-43, cp. 25:29-34 - even though the angel of God had appeared to him at the time of his agreement with Laban and confirmed that God Himself would see to it that Jacob's flocks would multiply, enabling him to go back home to his home and family, 31:11-13.

ii. Superstition 31:1-21, 25-35

Jacob found that his increase in wealth at the expense of his father-in-law, bred open hostility in Laban and his sons. That fact and a command from the Lord to return home convinced Jacob it was time to go, but first he approached his wives to explain the situation.

Both Rachel and Leah were of one mind in their feelings towards their father - having originally been sold to Jacob by Laban, they had then suffered the further indignity of seeing Laban use all the wealth obtained through them for his own profit. They had no

objection to leaving.

Her father was away sheep shearing when Jacob left, so it was not difficult for Rachel to steal the household gods. Why she took them is never explained. Perhaps her superstitious nature, cp. 30:14, hankered after the gods she had known from infancy and now, as she left behind the only home she had ever known, she took with her the familiar household gods. Her shallow spiritual life crumbled when the crisis came and she turned, not to the living God but to the idols of her childhood.

When Laban arrived with his pretence of sorrow and concern for his daughters plus the accusation of stealing, Jacob had no idea that Rachel was the guilty party. He recklessly promised Laban that whoever had stolen the gods would be put to death. Rachel's refusal to trust in the Lord meant her only recourse was in quick thinking. One sin led to another and the theft, which had its roots in unbelief, bore more fruits of unrighteousness in her deceit and falsehood - a sad echo of her own husband's behaviour many years before.

e. The Voice of Mourning 35:1-20

Jacob and his company journeyed on and eventually reached the place where God had first spoken to him, Bethel, 28:16-22. At Shechem, 33:18-20, Jacob cleansed the household of idols and amulets ready for their arrival and worship at 'the house of God'. It seemed that at last, spiritual matters were becoming more important to Jacob than temporal things. He was almost home, ready to be united with his father, having met God at Peniel and bowed to His sovereignty and will, 32:24-30. But Jacob was about to experience unimagined distress - just outside Bethlehem, Rachel went into labour with her second son and died. Her final words were the child's name, 'Ben-oni, son of my sorrow'.

Rachel's gift from God was her beauty, but exploited by man it became the beginning of her sorrow. She was betrayed by her father and although her husband's love and devotion were totally genuine, Jacob had many responsibilities and was often away, leaving his young and attractive wife alone with a sister whom she despised and envied at the same time. Rachel was too much of a child herself to cope with the situation and Jacob was too busy to help her. 'Am I God?' he demanded, when Rachel begged for his children. Jacob's love for Rachel was deep and enduring but he had no sense of responsibility for his immature and unhappy wife and could give her no comfort or spiritual direction.

Rachel's cry was forever, 'Give me' 30:1-4 cp. Proverbs 30:15-16, reflecting a nature which always wanted more and wanted what others possessed, rather than giving thanks for all that was hers in health, beauty and affection. It was not her desire for children which offended the Lord, but her discontent, her envy and impatience. Although Joseph's birth brought a surge of thankfulness and faith, the trauma of leaving home six years later and the episode of the stolen idols brought Rachel's spiritual life into jeopardy again. Not until Jacob himself took the lead in Shechem as head of the household and buried the idols, could real progress be made. But by then, it was too late for Rachel.

Rachel's life was spoiled by the greed of one man, the thoughtlessness of another and her own envy and discontent. Yet in death we see another picture, chosen by the Spirit of God to represent those mothers in Israel who wept and would not be comforted for the children they would never see again, 35:18 cp. Jeremiah 31:15. Rachel's longing and love for children was as genuine as her pain and sorrow in childbirth and her name and voice will symbolise for ever the unnamed and unnumbered grieving mothers who wept in Babylon and Bethlehem, Auschwitz and Treblinka for their children, their lovely children,

who went to their deaths at the hands of wicked men.

2. Leah

a. Favoured by the Lord 29:16-35; 30:1-21

It is not unlikely that Leah had always lived in the shadow of her younger and more beautiful sister. She was probably the one who looked after the home while Rachel was more familiar with life outside through her duties as shepherdess. The name Leah has several meanings - weak or tender-eyed, weary - which give the impression of someone who could never compete physically with her sister and who had a quieter and less endearing nature.

We have no idea whether Leah was in agreement with her father when he used her in deceiving Jacob, vs21-26. She probably had no option. But it is evident that Leah grew to love Jacob and saw him as the one who belonged to her by marriage, even though it had not been his choice. Five times Leah spoke of 'my husband' 29:32,34; 30:15,18,20, expressing her heartfelt desire that Jacob would become her husband in spirit as well as in name.

Favouritism had ruined the family life of Isaac and Rebekah and it was to have the same effect on Jacob's household. For while Jacob favoured Rachel above her sister, God would compensate the unloved Leah.

In the birth and naming of her sons Leah showed a real growth in the knowledge of the character of God. She came to appreciate Him as the One Who sees and understands the needs of His people and especially those who have hidden sorrows, who shed tears unseen by others.

Reuben - Behold a son! 'Jehovah has seen my affliction, now will my husband love me.'

Simeon - Hearing 'Jehovah has heard that Jacob loves Rachel more than he loves me, so He has given me another son.'

Levi - Joined 'Now my husband will be one in spirit with me - I have give him three sons.'

Judah - Praise the Lord 'Now will I praise the Lord.'

Leah's emotions, her hopes and longings, spill out in the names of her sons. Now *she* is the favoured wife - Jehovah, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God Who promised to bless Jacob and increase his house, 28:13-14, this One has favoured her with children while Rachel remains barren.

But the household rivalry increased. Rachel tried to get the better of her sister through her maid Bilhah and Leah retaliated by giving her own maid Zilpah to bear Jacob sons. She went down to Rachel's level and the names of *these* children reflect the lowering of standards. There is still joy, but not in Jehovah; Gad - Good Fortune, Asher - Happy. Leah went on to have a daughter and two more sons, but there was never a return to the delight of the early days, although she still hoped that her sons would bring Jacob to live with her.

Issachar - Reward 'Almighty God has rewarded me for giving Jacob my maid.'

Zebulun - Dwelling 'Almighty God has given me a good dowry, six sons, now my husband will

live with me.'

Leah attributed her blessing to Elohim, not Jehovah, a subtle change of emphasis. He was no longer the God she knew personally and by name; He was more remote - the God Who was over all. Her relationship with the Lord had been spoiled by her relationship with her sister. Leah's reaction to Rachel's request for Reuben's mandrakes revealed a bitter and resentful heart. By going into the field to meet Jacob and demand his presence that night, Leah showed just what she was willing to do in order to claim his love and bear his children. The poison of jealousy had spread into Leah's mind and heart and sadly, Jacob never saw the need to alter his attitudes or his actions, either in relation to his wives or eventually to his sons, 33:1-2; 37:3-4.

b. Faithful to her husband 49:31; 50:12-13.

Perhaps few other episodes in the Bible can compare with the range of emotions experienced in that household in Haran - from the moment when Jacob arrived, an exile from his own home, to the time of his return to Canaan. He brought nothing with him except a passionate and determined nature; but without any care for God's will or God's ways, it resulted in endless trouble for himself and unceasing heartache for his wives.

Could the quiet and spiritual Leah ever have imagined the anguish of unrequited love and the hostility of an envious sister? Was this marriage? Was this motherhood? Sadly, it was....and Leah could only seek the face of the One Who kept her and consoled her through the storms of jealous anger and selfish demands which marred family relationships and at times spoiled her spiritual life. But she never returned to the idols of her childhood and she had nothing to hide from her father when he came to search her tent, 31:33. Leah remained faithful to her God and to her husband and perhaps when she was Jacob's only wife, she found peace and happiness. Rachel died and was buried near Bethlehem but Leah lies with her husband in the family tomb at Machpelah - her name enshrined in the annals of Israel's history as one who with Rachel 'did build the house of Israel,' Ruth 4:11.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. Genesis 30:1-5 cp. Genesis 25:21; Ephesians 5:22-23.

Unlike his father Isaac, Jacob could give his unhappy wife no comfort or spiritual direction.

2. Genesis 35:18 cp. Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:18. 'Rachel weeping for her children.'

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 4 EXAM

RACHEL AND LEAH

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. In order to marry Rachel, Jacob agreed to work for Laban
 - a. seven weeks
 - b. seventy weeks
 - c. seven years
 - d. seven months

2. The names given to Bilhah's sons reveal Rachel's
 - a. humiliation and sadness
 - b. contempt
 - c. deep felt sorrow
 - d. inward struggles

3. The title 'Jehovah' used by Rachel, describes Him as
 - a. the Almighty God
 - b. the personal God
 - c. the God Who is there
 - d. the God Who answers prayer

4. When Rachel left home she took with her
 - a. the household gods
 - b. some mandrakes
 - c. the family altar
 - d. small silver idols

5. The name 'Ben-oni' means
 - a. son of my gladness
 - b. son of my youth
 - c. son of my prayers
 - d. son of my sorrow

6. It was not Rachel's desire for a family which offended the Lord, rather her
 - a. discontent
 - b. envy
 - c. impatience
 - d. all of the above

7. In the naming of her sons, Leah showed her appreciation of the God Who
 - a. has power over life and death
 - b. rewards those who are faithful
 - c. cares for those who have hidden sorrows
 - d. knows the end from the beginning

8. Over the years, Leah's spiritual life suffered because of her
 - a. covetousness
 - b. jealousy
 - c. immorality
 - d. idolatry

9. Jacob's passionate and determined nature gave to family life
 - a. excitement
 - b. trouble
 - c. fulfilment
 - d. anticipation

10. Leah was buried with Jacob in the family tomb at
 - a. Bethlehem
 - b. Shechem
 - c. Haran
 - d. Machpelah

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How should a Christian react when having been wronged?

Chapter 5

NATIONAL HISTORY - THE THEOCRACY

The Emergence of the Nation out of Egypt - Exodus and Numbers

1. Jochebed

a. Growth and Persecution Exodus 1

It was through Joseph, the eldest son of Rachel, that Jacob and his family moved down into Egypt from Canaan, Genesis 46:1-7,26-34. Sold as a slave by his own brothers nearly twenty years before, Genesis 37, Joseph had risen to become second only to Pharaoh in Egypt and in a time of world wide famine brought his father, brothers and all their families down to the land of Goshen, Genesis 45:4-11.

In the opening chapters of Exodus, 400 years later, Joseph's family - now an emerging nation - had become a threat to the Egyptians, Genesis 47:1-6, cp. Exodus 1:6-10. But the Israelites were still needed in the country to build Egyptian cities, so by order of the king, hard manual labour became the means of relentless oppression. Pharaoh meant to destroy the spirit of the people and keep them in bondage and fear for ever, v14.

But God had not forgotten His promises to Abraham and to Jacob concerning their family :-

- i. The growth of the people. Genesis 12:2.
- ii. Deliverance from Egypt. Genesis 15:12-16.
- iii. Creation as a nation, by God. Genesis 46:3.

b. Shiphrah and Puah Exodus 1:15-21

Pharaoh's fear of the Israelites became obsessive. The more they were afflicted, the more they increased, so he ordered that every male child must be destroyed by the midwife at the moment of birth. Shiphrah and Puah were probably the chief midwives and represented their profession before Pharaoh. To stand against the order of the most powerful man in the land took a great deal of courage, but these were women who feared God, the very Giver of life, and as such they could not and would not destroy what He had bestowed.

The midwives lied to Pharaoh in order to save the lives of the children and although the Lord would not justify their untruths, He recognised a desire to do His will and rewarded them for obedience. Their integrity as midwives and their boldness before Pharaoh gave Shiphrah and Puah an active part in the fulfilment of the purposes of God for Israel and the word of God has placed their names (meaning 'to glisten, to shine') as well as their deeds in the chronicles of the emerging nation.

c. The Birth of Moses Exodus 2:1-10 Numbers 26:59 Acts 7:20 Hebrews 11:23

God was preparing to deliver His people out of bondage. They were a nation in slavery, without purpose and direction and without a leader. Even so, the Egyptians were afraid that the Israelites would align themselves with a foreign power and rise up against them, 1:8-10. Pharaoh, outwitted by the midwives but still determined to destroy the Hebrew race, decreed that every male child should be thrown in the river Nile. But God was working out His purposes.

Jochebed had recently given birth to a son and 'when she saw he was a fine child she hid him for three months'. What exactly did Jochebed 'see'?

The New Testament tells us that his parents saw that Moses was no ordinary child and they hid him 'by faith', Acts 7:20; Hebrews 11:23. Amram and Jochebed were made aware that God had given them a child who was special to *Him*. When Jochebed could hide her baby no more, she entrusted this precious possession to God and put him in the river, not to die as Pharaoh had decreed, but to be preserved for the will of God. Jochebed may have been in bondage to an Egyptian taskmaster but her heart and mind were free to exercise faith in the living God.

In answer to her faith, the baby was given back to her by the over-ruling of God and Jochebed was given the opportunity to train up her own child and receive wages as well! It was only for a little while and yet Moses would reflect the faith and influence of his mother many times in his life. She had chosen to disobey the king and save her child for God ; 'by faith Moses.....chose to be ill treated along with the people of God.' Hebrews 11:25-27 - a choice which led eventually to the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt.

First the mother and then the son - both made crucial and courageous decisions of faith, which God used and blessed in the fulfilment of His own eternal will.

2. Pharaoh's Daughter

Exodus 2:1-10 Acts 7:21 Hebrews 11:24-27.

