

Devotional Quarterly

Through-the-Bible Series

Vol. 13, No. 4

September 1, 2003

1 Samuel; 2 Samuel 1—4;
1 Chronicles 1—10

These daily devotions will challenge individuals to learn God's Word, be loyal to it and use it as a guide to everyday living. Realizing the importance of true spirituality, believers will have a consistent prayer life and live their lives in the center of God's will.

**Personal and Daily Devotions
for
Fall Quarter, 2003**

Prepared by Marc Shultz, Mary McCalister
and Gene C. Smith

DEVOTIONAL QUARTERLY is published at \$1.00 per quarter.
© Copyright 2003, BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL COMMITTEE of the American Baptist
Association, 4605 N. State