God's ways are 'past finding out'. It was the crying of the child which struck a chord of compassion in the heart of Pharaoh's daughter and led her to protect him from her father's edict. In the shelter of the king's own palace, in the care of the king's own daughter, Moses would be secure. Childhood and youth were spent in comfort and safety and he received the best of education - according to Egyptian standards. The princess brought him up as her own son and perhaps saw him as a gift from the great Nile god, as she named him Moses - 'drawn out of the water'.

But Pharaoh's daughter was used by God to preserve only the physical life of Moses. The wisdom and knowledge of Egypt never superseded the spiritual education he had received from Jochebed and this was to be the deciding influence in his life. Moses never forgot his Hebrew roots, and the concern he felt for his own came to the surface when he became involved in the killing of an Egyptian, 2:11-15.

Exodus recounts Moses' flight away from Egypt as though he was afraid of the king, but the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that Moses had already rejected all that he had been brought up to enjoy as the adopted son of the princess - status and privilege, education and culture, wealth and pleasure - 'the treasures of Egypt'. Fear may have prompted the move out, but faith had already decided to leave a lifestyle and a people which gave no place to the one true God. Moses made his choice and aligned himself with God's people. He had been rejected as their leader but Moses went out in faith - believing in the God Who rewards those who trust Him and Who would use him to fulfil His purposes in the deliverance of a nation - just as He had used a faithful Hebrew mother and a compassionate Gentile princess in the protection of a child.

3. Miriam Exodus & Numbers

a. Trustworthy Exodus 2:1-10.

The eldest child of Jochebed, her daughter Miriam, was given a crucial role to play in the saving of Moses. Perhaps about eleven or twelve years old at the time, she was a girl who could be trusted to respond swiftly and intelligently to whatever situation arose and Jochebed was able to leave her watching and waiting at the river bank for the arrival of the princess. The mother's confidence was not to be disappointed.

That Miriam was able to be given such a responsibility shows how well trained she had been. No doubt, Miriam had often helped to take care of her brothers but this occasion was something beyond the norm, this was something which required faith as well as sensitivity, courage as well as wisdom. Faith and works - attributes of Jochebed's daily life and particularly since the crisis of Moses' birth - these, Miriam had learned from the example of her mother. She had been her mother's confidante and in the oppressive regime of the day had grown older than her years; this young girl was well able to assess the gravity of the situation and her own place in the scheme of things.

Miriam was part of God's plan for the deliverance of His people, through Moses, and her approach to the princess - alert yet natural, wise yet unaffected - brought the response she hoped for, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you'. God is able to do above all that we ask or think!

b. Triumphant Exodus 15:1-22

When Israel 'saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore', 14:30-31, their relief was boundless and their recognition of God's great work on their behalf led them to a song of praise and thanksgiving which reflected their acknowledgement of God's power and glory. He had become their strength and song, their source of deliverance. As Moses led the newly emerging nation in their hymn of joy and thankfulness, Miriam took up a timbrel and led the women in celebration music and dance. She echoed her brother in his rejoicing at the unmistakable evidence of the fate of the enemy and took up the refrain which thrilled the oppressed, unhappy people more than anything. The symbol of Egypt's strength - the horse and its rider - had been destroyed, cp. Isaiah 31:1.

Miriam was already recognised as a prophetess amongst the people and was to be recorded in scripture as one sent by God, 'For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt.....and sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam', Micah. 6:4. Her faithfulness and courage in youth had been recognised by the Lord, now in latter years she was acknowledged and respected by the women of the emerging nation.

Miriam was known as the sister of Aaron but at that moment, by the Red Sea, she was her mother's daughter, Jochebed - 'the Lord, my glory'. As Miriam sang of the glorious power of the Lord she reflected all that her mother had realised, in faith, as she lay her baby son in the rushes of the river and left her daughter to 'see what would happen to him....' Exodus 2:4 NIV.

c. Defiant Numbers 12:1-16. Deuteronomy 4:9. Micah 6:4

But leadership itself became a snare to Miriam. Her position before the people had never been in question - why then did she speak out against Moses and in effect defy the Lord who had chosen him as supreme leader?

Outwardly Miriam gave no sign of dissatisfaction, but inwardly her resentment had been increasing. She was a strong minded woman, bold, enthusiastic, acknowledged by the Lord and His people as a leader with her brothers. Even so she felt entitled to a higher standing before the people. Miriam's pride had taken over - progressing to a display of defiance which resulted in horrendous judgment and public shame.

She spoke out - knowing that her brother Moses would bear with her and not reprove her. Her excuse was the marriage of Moses to a Cushite woman, her reason was jealousy, her action was rebellion. That Miriam was not afraid to speak out against her brother, showed that she was not now the spiritual woman she appeared to be, there at the Red

Sea. For had she possessed any conception of the holiness of God she would have never dared raise thought or word against His chosen servant.

We are not told whether Miriam's words were spoken publicly but 'the Lord heard' and He immediately called Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the tabernacle. He came down Himself and called the offenders forward - such was the seriousness of their presumption. The Lord vindicated the supreme leadership of Moses in words of solemn and fearful significance, 'Wherefore then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses.'

'.....I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech' Proverbs 8:13, NIV. Unseen thoughts and feelings are ultimately exposed by speech and conduct, but God is aware of the thoughts and intents of the heart before ever they come into the sight of men. That is why Miriam was the one who was punished - to awaken her to the fact that she had for many years neglected the course of true spirituality, relying perhaps on her natural leadership qualities and experience of life, instead of 'pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness', 1 Timothy 6:11.

Her punishment was appalling but Moses with true forgiving spirit pleaded for her and she was banished, not for life, but for seven days. Miriam halted the progress of a whole nation, such was the seriousness of her sin as a leader and prophet amongst Israel, and her leprosy was never forgotten. Written into the law of the Lord, Deuteronomy 24:8-9, it was to serve as a warning that the disease could be contracted as a punishment for disobedience.

d. Conclusion

Miriam died shortly before Aaron, prior to the nation entering the promised land, Numbers 20:1, 22-29. cp. Numbers 33:38. She was a gifted, privileged woman but neglected the profound spiritual responsibilities which come with privilege and rank. So her sin was greater *and* its punishment, both for herself and for the people.

Miriam's high spot was that moment by the river when she spoke out for her brother Moses - who would have dreamt that in later life she would have spoken out against him. Early promise is no guarantee for finishing the course. Like Eve, Miriam reached out for something which was not hers to take, only to find that the consequences brought unimagined sorrow and shame.

4. Zipporah Exodus

a. Marriage 2:11-25

Moses' concern for the underdog showed in the help he gave to the daughters of Reuel, a priest in Midian. The man who delivered his Hebrew brother from the cruelty of the Egyptian and who tried to bring harmony between two others who argued and fought was true to character in much less dramatic circumstances.

Fresh from the trauma of his flight out of Egypt Moses was pleased to settle down in the security of a home and family and eventually received Zipporah as his wife. Very little is known about their relationship but it would seem that even after marriage and fatherhood he felt an outsider in his adopted country.

The names of his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, tell us something of his feelings, Exodus 18:3-4.

Gershom - 'I have been an alien in a strange land'. The warmth and concern in Reuel's welcome was never echoed in his daughter's feelings for Moses and their home was not a haven of love and belonging.

Eliezer - 'For the God of my father said he was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh'.

Moses looked back with gratitude to the day when God proved His reality and power, but there was no sense of a shared spiritual relationship with Zipporah at the birth of their second son.

b. Crisis Exodus 4:18-31; 18:1-12,27.

The Lord had heard the cry of His people, 2:23-25; it was time to deliver them out of bondage. Moses had received his call from the Lord, 3:1-14; it was time to leave the desert and return to Egypt. He made his excuses, but the Lord persisted and gave him His own great promises and the help of his brother Aaron, 4:1-17. Jethro gave Moses permission to go and he left Midian after forty long years - not as he came, with the mark of Egypt on him, 2:19 - but as a humble shepherd with a rod in his hand. It was the rod which would mark him out as the Lord's chosen one before the children of Israel and ultimately, on the shores of the Red Sea, it would bring judgment on all the might of Egypt, 14:15-18.

But judgment was about to fall upon his own house, 'and by the way, in the inn....the Lord sought to kill him', 4:24.

God had called Moses to deliver His covenant people out of Egypt, '...say to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Israel is my son. .. let my son go, that he may serve me.'". The sign of the covenant was circumcision, Genesis 17:7-14, and Moses had neglected to circumcise his younger son. The penalty for the uncircumcised one was death, but in this case, Moses was the guilty one who had disregarded the Lord's command. He was about to lead the people of God out of bondage into the promised land and yet his own son was without the covenant mark upon him.

There is no indication as to the nature of the life threatening illness or how Moses and Zipporah knew the reason for it. But the way in which Zipporah responded makes it clear that she was responsible for the boy not being circumcised in the first place, although Moses should never have allowed her to overrule God's command.

It was Zipporah who had to take the sharp stone and remove the foreskin. As she flung it at the feet of Moses her bitter words reveal a hatred of the rite and all it signified. Only through the blood of her son could she claim her husband back from the judgment of God - 'a blood-bridegroom art thou to me', v26.

The crisis over, Moses sent his wife and sons back to Midian until the day when Israel arrived in Sinai at the mount of God and Jethro brought the family to him there, cp. 3:11-12; 18:1-5. Nothing more is said about Zipporah, but it appears that she and the boys remained with Moses in Sinai, as only Jethro went back to his own land, v27.

c. Conclusion

When Moses first appeared at the well in Midian, Jethro's daughters thought he was an Egyptian and not one of the despised Hebrews. Through the forty wilderness years, the advanced culture and high ambitions of Egypt were replaced in Moses' life and character by the quiet cares of shepherding, the responsibilities of home life and the desire to follow the ways and will of Jehovah. It may be that Zipporah had been disappointed in her husband. She had married 'a man from Egypt', 2:19, only to discover that Moses had deliberately chosen to leave that life style. But there were intrinsic qualities in Moses which far surpassed anything which came out of Egypt and Zipporah refused to recognise or appreciate them. She set aside those things which could have strengthened their

mutual love and esteem and developed their spiritual fellowship. Her longings were still for 'a man from Egypt', not this humble, hard working man who had given way to her selfwill in order to keep the peace.

Forty years of marriage and the moment came when Zipporah could have been a support and help to her husband in his hour of greatest need. But it had been forty lost years and although Moses had intended taking his wife, having his own family with him there in Egypt, he sent her back home until his work was done and the nation had been delivered, 18:2. Moses loved his wife, but she had refused to respect his wishes and made him disobey the will of God. He had to leave her behind.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. Exodus 1:17-21 cp. Hebrews 6:10.
Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.
2. Exodus 2:6 cp. Romans 11:33 AV. God's ways are 'past finding out'
3. Exodus 2:7-10 cp. 2 Timothy 1:5. Faith and works - Miriam had learned from the example of her mother.
4. Numbers 12:1-2 cp. Hebrews 4:12-13 The Lord is aware of our thoughts and motives, though not revealed to others.
5. Numbers 12:10-13 cp. Colossians 3:12-13. Moses, with true forgiving spirit, pleaded for Miriam when God punished her.
6. Exodus 4:24 cp. I Peter 4:17. Before Moses could pronounce God's judgment on Egypt, judgment had to fall on his own house.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 5 EXAM

EXODUS

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The new Pharaoh did not destroy the Israelites because they
 - a. fought in his armies
 - b. built his cities
 - c. kept his sheep and cattle
 - d. served in his government

2. Shiphrah and Puah disobeyed Pharaoh because they were
 - a. faithful to their God
 - b. protected by their rank
 - c. frightened of the Israelites
 - d. courageous women

3. In later life Moses would often reflect the
 - a. wisdom of his father
 - b. courage of his sister
 - c. faith of his mother
 - d. dignity of his brother

4. Moses chose to reject the treasures of Egypt; they were
 - a. status and privilege
 - b. education and culture
 - c. wealth and pleasure
 - d. all of the above

5. Miriam was able to be trusted with the care of Moses because
 - a. she was fond of the child
 - b. her mother had encouraged her sense of responsibility
 - c. she knew exactly where the baby was
 - d. she admired the courage of Shiphrah and Puah

6. Miriam rejoiced when the strength of Egypt was destroyed; its symbol was
 - a. chariots of iron
 - b. Pharaoh's first-born
 - c. the horse and its rider
 - d. the sword and spear

7. In later years God had to show Miriam that she had been
 - a. carrying too much responsibility
 - b. neglecting her spiritual life
 - c. ignoring the needs of others
 - d. allowing sin to go unpunished

8. The names of Moses' sons reveal that he
 - a. had a happy family life
 - b. shared a deep spiritual understanding with Zipporah

- c. still felt a stranger in his adopted country
 - d. was longing to go back to Egypt
9. The rite of circumcision was the sign of
- a. God's covenant with Adam
 - b. God's covenant with Noah
 - c. God's covenant with the tribe of Levi
 - d. God's covenant with His people
10. Zipporah failed her husband at the end because she had never tried to
- a. understand his spiritual responsibilities
 - b. promote his well being
 - c. develop his self respect
 - d. appreciate his particular qualities

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Under what circumstances is it justifiable to refuse to obey the law of the land?

Chapter 6

NATIONAL HISTORY - THE THEOCRACY

Israel in the Land of Canaan - Joshua & Judges

1. Rahab Joshua

a. Rahab's faith 2:1-24

Rahab's profession and her ability to talk herself out of a life threatening situation hardly make her an example to be followed by believers and yet she is mentioned alongside Abraham, friend of God, in the epistle by James and in the gallery of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews. When she was faced with the choice of rejection or belief in the God of the Israelites, she chose to believe - to put her faith in the God Who had proved Himself with power in the heavens and on the earth and to act on that belief by welcoming His messengers and obeying their instructions.

'For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God,' Ephesians 2:8. Rahab's faith was from God - as she sheltered the spies and protected them from death, she gave them and the Israelites the necessary boost to their morale as they stood on the threshold of the promised land. Without Rahab the nation might well have hung back at a crucial moment, but her graphic account of the fear and despair of the local population made it clear that the Lord had prepared the way for victory, just as He had promised to Moses on the banks of the Red Sea, forty years before, Exodus 15:11-18.

b. Rahab's works 2:21; 6:20-25; Matthew 1:5

Rahab's faith in Israel's God was simple but real. She had received, 'welcomed as guests' the spies and had shown by the risks she took to save them, that she believed in the power of God, 'I know that the Lord has given you the land' v9. She proved the reality of her faith by her works, just as Abraham had done when he offered up Isaac. First she pleaded for the life of her family as well as herself, then she obeyed the instructions of the spies and bound the scarlet thread in the window. Rahab's name means 'large' or 'wide' and the adjective is reflected in the kindness and concern she showed for all her family - 'my father...my brethren...and all that they have...' v13. The spies knew that they owed her their lives, but a commitment to her safety was governed by the fact that God had commanded that Jericho in its entirety, was to be a sacrifice to Him - 'accursed' AV; 'devoted' NIV, 6:17. It was to be the firstfruits of victory in the land which He had given to Israel, Deuteronomy 34:3; Joshua 6:24. So the pledge, with its conditions was made and Rahab tied the cord in her window, ready for the day when its simple witness would bring deliverance out of a doomed city.

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac was his pinnacle of faith - an act of obedience which displayed a faith 'made perfect,' James 2:22; Rahab's willingness to trust the spies and bind the cord in the window was from a heart which had barely begun to know what faith was all about. But with resourcefulness and courage she did what she could and in the day of judgment, Joshua himself saw to it that she and the family were saved.

Abraham, friend of God and Rahab the harlot grace the pages of scripture as those who demonstrated the reality of their faith by obedience - each according to their understanding, each according to their situation. Rahab's faith overruled her patriotism and showed that she recognised the need of judgment on her own people; her faith encouraged her to trust the word of the spies and obey their instructions; her faith changed a life of immorality to one of purity and faithfulness and she became the wife of Salmon, mother of Boaz, ancestor of David, Ruth 4:17,22.

In the awesome grace of God, this woman from Jericho - ever known by her profession - is found in the lineage of the Saviour, 'Who came to seek and to save those who are lost', Matthew 1:5-6,16.

2. Achsah - daughter of Caleb

Joshua 15:13-19; Judges 1:9-15.

Caleb - called by God, 'my servant', Numbers 14:24 - had seen the potential of the land of Israel when he and Joshua had stood out against the ten spies before the people and declared, 'The land....is an exceeding good land.' But the people preferred to believe the report of the other ten spies and in their rebellion had condemned themselves to die in the wilderness - only their children, with Joshua and Caleb, were allowed into the promised land, Numbers 13-14:25. Forty five years later Caleb stood before Joshua to claim his inheritance, Joshua 14:9, conscious that God had spared him to see that day and eager to possess the place he had been promised.

His daughter Achsah was a young woman, highly respected in the community, and when Caleb offered her as a reward for valour, this was not to devalue her womanhood, rather to demonstrate the esteem in which he held his daughter.

It was Achsah who wanted the field and having obtained it she realised that it was barren, ('south' AV - negev - parched, Heb.). So she went to her father with a special request. Othniel had acquired the field for her but the springs were something more. Respectful, she alighted from her mount, eager, she 'sprang down quickly' to approach her father.

Caleb realised she had a particular request to make and asked her straight away what she wanted. Her request was granted - not just the upper springs but the lower ones as well. Caleb appreciated his daughter's initiative. The Lord had said of him, '...my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit in him and has followed me fully...' Numbers 14:24. Now he could see that same spirit in his daughter and rejoiced that like him, she valued her inheritance. The reward would come, as it came eventually to Caleb, whose spirit at eighty-five was the same as a young man's. Achsah was her father's daughter - she fully appreciated what he had given her, she was eager to possess it and make it fruitful and she was not afraid to approach her father for further blessings.

'And he gave her the upper and the nether springs.'

'now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us...' Ephesians 3:20.

3. Deborah Judges

a. Israel's Disobedience Chapters 1 - 3:6

This period in the nation's history was intended to be one of growth and development. The twin keys to success would be faithfulness to God and obedience to His Word - then, as He had promised, God would enable the people to take root in the land and drive out their enemies, Joshua 23:1-11

Just before Joshua died, he gathered all the tribes of Israel together and reminded them of the faithfulness of the Lord since they came out of Egypt, Joshua 24:1-15. The question was, would *the people* continue faithful to their God? '...choose for yourselves this day, whom you will serve.' Joshua knew the hearts of the people and their tendency towards idolatry and unfaithfulness, Exodus 32:15-24.

The people were adamant that they would continue to serve the Lord and there at

Shechem, Joshua renewed God's covenant with the people, at the same time warning them of the consequences of disobedience, Joshua 24:14-31, cp. 23:12-13. The book of Judges shows that Joshua was right to challenge the Israelites - his reservations about their faithfulness were correct and within a generation of his death, 'the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals', Judges 2:10-13, NIV.

The people had started well enough with victories by the tribes of Judah and Simeon, but before long the phrase, 'did not drive out' becomes depressingly frequent. It may have seemed a less drastic process to make the local inhabitants their slaves instead of destroying them, but this was an outright violation of God's command. The Canaanites were ripe for judgment because of their wickedness, Deuteronomy 9:4, and Israel was to be the instrument of God's anger against them. The nation's spiritual slackness and flagrant disobedience would bring many bitter harvests.

b. God's punishment 3:5 - 4:3

The result of allowing the Canaanites to exist amongst them meant a decline in both the national and spiritual life of Israel, 3:5. They ceased to make war against their enemies and preferred to look after their own tribal interests instead of considering the needs of others, 5:15-17. Mixed marriages led inevitably to idolatry and all its corrupt practices - in short, 'the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord'. The result, as warned by Joshua, was subjection to other nations, even by those people who had been allowed to remain in the land of Canaan, 4:2; 10:6-9.

But alongside Israel's unfaithfulness to God was His faithfulness to them. When the people cried to Him in repentance and sorrow, God sent them judges - leaders - to deliver them out of the hands of their oppressors or to govern them in times of peace. Othniel, husband of Achsah, was the first man chosen by God to bring freedom to Israel after eight years of subjection, Ehud and Shamgar followed, but after Ehud's death, Israel returned to idolatry and its inevitable consequences, 4:1-2.

c. God's provision 4:1 - 24

The nation had suffered twenty years of occupation - twenty years of harsh military oppression by Jabin's powerful general Sisera. However, not all the people had lapsed into idolatry and disobedience - many came with their conflicts and dissensions to Deborah the prophetess, who judged amongst the people. They came in obedience to God's law, Deuteronomy 17:8-13, but as they came, hardly able to maintain a normal existence, 5:6-7, Deborah - a true 'mother in Israel' - responded to the needs of her children.

The office of judge was not hereditary; God raised up leaders of His own choice and fitted them for their office and work - Deborah was no figure-head. The Word of God was the foundation of her life and the people of God were her concern and care. Deborah was a woman who could discern the spirit and motives of men but she used the wisdom and guidance of God as their leader and judge; her spiritual and mental abilities had been developed and sharpened by application and experience. A true prophet, she brought the Word of God to the people and to individuals, 'The Lord, the God of Israel commands you...' v6. The day of salvation was imminent, cp. Deuteronomy 18:18; Psalm 68:20.

But twenty years of iron chariots and iron rule had sapped the faith and dimmed the vision of Barak. He knew that battles were to maintain national entity, not to extend national territory - it was a matter of survival, not conquest and his spirit failed at the thought of what defeat would mean. Even though Deborah had given him the promise of victory he would not go unless she went with him.

Deborah's response showed her disappointment at his lack of faith in God's promise - the honour which could have been for Barak that day would go to a woman. At Deborah's command, Barak took his army down from the heights of Tabor and led the people to victory, 'the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword' 4:14-16 NIV. It was an overwhelming display of divine power. The Canaanite leader escaped, only to fall into Jael's hands. Her killing of Sisera appears bloodthirsty and cruel but he was known for his merciless treatment of women, 5:30, and as Jael hammered the tent peg into his temple, she delivered the judgment and condemnation of God upon all who rape and abuse.

d. God's Triumph Chapter 5

Just as Moses and Miriam celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, so Deborah and Barak led the tribes in this great expression of triumph and thanksgiving, cp. Exodus 15:1-21. The state of the nation and the struggles of the people, the sound of battle and the surge of the torrent, all come together in epic poetry which reflects the spirit of a woman whose courage and enthusiasm brought a nation back from its twenty years of lethargy and disobedience.

i. Past and Present 5: 2-11

v 2. A vital part of the victory over Jabin, was the willingness of many men in answer to the call of Barak, 4:6,10, cp. 1 Chronicles 28:9.

vs 3-5. Deborah calls to the Gentile kings to witness the mighty acts of Jehovah, the God Who had made a covenant with Israel that He would be *their* God, Exodus 19:1-20; Deuteronomy 33:2.

vs 6-8. The failures of the past are not glossed over - 'they chose new gods' and war came right to the gates of their villages and towns, but no-one could take up arms against such an enemy. Deborah was watching as a mother over the people, cp. Job 29:12-16.

vs 9-11. Deborah pays tribute to those who were willing leaders and who saw their obedience rewarded by the Lord. All classes of society are urged to praise Him and to spend time considering the righteous acts of God, cp. 1 Samuel 12:6-11. The city gates were open, the elders were in their place, people were no longer afraid, Proverbs 31:23.

ii. Conflict and victory 5:12-23.

v.12. Barak displayed his captives and Deborah celebrated the victory in song. History had been made and must be recorded for the encouragement and caution of future generations.

vs 13-18. But first, serious commitment and sacrifice are contrasted with lack of involvement and an indifferent spirit. Deborah lists the tribes who fought with Barak - brave men, who put their lives in jeopardy while their brethren deliberated and discussed or simply ignored the issue. Farming, trade and commerce were more easily dealt with than tribal conflict - and posed no dangers. Their names, Reuben, Dan and Asher, are written for ever in the scriptures as a reminder of the time when they turned their backs on the sufferings of others.

vs 19-23. From Tabor's mountain top, it seemed to Deborah that the very stars in heaven came out to fight against the kings of Canaan. But it was the brook, 'that ancient river, the river Kishon' that won the day as it swept the forces of Jabin away to their deaths. As God had promised, He delivered the enemy into the hands of Israel, 4:7, but although God

fought for His people and gave them the victory, the people of Meroz are cursed because they refused to help or associate with Israel.

vs 24-30. Jael presents the contrast to Meroz - she too was not an Israelite, but she was prepared to play her part in the battle against evil, ready to strike the final blow against a ruthless and violent man. The hammer struck the tent peg and Sisera was dead, destroyed by the hand of a woman, 4:9. His mother and the royal ladies waited in vain for his return, but never again would he ruin lives and violate youth and beauty, never again would he share with them the spoils of war.

vs 3,31. When Deborah led the victorious people in praise, all the glory was for the Lord Jehovah, her music and song were all for Him. The theme was martial but the fervour was spiritual for it was the Lord who gave the victory, 4:14; 5:12.

Deborah's triumphant cry would be echoed throughout the land by 'her children' and the fruits of that victory lasted forty years.

Conclusion

Deborah was a gifted woman - known amongst the people as a prophet and in time of military crisis, having authority to command the tribal leaders, 4:14. Although recognised as a judge and leader she preferred to be seen as a mother, 5:7, but a mother who worked on a national rather than domestic level. Her family were the people of God and Deborah willingly took responsibility for them. It was a time when the national spirit was at a low ebb. People were oppressed and depressed, but Deborah, whose name denotes 'activity', gradually brought the nation back to a spirit of obedience and a mood of self respect. Her wisdom and spirituality were gifts from God in a day when men seemed weak in faith and content for a woman to lead. But Deborah never abused her gifts, rather she developed them before the Lord, having the support of her husband, Lapidoth and the respect of princes and leaders.

As a 'mother in Israel' Deborah was: -

- a. emotionally involved with the people, 5:9.
- b. aware of the needs of the people, 5:6-8.
- c. appreciative of a willing spirit, 5:2, 9.
- d. able to praise and reprove, because she knew the hearts of the people, 5:13-18.
- e. willing to support Barak, whose faith was not so strong as hers, 4:8-10.
- f. continually waiting upon God's Word for direction and help and trusting in God's power to work on behalf of the people, 4:6,14, cp. Proverbs 3:5-6.

Lively, enthusiastic, forthright - whether directing the people in battle or leading the nation in praise, Deborah was an example to those she genuinely cared for. She commanded but never dominated; her aim was to strengthen faith and encourage obedience; her joy was to see God's people working together in commitment to each other and for the glory of His name.

Deborah, a true mother - a woman who feared the Lord and earned her reward, Proverbs. 31:31.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. Joshua 2:8-9,21 cp. Hebrews 11:31; James 2:24-26.
Rahab put her faith in the God of Israel and showed her faith by obedience to His messengers.

2. Joshua 15:18-19 cp. Ephesians 1:11-12; 1Peter 1:4 Colossians 1:12, 3:24;

Caleb would have rejoiced to see the value his daughter placed on her inheritance.

3. Joshua 15:19 cp. Ephesians 1:3; Hebrews 4:16.
Achsah was not afraid to approach her father and ask for further blessings.

4. Judges 4:4-6 cp. I Timothy 4:13-16.

Deborah had sharpened her God-given gifts by application and experience.

5. Judges 4:8-10 cp. Romans 15:1.

Deborah, as a 'mother in Israel', was willing to support Barak, whose faith was not so strong as hers.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 6 EXAM JOSHUA AND JUDGES

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. Rahab is mentioned alongside Abraham in the New Testament because of her
 - a. courage
 - b. self sacrifice
 - c. faith
 - d. meekness
2. In which of the following books is Rahab not mentioned?
 - a. Matthew
 - b. Romans
 - c. James
 - d. Hebrews
3. When Achsah approached Caleb for 'springs of water' she showed that she
 - a. was eager to make money
 - b. wanted to make the field into a beautiful garden
 - c. valued her inheritance
 - d. wanted a lot more than her father was willing to give
4. In the book of Judges which phrase occurs again and again?
 - a. And the hand of the Israelites *grew stronger...*
 - b. They *did not remember* the Lord their God
 - c. Zebulun *did not drive out* the Canaanites
 - d. And *the Lord was with* Judah
5. God was faithful to Israel and when they cried out in repentance He sent
 - a. times of plenty
 - b. armies to protect them
 - c. judges
 - d. plagues on their enemies
6. The leadership of Israel was
 - a. hereditary
 - b. ordered by the Lord
 - c. shared between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin
 - d. decided by a council of elders
7. A vital part of the victory over Jabin was
 - a. the strength of Barak's army
 - b. the willingness of those who volunteered to fight
 - c. the enemy's lack of preparation
 - d. the popularity of Barak and his generals
8. The tribes of Reuben, Dan and Asher are remembered for their
 - a. courage in battle
 - b. lack of numbers
 - c. reluctance to be involved

- d. faith in the power of God
9. Deborah's name means
- a. beauty
 - b. activity
 - c. light
 - d. caring
10. The Bible records Deborah as
- a. a gracious leader
 - b. a wise judge
 - c. a mother in Israel
 - d. a woman who feared the Lord

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What valuable lesson in prayer does Achsah's actions suggest?

Chapter 7

NATIONAL HISTORY - THE THEOCRACY

Israel in the Land of Canaan - Ruth and 1 Samuel

1. Ruth and Naomi The Book of Ruth

a. Introduction Chapter 1:1

The book of Judges gives us the life and times of an unsettled nation - full of disorder and danger, with superstition rivalling faith in God and 'every man doing that which was right in his own eyes', 17:6; 21:25. The book of Ruth reminds us that the true spirit of the nation was still in evidence, even in the midst of awful immorality and spiritual corruption.

Conflict and violence produce men and women of courage and faith as well as those who perpetrate wickedness; Gideon and his three hundred men, Deborah and Barak, Samson and his final self-sacrifice - these were characters whose words and ways are written large in the word of God, people to be remembered, conquerors through faith, Hebrews 11:32-40.

In the book of Ruth we would search in vain for the armaments of war, Judges 4:3, for a dispirited people hiding in caves, 6:2, for courage in battle, 4:16, or for mighty deeds through the Spirit of the Lord, 3:9-10. The landscape of this book is local and pastoral; there is no hint of menace from invading tribes but the threat of poverty and the tension of uncertainty overshadows its pleasant aspect. The characters of Ruth and Naomi are clearly defined and within the limits of their own experiences we find oppression and sorrow, faith and courage. Their chariots of iron were the afflictions and challenges of life; their achievements were personal and domestic - no less important in the eyes of the Lord, Who ultimately rewarded them in ways beyond all they had ever thought.

b. The Famine 1:1-5

Humanly speaking, Elimelech was in a quandary. Bethlehem ('House of Bread') could no longer provide for him and his family. The health of the boys obviously caused their parents deep concern, Mahlon ('sick'), Chilion ('pining'), so they decided to leave home for Moab. It would seem that Naomi was the prime mover in the decision; her words to Ruth and Orpah, v13, and to the women of Bethlehem, v21, witness to the fact that the Lord had shown her the sin she had committed '...the Lord hath testified against me', AV. Naomi was a strong minded woman, able to marshall her arguments in a forthright and persuasive manner, cp. vs 8-15. Elimelech would have found it hard to resist the pleadings of his wife when faced with her worries about the future and the indifferent health of their sons. Nevertheless, Elimelech should have stood firm. His name implies, 'My God is King' and yet by going to Moab, for whatever reason, he denied outright the lordship of God in his life, Deuteronomy 23:3-6 cp. Numbers 22-25. He aligned himself with the spirit of those days by doing what was right in his own eyes, ignoring God's command and refusing to trust Him for the future..... and behind his decision was Naomi.

No doubt, the parents never meant to remain in Moab but somehow the years went by (v2, 'they continued there' margin AV) and then Elimelech died. The boys were fully integrated into Moab society and married two local women, Ruth and Orpah, which no doubt would have persuaded Naomi to remain indefinitely with the prospect of grandchildren to care for. But the grandchildren never came and both sons died - all of Naomi's posterity, all that she had so vehemently protected in her own strength and reasoning had gone. Ten years in Moab, ten wasted years? There was bread now in Bethlehem, but there was a famine in Naomi's heart and soul.

c. The Return 1:6-22

‘Naomi.....set out on the road which would take them back to the land of Judah’ vs 6-7 NIV. Going back to Judah involved much more than the actual journey, it required determination and courage - because for Naomi, going back meant an admission of sin. Her present distress was a sombre witness to the fact that she had disobeyed God's Word and failed to trust the One Who, in His own way and in His own time, had provided for His people - He will never deny His Name, Genesis 22:14.

Naomi (‘pleasant’) would deny her name when confronted by the women of Bethlehem, ‘Call me Mara (‘bitterness’), but she did not hide the fact that her sorrows were self-imposed because of her sin against the Lord. Naomi had the courage to face her former neighbours and friends; but more than that, she had the courage to face the truth about herself.

At the commencement of her journey, Naomi had the company of her two daughters-in-law. She appreciated their kindness but obviously felt they would be much better off if they returned to the security of their maternal homes, rather than setting out into an unknown situation with their widowed mother-in-law. Naomi expressed the hope that Ruth and Orpah would marry again, she gave them her blessing and embraced them with tenderness and love. All the sadness of Naomi's heart spilled out and she wept with regret over the loss of her sons, the hopelessness of her own situation and the sorrows that had come into the lives of the two young women. Though she spoke of the Lord, such was the darkness and depression in Naomi's soul that she would send her own family back to the worship of idols, v 15. The weight of responsibility for the sorrows of the past and the awful uncertainty of the future burdened Naomi's soul and obscured any faith in the mercy and love of the Lord.

With much heartache and tears Orpah turned back to Moab but Ruth remained. She clung to her mother-in-law, who made one last attempt to break the family ties, only to hear from the lips of her gentile daughter an affirmation of devotion in words which even now epitomise the very heights of love and dedication of one person to another. This bonding was unbreakable, for although Ruth was a Moabite by birth, it was evident that she was an Israelite in spirit. The full impact of her devotion is felt in the declaration that ‘thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God’. The future was stark - poverty, even alienation - but Ruth had made her choice long before. It was not to be the idols of Moab but the God of Israel, the One Who was calling Naomi back home.

Ruth wanted nothing more in life than to be with Naomi - having grown to love her during happier times, she would not leave her now in days of adversity. Naomi sensed that God had spoken in Ruth's solemn commitment to her, ‘So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.....and they came.....in the beginning of the barley harvest.’

The Lord was opening up a path of blessing for the two women, which Naomi would find to be ‘.....as the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day’, 2:20; Proverbs 4:18, NIV.

d. The Master Chapter 2

Boaz was a man of wealth and authority - his word was to be obeyed. But the strength of his authority had nothing to do with earnings or status; it lay in the dignity and refinement of his character and in the care and consideration which Boaz habitually showed to his employees.

His greeting to the reapers was a true ‘Shalom’, full of the spirit of peace and goodness

towards others and these virtues were distilled amongst the workers - even, when occasion demanded, amongst high-spirited young men. Boaz was well thought of, his discipline was respected and his goodwill coveted. When he enquired from his servant concerning Ruth, it was evident that his example of courtesy and care was followed by those who worked for him.

Boaz not only saw, he understood the situation, vs 11-12, cp. Proverbs 1:5 - observation backed by perception. He was well aware that Naomi had returned to Bethlehem under difficult circumstances and that she could have claimed relief from him as a near kinsman of her husband. (Naomi felt the reproach of her exile deeply; she had come home, but not to be a burden to her friends or family). He knew of the kindness and self-sacrifice of Ruth and of her living faith and practical trust in the God of Israel - this man was not only in touch with the comings and goings of town life, he had a *heart* for the people of Bethlehem and the desire to minister to the needs of others, as he was able.

e. The Gleaner Chapter 2

Ruth had spoken words of devotion and courage to Naomi, 1:16-17, now the reality of her promise was proved in her request to glean in the fields. In her desire to provide for Naomi there was devotion; in her hope that she would find someone who would treat her kindly there was courage.

It was of the Lord that she found herself working in the fields belonging to Boaz, a man who obeyed the Lord's commands concerning the alien, Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22. But Boaz went beyond what was required by the Lord for those who gleaned in the fields - he knew the circumstances behind Ruth's appearance and appreciated her spirit of care and diligence in all that she did.

Boaz approached Ruth with a spirit of fatherly kindness, 'my daughter, listen to me', and Ruth responded with genuine respect and humility. Her words seem to convey that verbal abuse and rejection might well have been her experience as a stranger in Israel - '...you have given me comfort and spoken kindly to your servant', v13. It was good that Ruth knew that she was appreciated; that the Lord would reward her in His time for her kindness to Naomi and her sacrifice for Him.

Boaz was considerate in words as well as deeds. He knew that the mind and heart can be as hungry for comfort and reassurance as the body is for food and Boaz saw to it that Ruth returned home that evening with a full heart as well as with full hands.

The import of her meeting with Boaz was evident only when Ruth told her mother-in-law the news of the day, v20b. Naomi immediately recognised the hand of the Lord in directing Ruth to the field of their near relative and counselled her to remain with his workers, where she would be safe. Concern and respect for each other marked the relationship between Naomi and Ruth - the mother for the daughter and the daughter for the mother. Material needs had not created a lack in the sweet courtesies of life; a menial job in the harvest fields had not fostered a spirit of discontent, Proverbs 15:17.

The Kinsman-Redeemer, v20

God had made provision for the continuance of the family name and inheritance, should the head of the family die without heirs and the widow be forced to sell any land or property. The nearest relative - the kinsman redeemer - was to buy back (redeem) what had been sold and if the widow was still young, he was to marry her - their first-born son would bear the name of the widow's first husband and inherit the redeemed land or

property, cp. Leviticus 25:23-28; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

f. The Request Chapter 3

'I will do whatever you say,' v5. Ruth had appreciated the guidance and encouragement of her mother-in-law throughout the long months of harvest, now, as Naomi directed her to the threshing floor and their kinsman redeemer, she had no hesitation in obeying the one whose thoughts toward her were always for good and blessing.

'She came softly', v7 AV. This was to be virtually a proposal of marriage but Ruth knew how to behave, she knew how to obey Naomi's wise counsel, cp. 1 Samuel 18:14. Ruth herself was growing in wisdom - taught by the example of her mother-in-law's life, 2:23b. Although the method of gaining Boaz's attention may seem strange to western minds, it was according to the custom of those days and Boaz obviously regarded Ruth's request as right in the circumstances. But more than that, for he loved Ruth - her gentle nature and disposition had filled his heart and mind for many months - and he gladly acknowledged his own great joy in her approach to him.

The chapter began with Naomi's desire that Ruth should have a secure future, 'Shall I not seek rest for you.'. It ends with her counselling Ruth to 'Sit still, my daughter.....for the man will not be in rest until he has finished the thing this day.'. Naomi knew that there was nothing more for either her or Ruth to do; the matter was now entirely in the hands of Boaz. But such was her knowledge of the man - his character and way of working - that she could wait with confidence and encourage Ruth to do the same. To wait, to 'sit still', might well have tried the patience of a young woman, but Ruth's habit was to obey the word of those she trusted, 2:23; 3:5,13b-14, whether in action or repose.

g. The Marriage Chapter 4

The transaction was carried out at the gates of the city in the presence of ten responsible men. The nearest relative of Naomi was willing to redeem the field that she intended to sell but he had no desire to spoil his own inheritance by marrying Ruth and raising a family to perpetuate the name of another. So Boaz was able to become the kinsman redeemer and take Ruth as his wife - with the blessing of the people of Bethlehem, vii.

When a son was born to Ruth and Boaz, Naomi's joy was complete. She had returned to Bethlehem in bitterness and sorrow, so that the women questioned her name, 'Is this Naomi?'. Those same women could now rejoice at the blessings which filled her life and pay tribute to the one who had so faithfully ministered to her, even to restoring the family she had lost - 'There is a son born to Naomi.'. Ruth received her reward, 2:12, but ever faithful to her vow, 1:16, she shared God's blessing with Naomi - mother, counsellor, and closest friend.

The writers of a nation's history might find little to inspire in the lives of these women, but the all-wise Spirit of God has directed the thoughts of generations to this relationship - forged in the trials and sorrows of life, made strong through the virtues of trust, patience and commitment - the bedrock of any relationship. The Lord does not look at the things that man looks at, 1 Samuel 16:7 NIV, and Ruth's obedience and dedication were to bring her into eternal history through the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Matthew 1:1,5.

2. Hannah 1 Samuel

a. Hannah's Request Chapter 1

Elkanah's household would appear to outsiders as well ordered and God fearing. Every year the family made the pilgrimage to Shiloh; the husband sacrificing the peace offering,

wives and children sharing in the thanksgiving meal, Leviticus 3:1-5; 7:11-15. But with one wife unable to have children and the other wife always ready to remind her of that fact, the order was only external - within minds and hearts there was concern, sorrow and aggravation.

Hannah's childlessness seemed more acute at the time of the annual sacrifice. Peninnah's words, year after year, cut deeper into her sorrow and not even the double portion from the hand of a loving husband could alleviate her pain. Hannah never shared with him the distress which Peninnah caused her, preferring to bear that shame alone.

It was after the thanksgiving meal, Leviticus 7:11-18, that Hannah went to pray at the temple, 'in bitterness of soul', v10. It was as though she could carry her sorrow no longer and 'she vowed a vow'; Hannah's words had a depth and determination about them which came, not from the emotion of the moment, but from the dark days and nights of anguish which preceded their visit to Shiloh. Her vow was of the Lord - *He* had willed her childlessness, *He* had led His child through a dark valley, now *He* would give her the strength to make the vow and enable her to keep it, vs 5-6, 10-11, cp. Deuteronomy 12:11; Psalm 65:1-2.

It seems that even in the intensity of her prayers, Hannah's voice was silent - her request, her sorrow was for God alone, Psalm 5:1-3, 7-8. Although accused of drunkenness by Eli, (who no doubt saw many such cases every day, 2:22) her patient spirit responded graciously and humbly to the old man - High Priest of Israel. Eli's blessing was not a firm prediction, but Hannah, filled with peace and joy went back to her husband assured that God, 'the Lord of Hosts/the Lord Almighty', v 11, Possessor of infinite resources and power, would grant her request. Prayer had been the remedy for sorrow, cp. Psalm 86:1-8.

Hannah's faith was rewarded and she named their son 'Samuel' - 'God-heard', cp. Genesis 16:11. When his weaning was complete, the child was taken to the temple in fulfilment of his mother's vow, that the whole of his life should be spent in the presence and service of the Lord, v 28, cp. v 11. Nothing is mentioned as to Hannah's feelings when she left her little one, but from the phrase, 'young as he was', v24, NIV, they can be imagined.

b. Hannah's Thanksgiving 2:1-10

Just as Hannah had reached the depths of sorrow in her prayer for a child, now she reaches the heights of praise in her thanksgiving to the Lord. The spirit of Hannah's song is not one of triumphalism - there is no self-exaltation, no gloating over the downfall of a rival - there is triumph, but the *Lord's* victory is the theme. It was *His* strength, *His* justice, *His* overall power which prevailed to bring deliverance. Nevertheless, it was from personal experience that Hannah tunes her praise, for she discerned in the events of her own life the divine principles which applied to a nation as well as an individual.

vs 1-2 From the time of Moses, the strength, holiness and stability of the God of Israel was known by the nation, Exodus 19:1-6; Deuteronomy 32:4 cp. Psalm 18:1-3.

vs 3-8a There was no room for arrogance before the Lord - He knows the heart of man, cp. Proverbs 24:12, and weighs motives as well as deeds. His own actions are always just and righteous and in *His* hands are the issues of life and death.

vs 8b-10 Hannah concluded her prayer with the assurance that as Jehovah controls the earth the righteous have nothing to fear - His strength is ever available. She had rejoiced in its provision at the beginning of the hymn, v1, and at the close of her thanksgiving, she

prophesied by the Spirit of God concerning the day when a king in Israel would rejoice in the same strength and enabling, Psalm 31:1-3, cp. Psalm 2.

c. Hannah's Reward 2:18-21,26.

It was a mother's privilege and joy to visit her son each year and provide 'a little robe' for a growing boy. This would mark him out in his special relationship before the Lord, v18, cp. Exodus 28:40-41, but more than a robe, it was his behaviour which set Samuel apart and ultimately gave him a supreme role in the history of Israel. First among the prophets - those fearless men who brought the Word of God to individual and nation, 1 Samuel 7:3-5; a man who felt it a sin, should he cease to pray for the people of God, 1 Samuel 12:23; the man chosen by God to establish the monarchy and choose out from amongst the tribes the kings of Israel, 1 Samuel 8:22. Hannah was blessed with more sons and daughters, but her great reward was the life and witness of her first born, Samuel.

Samuel's blessing was a mother who gave to her child a sense of the presence and the reality of the Lord. Domestic life, family problems, never stunted Hannah's spiritual growth - grace, patience, strength and godliness - all developed in the confines of the home with its daily frustrations, duties, joys and sorrows. Her anchor was the Lord and her regular, personal times of prayer and worship. Elkanah led the way, 1:3, but Hannah knew what it was to be in the presence of God alone, 1:9-10. Samuel came in answer to a specific prayer and his life was the fruit of a mother's dedication to her Lord.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. Ruth 2:4-8 cp. John 10:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4

Boaz had a heart for the people of Bethlehem and the desire to minister to the needs of others.

2. Ruth 2:10-13 cp. Hebrews 10:35-37; Revelation 22:12

It was good that Ruth knew that she was appreciated and that the Lord would reward her in His time.

3. 1 Samuel 2:18-21 cp. 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-17

Samuel came in answer to Hannah's prayers and his life was the fruit of a mother's dedication to the Lord.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 7 EXAM

RUTH

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The setting of the book of Ruth is
 - a. a great city
 - b. a palace
 - c. the countryside
 - d. all of the above

2. When Elimelech went to Moab he was
 - a. doing the best for his wife and family
 - b. denying the Lordship of God in his life
 - c. following the example of his friends
 - d. relying on his own assessment of the situation

3. Naomi preferred to be known as Mara when she returned to Bethlehem because
 - a. she had disobeyed the Lord
 - b. her husband and sons were dead
 - c. the future was bleak
 - d. all of the above

4. The height of Ruth's devotion to Naomi is displayed in
 - a. her obedience
 - b. her hard work
 - c. her words
 - d. her loyalty

5. People respected the authority of Boaz because of his
 - a. position as an elder in the town
 - b. riches and land
 - c. large household
 - d. refined and caring character

6. The Lord's commands concerning treatment of strangers is found in
 - a. Leviticus 23:26 - 27
 - b. Leviticus 19:9 - 10
 - c. Deuteronomy 30:19-20
 - d. Deuteronomy 24:19 - 22

7. Ruth's growth in wisdom and understanding came through the example of
 - a. her friends
 - b. the surrounding culture
 - c. her mother-in-law
 - d. Boaz

8. Ruth's obedience and dedication brought her into
 - a. eternal history
 - b. authority and power
 - c. wealth and security
 - d. inheritance and privilege

9. Hannah's remedy for sorrow was
 - a. activity
 - b. prayer
 - c. self examination
 - d. conference

10. Hannah's great reward was
 - a. her family
 - b. the love and concern of her husband
 - c. the life and witness of Samuel
 - d. her prayer of thanksgiving through the Holy Spirit

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What is your main ambition or goal in life?

Chapter 8
NATIONAL HISTORY - THE MONARCHY
1095 - 606 BC 490 YEARS
The United Kingdom Saul to Solomon - 120 Years
1 & 2 Samuel - 1 Kings 12

1. Michal 1 & 2 Samuel

a. Saul - King of Israel 1 Samuel 8 -10:25

Up to the time of the prophet Samuel the nation of Israel had been under the rule of God. He was their leader, He appointed those who from time to time delivered the nation from their enemies, e.g. Deborah, Gideon, Samson. The prospect of a king however, had found a place in the writings of Moses, long before the days of the Judges - in those days the people had become restless under the rule of the Lord and had tried to make Gideon their king, Judges 8:22-23 but it was never the mind of God that the people should depart from His rule. Moses had prophesied, ‘When you enter the land.....and say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us...”’, Deuteronomy 17:14-15. This placed the responsibility of changing from a theocratic government to the rule of a king squarely on the shoulders of the people. Nevertheless, the Lord allowed and overruled the will of His people and thus the way was prepared for the coming of the King of Kings, Who will rule over the whole earth, Zechariah 14:9.

Samuel was a judge as well as a prophet in Israel and was aware of the spirit of the times. He knew that the people wanted a king and felt the shame of their demands, 8:6-8, but more than that, he knew the demands a king would make on the people. The warning was given but not heeded and Samuel prepared to search out the future ruler. Saul, son of Kish, the Benjamite was chosen and presented to the people at Mizpeh, ch.9-10:25. This ‘giant amongst men’, 10:23, proved to be only in stature and not in spirit and his subsequent disobedience, 13:1-14; his self will, 15:1-35; his seeking help from a medium, 28:3-20, became steps downward to ruin and death.

God had never left Saul alone to rule as best he could. From the very beginning Samuel was at his side with the Word of God, 10:25, ready to encourage, guide or rebuke - not just as God's representative before the king, but as a genuine friend and mentor. He loved Saul and was grieved by his arrogance and often foolish handling of situations, 14:24-46, which effectively kept him from realising his potential in the strength and enabling of the Lord. After Saul's outright disobedience in his treatment of Agag, Samuel, sick at heart, left the king for the last time, 15:34 and within a short time he was directed by God to anoint David, son of Jesse, as Israel's future king, ch. 16.

b. The King's Daughter - her love for David 1 Samuel 18

After David's great achievement in destroying Goliath, ch. 17, he became part of the royal household; Saul's son Jonathan became his particular friend and the king's younger daughter, Michal, not surprisingly, fell in love with him. Saul, however, became consumed with jealousy and felt that his position as king was in danger as David's popularity amongst the people grew stronger every day. Here was a man with ‘the common touch’, v16, not only a courageous soldier but a leader who commanded the respect of his armies. Saul's jealousy led to terrible bouts of rage and eventually the king sent him out to fight the Philistines - sure in his heart that David would be killed. He promised him his elder daughter Merab, should he win the battle.

Michal's love for David was to prove a source of suffering from the very beginning - first he was promised to her sister, who obviously had no love for him, v19. Then Saul used the true love of Michal as a further bait to David, in the hope that his outrageous demand

would lead to David's death. Michal was just a pawn in the intrigues and politics of court life - would her capricious father refuse to give her to David if he survived? But David provided Saul with the evidence of 200 dead Philistine warriors and Saul had no choice but to give Michal in marriage to his rival, conscious of an even stronger alliance against him.

c. The King's Daughter - her sacrifice for David 1 Samuel 19:1-18

Michal had no rest from her anxieties even after marriage and the day came when David had to leave his home. Heroism and success in battle only made matters worse between him and Saul and Michal had to lie to her father's servants in order to give David time to escape. Such was her concern for his safety that she was willing to let him go - not knowing where and certainly not realising how long their separation would be. David had counted it an honour to be married to the daughter of the king, 18:23. He had gone into battle for her hand in marriage and Michal must have appreciated his courage, but it appears that Michal never came to appreciate David's Lord. This incident revealed the extent of Michal's commitment to David, it also revealed that idolatry was still part of her life. She loved David, took risks for him, but had nothing to do with the One Who had anointed him as future king - she used an idol to deceive the servants and lied to her father. Well aware of the terrible mood swings of Saul, Michal no doubt felt justified in her behaviour but from subsequent events it seems that a godly fear of the *Lord* never became a personal reality, although she must have been aware of His presence and power, both in the life of her father and her husband.

d. The King's Wife - her contempt for David 1 Samuel 25:44; 2 Samuel 3:12-16; 2 Samuel 6:1-23.

Nothing is said of Michal during the long years of David's exile except that Saul gave his daughter to another man, even though she was still bound in marriage to David. After Saul's death in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David was anointed king over the tribe of Judah, in Hebron. Ish-bosheth, one of Saul's sons became king over the remaining tribes in Israel, but 'the war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.' 2 Samuel 3:1 NIV. Eventually David made a pact with Abner, Saul's former chief of staff; the agreement being that he would negotiate on condition that Abner brought Michal back to him, which Abner did, much to the sorrow of her husband, Paltiel. Once again, Michal became a political pawn. David now had several wives and sons but Michal was his first wife, the wife of his youth, won through a deed of reckless daring - she belonged to him.

In time, through the murders of both Abner and Ish-bosheth (which David himself had no part in) the other tribes in Israel came to David and allied themselves to Judah - now David was king over all the land and he set up his capital in the former stronghold of the Jebusites - Jerusalem, 2 Samuel 5:5. Only one thing was missing - the symbol of God's presence amongst them, the Ark of the Covenant. David made two attempts to bring the Ark back to the city, 2 Samuel 6, he was successful the second time, but in his rejoicing and celebration, Michal showed her true spirit and spoiled for ever her relationship with her husband, the king.

The contempt Michal showed for David revealed something much more deep-seated - her contempt for the spiritual. Her sarcasm was directed to the 'king of Israel', dressed as a common man, showing himself up before the slaves. Michal had no appreciation of the joy which the people were feeling and their king was expressing on their behalf at the return of the Ark from the hands of the Philistines.

Michal may excite our sympathy - her life overshadowed by the dictates of politics and tradition - nevertheless, she loved and was loved by 'the man after God's own heart', the sweet psalmist of Israel, ancestor of the Saviour Himself and the king's daughter eventually became the king's wife. But she never marvelled at the grace of God, she never came to echo David's words, 'Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me thus far?' 7:18. She loved the position and power, but not the One Who gave it to her.

2. Abigail 1 Samuel

a. Nabal's folly 25:1-22

This incident took place when David was on the run from Saul. His supporters had increased to about six hundred men but his life was always in danger from the king, 1 Samuel 23:13-18. David however, would never lift his hand against 'the Lord's anointed' - that life was in the Lord's hands and David would leave it there, 1 Samuel 24.

The desert of Maon was situated in the north of Arabia, south of Judah. For a little while, David's small army of men had given protection to the shepherds and flocks of Nabal, so David felt justified in asking him for a share in the festivities, which took place at sheep-shearing time. His young men greeted Nabal in a friendly and polite fashion and merely asked for whatever could be spared in the way of provisions. Nabal's reply was a shock to David but not to anyone who knew the man and certainly not to his wife or his servants.

David's reaction was explosive and as much on account of his men as of himself - Nabal had insulted him and totally ignored the valuable protection given to his possessions, vs 10-16. But if Nabal was indifferent to David, one of his servants certainly understood that no-one trifled with the son of Jesse and emerged without harm or loss, v17.

Abigail is described as 'an intelligent and beautiful woman', v3 NIV. How she came to be married to someone as uncouth and ungracious as Nabal is not told, but it was evident that Nabal's manners and ways had not transferred themselves to his wife. She remained intelligent and beautiful and eminently approachable, even with the dire news of impending disaster brought about through the senseless behaviour of her own husband.

Abigail's response to the servant's warning was as swift as David's had been to Nabal's rejection. But while David's behaviour, as a servant of God, had been inappropriate and revengeful, Abigail showed a level of wisdom and discretion which was admirable in the circumstances. She wasted no time in discussing the situation or deploring the behaviour of Nabal - action was needed and action would be taken.

Abigail's swift and confident decisions were the result of careful thought and judgment in the domestic problems and minor upsets of everyday life. Now in this unexpected emergency, her trained and ordered mind could cope, not only with measuring out provisions for six hundred hungry men but also with appeasing their angry leader, determined for revenge.

b. Abigail's Wisdom 25:23-42

David may have been a lawless renegade to Nabal, but to his wife, David was the future king of Israel. Abigail's deference - in posture as well as words - had nothing to do with flattery or servility, rather it had to do with faith. Abigail knew David as the Lord's anointed one and in her wisdom, she appreciated not only the danger threatening her household but also the disaster which awaited David, if he gave way to the anger which Nabal had generated. Abigail's intelligence was spiritual as well as practical and as she confessed her belief in his future glory, she showed her concern for the present and the preservation of David's spiritual well being. Like a gift from God, Abigail had brought the treasure of her faith to David, to encourage him in the day of his rejection and to keep

him from sin.

Her wise words and prompt action and her provision for the young men more than appeased David's wrath. He recognised how near he had been to taking the Lord's place in his desire to avenge Nabal's behaviour, Romans 12:19. and acknowledged from a full heart that the Lord had sent Abigail to him that day.

If Abigail knew when to speak, she also knew when to keep silent, v36, cp. Ecclesiastes 3:7, and not until the festivities were past did she approach Nabal. His behaviour towards David and his men and his drunkenness at the feast are a vivid contrast to the dignified self control of Abigail. Though married to an insolent drunkard, she kept herself and her house from stooping to his depths of behaviour, committing her ways and thoughts to the Lord. Her time with David must have borne in on her heart the distress and sorrow of her present relationship, nevertheless she returned to Nabal and her responsibilities.

The effect of Abigail's news on her husband was such that within ten days Nabal was dead. This small minded, selfish man, whose life spelled out his name, could have been the cause of terrible sin, as David realised and confessed, 'vengeance is mine, says the Lord,' v39.

With Nabal's death, David was free to ask Abigail to marry him. She had strengthened him by her faith, would she now support and comfort him by her presence, would she be willing to forgo the wealth and comfort of her home for a place of rejection in the wilderness? The price was high, but the rewards would be great, nevertheless, Abigail's eyes were not on the rewards, but on David and the honour and privilege he had granted her - the humblest service would be enough for Abigail, such was her love for and appreciation of this man.

3. Bathsheba 2 Samuel & 1 Kings

a. Adultery 2 Samuel 11:1-11.

David was no longer a young man and after nearly twenty years on the throne he was still fighting battles. Although the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Moabites and the Edomites were not the threat they had been during Saul's reign, David's presence was still needed to inspire his armies and establish his name, 2 Samuel 12:26-31. However there was an occasion when 'kings go off to war' that David stayed at home - ready to leave the command of his army to his capable generals and well trained men, though he knew he was a 'warrior king' and was failing in his God-given duty by remaining in Jerusalem, 1 Chronicles 28:1-8. What that failure led to was the darkest hour in David's personal history - shared by another, who was not blameless herself.

Bathsheba had given no thought to who might be watching as she combined the freshness of a spring evening and the sensual pleasures of bathing - from where he stood David was well able to appreciate her beauty and indulge his own sensual pleasures. Restless from unaccustomed and unnecessary leisure his eyes and his energies searched for another challenge and found it in Bathsheba.

Whether Bathsheba had any choice in the matter is not clear. David certainly did. He was told exactly who she was - wife of Uriah, daughter of Eliam, both front line fighters, 2 Samuel 23:8,34,39, (also grand daughter of Ahithophel, David's political advisor, 2 Samuel 15:12). Bathsheba was no unknown servant girl, available to humour the impulse of a king. Years before, Abigail had preserved David from the results of equally powerful desires by her appeal to his better nature and responsibility towards the Lord. Bathsheba, it seems, never tried. The moment passed by, their desires were satisfied and, physically cleansed

from the act but defiled by the sin, Bathsheba returned home, Leviticus 15:18; Exodus 20:14.

The result was inevitable and if discovered, the punishment would be extreme, Leviticus 20:10. David's humiliation and guilt now led him further into sin as he ordered Uriah's death - and all because of a moment's sexual indulgence? Rather, this was the culmination of years of power and prosperity, when his orders were unchallenged and his ego gratified. Through the years David had been taking more and more wives, which was against the will of the Lord, 2 Samuel 5:13, cp. Deuteronomy 17:14-20. His actions led eventually to the sin of taking someone else's wife.

b. Repentance 2 Samuel 12

It was the prophet Nathan who revealed the Lord's displeasure to the king, but from the psalms of David, esp. Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, there is evidence that his conscience gave him no rest in the troubled days and sleepless nights before the birth and subsequent death of his child, Psalm 32:4. When another child was born to David and Bathsheba, (Solomon - the man of peace, 1 Chronicles 22:9) Nathan was sent again to David, this time with a message of encouragement - the child was especially loved by the Lord and with this mark of favour and pledge of peace, David and Bathsheba, having acknowledged their sin before God, could rest together in the assurance of the Lord's forgiveness, Psalm 32:1.

c. Responsibility 1 Kings 1; 2:1-25

During the final years of David's reign, trouble erupted again amongst his family - he suffered to the end on account of his terrible sin, 2 Samuel 12:9-14.

When Adonijah began to draw influential people after him, building up support from amongst the court as well as the people, Nathan the prophet approached Bathsheba - she had become a true Queen Mother, a valued and respected figure. The responsibilities of caring for the prince regent and her ageing husband had all drawn her closer to the source of all wisdom and care, the Lord Himself. Now her relationship with David was such that she could remind him lovingly and with due honour, of his promise to Solomon, cp. 1 Chronicles 22:5-10. After David's death, Adonijah tried to use her influence with the new king, but Solomon recognised deceit and cunning when he saw it and dealt with his rebellious brother as he deserved.

d. Conclusion

In the first chapter of Matthew, the genealogy of the Lord mentions Bathsheba as the mother of Solomon and the former wife of Uriah - she is never mentioned by name, but acknowledged, like Tamar, Rahab and Ruth as being in the line of the Saviour, the One Who came to call sinners to repentance. There is no record of her repentance in the scriptures but the sorrow she felt when her baby died - not anger against the Lord or bitterness against David, for 'he comforted her', 2 Samuel 12:24, - came from the heart of a woman who had acknowledged her sin before God and received in faith the blessing of the Lord's forgiveness, Psalm 32:5.

4. The Queen of Sheba 1 Kings 10: 1-13

Like the rest of the known world, the Queen of Sheba gathered her retinue and her riches and travelled to see the wisest man upon the earth, 10:23-25, cp. Proverbs 1:1-7. She came to try the extent of his wisdom with 'hard questions' - the Eastern riddle, i.e. a pointed saying which hints at a profound truth and leaves it to be guessed; but the meeting became more than an exercise in clever word play and veiled truths as the Queen sought insight and understanding to life itself, v2.

She herself had wisdom and proved her ability not so much by the hard questions, but by the fact that she came in the first place to seek *more* wisdom, Proverbs 3:13-18. The Queen came with gifts denoting respect and admiration for what she had heard; she also came in humility and with the desire to learn, for she meant to leave with answers to her questions and enrichment in her philosophy of life.

In fact she left with more than she ever brought in the way of material treasures, more than she ever brought in the way of an inquiring and teachable mind, for she left acknowledging and praising the One Who is the *source* of wisdom and truth, Proverbs 15:33, the God Who in love had given Israel a wise and righteous king. That king, like his God, gave freely of all that the Queen desired and much more and she returned home with her questions answered and her wealth increased, having received ‘according to his royal bounty’ cp. 1 Kings 3:10-14.

In the days of the Lord Jesus Christ the Queen became an example against the men of His generation, Luke 11:29-31. He reminded them of the Queen of the South who, on hearsay, travelled across the deserts of Southern Arabia to hear the wisdom of Solomon. She would not believe until she had seen and then in wonder she confessed, ‘Indeed, not even half had been told me, in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard’ 1 Kings 10:7 NIV, and yet the Lord's contemporaries had before them the wisdom of God incarnate, ‘a greater than Solomon’ and yet they refused to believe His Word, John 1:14,11.

To unbelievers in the first century or to believers in the twenty first century, this oriental queen has much to commend her in the quest for that which brings ‘enduring wealth and prosperity’, Proverbs 8:18 NIV. Now a greater than Solomon is here, ‘in whom are hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ - may her efforts encourage and her rewards inspire all those who love His Name.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1 Samuel 25:39-42 cp. Philippians 3:7-8; Hebrews 13:13.

Abigail was willing to forgo the wealth and comfort of her home for a place with David in the wilderness.

2 Samuel 11:2-4 cp. Matthew 5:27-30.

David's adultery with Bathsheba.

1 Kings 10:13 cp. Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:19.

Solomon gave freely of all that the Queen of Sheba desired - and more.

1 Kings 10:4-8 cp. Colossians 2:3.

Believers possess the One in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 8 EXAM

1 & 2 SAMUEL

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. Saul's feelings towards David were those of
 - a. thankfulness and pride
 - b. jealous anger
 - c. the affection of a father for a son
 - d. suspicion and hatred

2. Michal was used as
 - a. a political pawn by Saul
 - b. an excuse to put David's life in danger
 - c. a factor in negotiations with Abner
 - d. all the above

3. Michal never came to appreciate
 - a. David's power
 - b. David's warm-heartedness
 - c. David's Lord
 - d. David's courage

4. Abigail's ability in making swift and confident decisions were the result of
 - a. business acumen
 - b. education
 - c. family background
 - d. daily practice

5. When Abigail knelt before David she was expressing her
 - a. position as a servant
 - b. ability to natter
 - c. faith in his future kingship
 - d. fear of his anger

6. Bathsheba was
 - a. the daughter of a foreign king
 - b. an unknown servant girl
 - c. married to one of David's bravest soldiers
 - d. related to an important politician

7. David's humiliation and guilt led him to
 - a. repentance
 - b. the thought of suicide
 - c. anger against Bathsheba
 - d. murder

8. David expressed the sufferings of a troubled conscience in
 - a. Psalm 6
 - b. Psalm 3
 - c. Psalm 51
 - d. Psalm 121

9. In later life Bathsheba was
 - a. a respected and valued queen
 - b. a caring wife and mother
 - c. blessed through faith and forgiveness
 - d. all of the above

10. The queen of Sheba demonstrated her wisdom by
 - a. her foreign policies
 - b. the amount of gifts she brought to Solomon
 - c. seeking to gain more wisdom
 - d. the cleverness of her questions

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What quality or qualities in your life would you like to be best remembered for?

Chapter 9
NATIONAL HISTORY - THE MONARCHY
1095 - 606 BC 490 YEARS

The United Kingdom Israel - 120 years

The Divided Kingdom Israel & Judah - 255 years
Kings of Israel - Jeroboam to the Assyrian Captivity
Kings of Judah - Rehoboam to Hezekiah
Kings, Chronicles & the Prophets

The Single Kingdom Judah -115 years
Hezekiah to the Babylonian Captivity
Kings, Chronicles & the Prophets

Introduction

Israel, the united kingdom of twelve tribes under one ruler, was established by the Lord in 1095 BC. Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, was its first king but because of disobedience his dynasty was never established, 1 Samuel 15:26-29. The crown passed to David, who extended and strengthened the kingdom and his son Solomon, in a peaceful and prosperous reign, established Israel as a nation known and respected throughout the world, 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Each king reigned for forty years.

Solomon however, failed towards the end of his reign, 1 Kings 11:1-13 and his son Rehoboam, (an arrogant and foolish young man) was deprived of part of his kingdom, through the God-ordained rebellion of ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam. He set up a separate kingdom which was known as 'Israel' but by establishing an alternative form of religion (which was guaranteed to keep the people away from Jerusalem and ultimately from the Lord Himself, 1 Kings 12) Jeroboam rejected God and His will and became a pattern for the kings who followed him, 1 Kings 14:7-11, cp. 2 Kings 10:31. There were nineteen kings of Israel from nine dynasties, and everyone was a spiritual disaster. Ultimately, 250 years on from Jeroboam's rebellion, the Assyrians took the northern kingdom into captivity, 2 Kings 17:1-23. They were never to return.

The southern kingdom, Judah, comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, 1 Kings 12:21-24, had nineteen kings and one queen, all from the same dynasty, the House of David. Spiritually they fared better than Israel, keeping their capital in Jerusalem and the priesthood in the temple. There were several revivals under the four 'good' kings, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah but the remainder of the rulers were either unstable or totally bad and ultimately the kingdom of Judah, over one hundred years after Israel's exile to Assyria, was taken captive to Babylon for seventy years, 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. The relationship between the two Jewish nations was invariably hostile, in fact, the Lord forbade any alliance between them, 2 Chronicles 20:35-37.

During the whole kingdom period, many prophets were active on the Lord's behalf, warning and guiding both rulers and subjects. The prevailing sin in Israel and Judah was idolatry but there were oases in the wilderness - men and women who remained faithful to their God, encouraging the prophets in their difficult and often dangerous task of preaching to ungodly kings and apathetic people.

- 1. The Progress of Faith -**
The Widow of Zarephath 1 Kings 17

The moment in which Elijah appeared upon the pages of Israel's history was one of the darkest ever known. Jeroboam's sin had developed into wholesale idolatry through the marriage of king Ahab to the notorious Jezebel of Zidon, who set up the worship of Baal in Israel with the full cooperation of her husband, 16:30-33. Jezebel's intention was to root out and destroy anything which was of the true and living God, 18:1-4, as well as establishing altars and a priesthood to her own gods. She was a thoroughly evil woman whose personality and ambitions swamped her weak willed husband and brought eventual destruction to them all. But the first to suffer God's judgment was the land itself and with the land, the people.

Having been sustained for a while by the ravens and the brook, Elijah's next source of supply was a widow, in Zarephath of Zidon. It seems ironic that the country which was the birthplace of the vile Jezebel became a refuge for the prophet. But Elijah had no problem with what the Lord had told him to do. God obviously had His reasons for sending him there.

'A few sticks, a little water, a piece of bread, a handful of flour, a little oil, a little cake' - even Elijah's faith must have been tested by the meagre provisions which the widow possessed, but the word of God had come to him with a great promise and Elijah encouraged the widow to believe that word and give to him out of her poverty and need. She had gone of her own accord to fetch 'a little water' for a stranger, now she went in the strength of the living God to make 'a little cake' for a messenger of the Lord. God's commands are God's enablings.

Her positive response to Elijah brought blessing to the widow and her son - but faith in the prophet was not enough, satisfaction in the provision of oil and meal was not enough. Faith needed to advance to the God of the prophet, satisfaction needed to be found in the *Provider* of the oil and the meal.

The presence of Elijah, a man of God, had brought more than sustenance to that home, it had brought a sense of holiness and for this Gentile woman, living in the midst of unholiness and idol worship, a realisation of sin and judgment. Elijah wasted neither time nor words when the boy died or when his life was restored. By the woman's reaction he could discern the working of God's Spirit in her heart and soul and as she received her son, restored to life and health, she received by faith the God Who forgives sin and remembers it no more, the God Who would one day, give His own Son, a sacrifice for the sin of the world.

2. The Trial of Faith - The Shunammite 2 Kings 4:8-37

Jehoram (Joram), son of Ahab, was king of Israel, 3:1-3, and Elisha had inherited the mantle and prophetic vocation of Elijah, 2:9-15. He travelled throughout the northern kingdom, ministering to every class of society - from kings to widows, from prophets to foreign generals - but unlike Elijah, his ministry was generally one of mercy rather than judgment.

The Shunammite was a spiritual woman who recognised the sanctified life and service of Elisha and she requested her husband that they should provide shelter as well as food for the prophet. Her thoughtful suggestion, which took into consideration her husband's feelings as well as Elisha's needs, was complied with, and in appreciation for this provision, the Shunammite was asked if there was anything she needed - but she was happy and content amongst her own people, in her own locality. Gehazi however, probably through his contact with the servants of the household, knew that there was a need which the woman, in deference to her husband, would not wish to express. When promised a son the woman could hardly believe Elisha's words, but her care and consideration for the prophet and her faith in his promise were rewarded and the child

was born about a year later.

Although the child was a specific gift from God to the Shunammite, there was no thought of possessiveness. A blessing to both parents and a favourite in the household, the father was able, with confidence, to entrust his child to one of the servants when the child was taken ill out in the harvest field. No one dreamt that the headache would lead to death, least of all his mother, and as the child lay dead in her arms it was at this moment that her concern for her husband and her 'own people' was most apparent. Without upsetting the household, she set off to find the prophet, knowing that he alone could deal with the situation, knowing that she alone could persuade him to return.

The urgency of the situation was betrayed only by the speed with which the Shunammite and the servant travelled. There was still no hint that there was anything wrong until that is, the mother approached the prophet. Then her grief was evident and the bitter tears flowed. Elisha was deeply concerned that the Lord had kept this tragedy from him but as the woman begged him to come back, Elisha recognised that it was faith that demanded his presence - the faith that stands firm in the time of sorrow and loss, that trusts in the reality of God's love and faithfulness and which eventually had its reward in the restoration of life.

The Shunammite's strength of character never faltered, whether facing the distress of bereavement or the threat of famine and exile, 2 Kings 8:1-6. Obedient to the word of the prophet, she left home and country for seven long years, only to find on her return that her land and possessions had all been confiscated. It appears that the Shunammite was now a widow, as she herself approached King Jehoram to plead for their restitution - still a woman of independence and dignity, in this case, she would ask no help from the prophet.

The king was not a man renowned for wisdom and justice but it so happened that Gehazi, the servant of Elisha was in the presence of Jehoram, just as the woman and her son were given audience for their request. The subject of the king's conversation was the very miracle which Elisha had performed at Shunem, which influenced Jehoram to such an extent that he immediately assigned an official to look into the mother's petition and restore her land and all her lost income.

Many years before, Elisha had suggested that he speak for the Shunammite to the king - there had been no need then, for she 'lived amongst her own people'. But the day *had* come, that specific need *had* arisen and the Lord had spoken out for her - 'God is not unjust He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them'. Hebrews 6:10 NIV.

The mark of the Shunammite was not only her faith, but her works and her character - self controlled, responsible, stable, concerned for family and strangers - virtues formed in the often dull routine of daily living but finding their commendation in the Word of God and their reward in 'ways past finding out'. Romans 11:33 AV.

3. The Simplicity of Faith—The Servant Girl 2 Kings 5:1-27

The presence of an Israelite girl in the house was of no great interest to Naaman. He was an important man at court, a famous soldier and highly respected in his own country but he had been afflicted with leprosy. Naaman was under a death sentence, nothing could be done for him, no-one could help him.

The servant girl however had a real concern for Naaman's health and welfare. It had not been long since tragedy had affected *her* - carried away from homeland and family, with no hope of return - she too, faced a bleak future. But the girl seemed to have come to terms with the situation and neither bitterness nor regret soured the natural sweetness of her temperament. It says much for her upbringing that in the midst of overtly heathen surroundings, spiritual thoughts and memories of home were uppermost in her mind.

The girl's remark concerning her master and Elisha seems naïve in its simplicity. No thought as to whether the prophet could heal Naaman, the only problem was that Elisha was in Samaria and Naaman was in Syria. There were of course other hindrances like strained relations between the kings of Israel and Syria but such was the effect of the maid's remark that right away the machinery was set in motion for Naaman's visit which ultimately resulted in his cure and conversion.

Natural, innocent, unaffected - all describe the witness of the girl's faith. She did not argue the case for Israel's God, or state the demands of the law, she never even spoke of judgment or repentance. She simply told them of the one who could bring healing and hope to a dying man. And because her *life* had been lived out according to God's Word, even in a strange country and in the midst of idols, God could use her words for the ultimate blessing of Naaman and his house.

4. The Maturity of Faith - Huldah

2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34

Huldah lived during the single kingdom period and during her lifetime, Josiah became the 16th king of Judah. Although he followed two of the worst kings in Judah's history, which left the nation in a state of national and spiritual decline, he showed a different spirit to that of his father and grandfather and made a conscious choice to follow in the ways of David, 2 Chronicles 34:3.

The whole fabric of the nation had suffered during the previous reigns - the temple was in a serious state of disrepair and so were those who had responsibility for the spiritual care of king and country. When Hilkiah, high priest of the Lord, discovered the Word of God in the temple he merely passed it over to Shaphan the scribe to give to the king.

Shaphan had responsibility for the repair bills - the law of the Lord was merely 'a book' to him - and his financial report came before any other business. However, once he began to read the book to the king, priorities were overturned as Josiah discovered just how far the nation had gone away from its spiritual inheritance.

Josiah realised that he needed the advice and help of someone other than his so called 'spiritual' mentors, who had failed so lamentably. The whole nation was in danger of judgment and it was a mockery to spend time and money on restoring stone and timber when God's Word was despised and neglected, cp. 1 Samuel 15:22.

Without having to pause and consider who was the right person to confer with, the king's advisers went straight to Huldah - known to all as a prophetess. A true prophet (and there were many false ones) was chosen by God from amongst the people, to preach and teach His word, to warn and encourage every strata of society, Deuteronomy 18:14-22, cp. 1 Kings 19:16-21; 1 Kings 18:21-22.

Huldah's proven spiritual integrity and knowledge of God's word was needed at this crisis point in the nation's religious history. Her message to 'the man that sent you to me' (as representative of the nation) v15, was concise and specific - idolatry would be punished

according to God's word, Deuteronomy 4:25-27, but the king's manifest sorrow for his people meant mercy rather than judgment for him, v18 cp. Deuteronomy 4:29-31. 'This place', vs 16,17,19, referred to Jerusalem, the city of God - designated the centre of His worship, the place of His Name, 1 Kings 8:27-30, now a city and temple polluted by idol worship and its attendant evil practices.

Huldah's prophetic gift came from the Lord but it was a gift she had cultivated over the years. Huldah recognised the importance of the intellect and appreciated the fact that the *mind* needed to be disciplined whether in the context of home and family or prophecy and temple, Isaiah 50:4. So it was that the five men could discuss the situation with Huldah and the answer came - not by dream or ecstatic declaration - but from a thoughtful, spiritual and trained mind.

SUMMARY OF COMPARATIVE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1. 1 Kings 17:17-24 cp. Luke 8:43-48.

The woman's faith needed to advance to the God of the prophet.

2. 2 Kings 4:25-30 cp. Luke 8:41-42, 49-56.

Elisha recognised the faith of the Shunammite - the faith that stands firm in the time of sorrow and loss.

3. 2 Kings 5:1-3 cp. Philippians 4:4-9; Daniel 1:1-8.

In the midst of heathen surroundings, spiritual thoughts and memories were uppermost in the mind and heart of the Israelite servant girl in Naaman's household.

4. 2 Kings 5:3-6 cp. Matthew 5:14-16.

Because the servant girl's *life* had been lived out according to God's Word, her words could be used for the blessing of Naaman.

5. 2 Kings 22:14 cp. 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17.

Huldah's gift had been cultivated over the years and her answer to the king came from a trained and a spiritual mind.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 9 EXAM KINGS - CHRONICLES

Enter the letter of the correct answer:

1. The nation was divided into two kingdoms - Judah and Israel in the days of
 - a. Solomon
 - b. Josiah
 - c. Rehoboam
 - d. Asa
2. The southern kingdom - Judah
 - a. enjoyed the rule of four 'good' kings
 - b. was ruled by the house of David
 - c. had their capital in Jerusalem
 - d. all of the above
3. The great famine in Israel was caused by
 - a. poor agricultural policy
 - b. the effects of war
 - c. God's judgment on idolatry
 - d. selfish land owners
4. The widow's reaction to the healing of her son was one of
 - a. faith in the God Who forgives sin
 - b. thankfulness for a miracle
 - c. gladness that she had shared her provisions with a prophet
 - d. surprise at the power of Elijah
5. On the death of her son, the Shunammite went to Elisha because
 - a. she was angry and felt he had let her down
 - b. she was afraid to tell her husband and she needed his support
 - c. she believed that Elisha could bring her son to life again
 - d. she wanted Elisha to ask God why her boy had died
6. The Shunammite's strength of character had been developed through
 - a. the responsibilities of daily life
 - b. an important position in local society
 - c. sorrow and disappointment
 - d. education and culture
7. Although the servant girl was far from home and in enemy country she
 - a. never displayed hostility to Naaman or his wife
 - b. was concerned for those around her
 - c. remembered what she had learned about God and his prophets
 - d. all of the above
8. The young girl told Naaman's household
 - a. that Elisha only healed those who were Israelites
 - b. that leprosy was the judgment of God
 - c. that she knew of a man who could heal her master
 - d. that Naaman would have to obey God's law if he wanted to be healed

9. Huldah was known among the people as
 - a. a mother in Israel
 - b. a true prophetess
 - c. a woman of great wisdom
 - d. the wife of Shallum

10. Huldah's gift came from the Lord and she spoke
 - a. when she was in a trance
 - b. only at particular times
 - c. from a spiritual, disciplined mind
 - d. without understanding what she said

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Describe briefly the kind of relationship you have with God?

Chapter 10

NATIONAL HISTORY - THE EXILE

The Jews of the Dispersion - Esther

a. Introduction

The events of the book of Esther took place during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), King of the Medes and the Persians, 486 - 465 BC. He was the son of Darius and father of Artaxerxes who respectively encouraged the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, Ezra 6, and the return of some Jews from exile, under the leadership of Ezra, Ezra 7.

Even under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel, not many Jews had availed themselves of the opportunity to return to their homeland, Ezra 2:64. There was always a considerable number of Jews living in Babylon and other Persian provinces who were too well settled to want to go back to a run-down country, even though it was their own. They were ready to send cash, Ezra 1:6, but preferred exile to emigration.

The book of Esther is straightforward narrative which tells the story of a young Jewish woman, who in a remarkable way, brought deliverance to her people - threatened with annihilation throughout the entire Persian empire.

The tone of the book is more secular than spiritual, more patriotic than prayerful. However, although the name of God is never mentioned, the presence of God is felt in the over-ruling of a tyrant's impulsive decree and in the gift of beauty to an unknown girl, whose lovely face and character won over a king and his courtiers. In the book of Esther situations are left to speak for themselves - there are no miracles, no prophets or visions. Deliverance comes through the God of history, the God of the nations; it comes through the God Whose authority is supreme, Psalm 22:28; 46:10; Acts 17:26.

b. Vashti and Esther Chapters 1 & 2

The king's sumptuous display of wealth and military power was guaranteed to impress the rulers and officials of the Persian empire. What was not guaranteed to impress was Queen Vashti's refusal to display her beauty, in obedience to the command of her husband, supreme ruler of the empire. That Vashti as the queen had no right to disobey the king must be conceded, but her self respect and dignity as a woman compelled her to disobey a drunken, boastful man, who dared to expose the loveliness which should be for his eyes alone.

There could be no other outcome for Vashti than banishment and divorce. Xerxes' decision was prompted by humiliation and rage and by the crafty advice of his counsellors, who may well have feared the influence of the queen and the power of her independent spirit, not so much upon their wives, but upon their own status as advisors to the king.

For the next few years Xerxes was occupied with military campaigns but when he returned home he began to regret his action against Vashti. These emotions did not go unnoticed amongst his servants and they moved swiftly to counteract any move to reinstate the ex-queen. Pandering to his ego and loneliness, beautiful young virgins were brought to Shushan, from whom the king could choose his new consort; and amongst the virgins was one, Esther, a Jewess, cousin of Mordecai, who lived in Shushan. Her Jewish roots were deliberately concealed - a wise precaution for those whose Jewishness was perhaps more a matter of birth than a living faith.

Mordecai was a faithful guardian and although he could not prevent Esther's presence in the harem, he made enquiries every day as to how she was. Her life of pampered luxury had to be placed alongside the intrigues and jealousies of the house of women and eunuchs were often brutal and malicious. But the one who cared for the harem at that particular time was Hegai, who seemed a different character - at least towards Esther. He singled her out for special attention and she respected his care and his knowledge of what would please the king. It was twelve months of uncertainty - if the king approved then Esther's future was ensured, up to a point. If the king was not interested then her future was bleak indeed - virtual widowhood, a prisoner, a spoiled and wasted life.

Esther's response to Mordecai's instructions, 2:10, 20, and her appreciation of Hegai's advice, v15, give a clear indication of her character. There is a quiet acknowledgement of the wisdom of her elders - she was ready to learn from those who understood the situation, she was ready to follow their counsel. Obedience, respect, discretion - all played their part to bring Esther through an experience which at its best must have been strange to a girl brought up in the Jewish tradition and at its worst to have been a frightening foretaste of the excesses of a heathen culture.

After Esther's elevation to the throne, she procured a place for Mordecai 'at the king's gate' - a position of responsibility, possibly as a magistrate or a judge, Proverbs 31:23. From there Mordecai was able to communicate with his adopted daughter, which privilege served him well, when he discovered a plot to assassinate the king. Although his diligence received no immediate recognition, the report was written up in the court annals. 'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.', Ecclesiastes 3:1. AV.

c. Haman and Mordecai Chapters 3 & 4.

Mordecai's refusal to venerate the newly promoted Haman may have had as much to do with national pride as with religious scruples. He was now known to be a Jew, which fact raised Haman's anti-semitic feelings to such a pitch that he resolved to destroy the whole Jewish race in every part of the empire. Before asking the king's permission for this act of genocide Haman had to cast a lot (Pur) to discover the most propitious month and day for the destruction to take place. This was normal practice, cp. Ezekiel 21:21, and the date was fixed for eleven months ahead, Proverbs 16:33. Haman's presentation of his case against 'a certain people' was cleverly done - he implied that the king was suffering because of the laws and behaviour of these people and his treasures would greatly benefit if they were exterminated. The king obviously trusted Haman's judgment to such an extent that he did not even bother to check who 'a certain people' were. Indifferent, unfeeling, Xerxes drank to the success of the venture while outside in the city the people, bewildered and fearful, wondered what the future would bring.

Mordecai was well aware of the political climate - the scene was being set throughout the entire empire for anti-semitism to be raised to a level that in one day, all Jews would be annihilated and their possessions taken over by their destroyers. His public mourning displayed his people's grief - dispersed and vulnerable; his refusal to cease from mourning, declared the seriousness of the situation as he informed Esther of the full horror of Haman's edict. His final words would bring home to the queen that she too was under this death threat but in her hands was the possibility of saving her people.

The queen knew better than anyone the character of Xerxes and the authority of the throne - even one the king professed to love was not allowed to approach him unbidden. But Mordecai knew better than anyone the character of Esther, '...and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?' Confronted by such a challenge and facing the reality of her own situation a woman like Esther could not resist.

Her whole life had been preparation for this moment and she rose to the occasion. Now it was Mordecai's turn to obey, v17.

d. The Fall of Haman Chapters 5 - 7

Esther was a woman of determination - once the decision had been taken there would be no going back, '.....when this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.' 4:16.

Although not specifically mentioned, prayer would accompany the fasting, 4:16, cp. Joel 1:14, and it was in the strength of the Lord that Esther entered the king's presence three days later - determination does not cancel out fear and apprehension. But neither did Esther's natural fears cancel out her discernment, those lessons well learned from Mordecai and Hegai. She understood what was appropriate for the occasion - three days of fasting in preparation for her approach to the king and then, suitably attired in royal apparel for her entrance to the throne-room and a banquet in readiness for the king, she waited for Xerxes' response to her presence.

The king's response was more than favourable, 5:3, but Esther bided her time. Haman was included in her invitation to the banquet, which pleased him greatly, although his pleasure and pride were marred by Mordecai's continued refusal to acknowledge him in any way. To compensate for these blows to his self-esteem, Haman called for his wife and friends and proceeded to boast of all that he had, of all that he was and of the high honour of being personally invited by Queen Esther, not just to one banquet, but to two - feasts where only he and the king were present. His wife and friends sympathised with Haman over Mordecai's behaviour and they gave him advice - which to Haman's ears was quite justifiable in the circumstances, taking it for granted that Xerxes would not object to seeing one Jew executed, seeing he had decreed that the whole race should die.

Next morning, when Haman hurried to the palace to arrange for Mordecai's execution, he found that the king needed his advice, 6:6. Haman's mind was so full of his own importance that he could not envisage anyone else being honoured by Xerxes apart from himself and it was no problem for him to list the distinctions which should be heaped upon this fortunate man. 'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.....a man's pride brings him low', Proverbs 16:18; 29:23

When Haman arrived home that evening, his head covered as a sign of his shame and mortification, his friends and wife were less encouraging. Esther's wisdom at waiting a further day before presenting her petition was surely, in the light of the previous events, a gift from God. 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases', Proverbs 21:1. The time was now right and the king was ready, prepared by God, to receive Esther's request. She frames her petition with grace and dignity, paying due respect to the feelings of the king but speaking out plainly against 'this vile Haman' 7:1-6. The king's anger and Haman's desperate plea for mercy combined to bring his life to a speedy end. It was Xerxes' advisers who suggested he use Haman's own gallows to execute the man, but it was God who directed their thoughts. 'The Lord is known by His justice; the wicked are ensnared with the work of their hands', Psalm 9:16.

e. The Rise of Mordecai Chapters 8-10

From the moment that Haman was deposed, Mordecai came to the fore; he received the sign of the king's approval, 8:2, and the queen gave him control over Haman's household. Bolder now in the king's presence, Esther knew that the Jews were not yet out of danger and that time was running out - the first edict could not be revoked, v8, so a second one

was issued, dictated by Mordecai in the name of the king, giving permission to the Jews to defend themselves on the appointed day, nine months ahead, vs 10-12. The tables were turned; many people became Jews and when the thirteenth day of Adar arrived, the princes, officials and governors of the 127 provinces fought on the side of the Jews, for fear of Mordecai (now prime minister) and his wide sphere of influence. The Jews, although given permission, avoided taking any plunder, vs. 10,15,16, cp. Genesis 14:17-24; self-restraint was the wisest course in this situation. The ten sons of Haman were disposed of and their bodies publicly displayed - their influence in future years could have meant trouble for the Jews, especially under another king, who might not know Mordecai, cp. Exodus 1:7-10. Esther's final request for her people, 9:13, proves that their enemies were still ready to annihilate them if at all possible.

It was important that this wonderful deliverance should be commemorated by the Jews throughout all the provinces - it was a month which had been turned from sorrow to joy, from mourning to a good day, 9:22; so letters went out and the name of the feast was approved, Purim, including the institution of a time of fasting.

Both Esther and Mordecai signed the second letter, v29; between them, through the sovereignty of God, they had been instrumental in delivering their people from certain destruction. God had used them to preserve the Jews, for the devil was at the heart of Haman's evil intentions and Purim is essentially the victory of God over Satan's ambitions to destroy the nation from whom Messiah must come. God's covenant with Abraham covers all eventualities, nations, people - 'He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps', Psalm 121:4.

f. Conclusion

Mordecai's rise to authority had been meteoric, 8:15; 10:3, but his own people continued to be close to his heart and their prosperity and peace his great objective. Just as Mordecai had realised the full potential of Esther's character by challenging her to dig deep into her spiritual birthright so now he would encourage the Jews of the dispersion to live in the same manner and Esther, by her example, would be a living testimony and the feast of Purim an everlasting memorial, 9:28,32.

Mordecai must have known that it would cost Esther real anguish of heart when he confronted her with the awful reality of the situation but he did not hold back, 4:8-14. The call of her destiny - 'For such a time as this' - was the key that opened the door of Esther's will and years of practice in the school of obedience and trust had prepared her for this moment. Esther had habitually submitted to the word and will of her guardians, Mordecai and Hegai, but this had not resulted in a cowed and unassertive nature. She had realised that their knowledge and understanding were for her present and future good, 2:15, and she applied what she learned with intelligence and common sense. Thus, when the ultimate moment came, she obeyed, not because she was forced by the strong minded words of another but because she trusted Mordecai; she had always trusted him, 2:20, and knew from personal experience that this alone was the way of 'prosperity and peace'. Esther was suddenly faced with being responsible for the prosperity and peace of a nation but with the support of her friends and fellow Jews she was ready.

Submission, trust and obedience are often seen as attributes which demean rather than exalt, which inhibit rather than develop a person's character. Esther's life, its effect and its reward would say otherwise. Over four hundred years later there came another Deliverer to Israel, in whose hands was the salvation of the *world* but the way was still the same:-

Submission '...yet not what I will but what you will.' Mark 14:36.
Trust 'Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore
have I set my face like a flint...' Isaiah 50:7
Obedience '...he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death
on a cross.' Philippians 2:8.

WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 10 EXAM

ESTHER

1. In the book of Esther deliverance comes through
 - a. a miraculous victory
 - b. the wisdom of a prophet
 - c. the overruling presence of God
 - d. a wealthy, powerful king
2. Although Esther lived a life of luxury she was in danger from
 - a. intrigue and jealousy
 - b. the approval or disapproval of the king
 - c. the cruelty of eunuchs
 - d. all the above
3. Mordecai had a position of responsibility and he discovered
 - a. that palace funds were being stolen
 - b. a plot to assassinate the king
 - c. the military were planning a coup
 - d. that bribery and corruption were rife
4. Haman hated Mordecai because
 - a. he was related to Esther
 - b. he was a rich man
 - c. he refused to bow down to Haman
 - d. he was becoming more and more influential
5. When Mordecai challenged Esther “...for such a time as this” she
 - a. refused to have anything to do with him
 - b. was too frightened to respond
 - c. recognised her responsibilities
 - d. asked for the support of her friends
6. Esther always did what was appropriate for the occasion because
 - a. she had good taste
 - b. she had plenty of servants and money
 - c. she had learned from Hegai and Mordecai
 - d. she enjoyed entertaining
7. When Haman complained about Mordecai, his wife and friends advised him to
 - a. build a gallows
 - b. confiscate his wealth
 - c. speak to Esther
 - d. hire a killer
8. Although Haman had planned the Jews’ destruction, behind his evil work was
 - a. the king Xerxes
 - b. friends of the assassins, Bigthan and Teresh
 - c. Satan
 - d. the princes of Media and Persia

9. Mordecai's great objective for the Jews was
 - a. their return to Israel
 - b. protection from anti-semitism
 - c. their peace and prosperity
 - d. growth in influence

10. In Esther's life the attributes which brought blessing and reward were
 - a. submission
 - b. trust
 - c. obedience
 - d. all of the above

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Has this course of study affected your attitude or behaviour in any way?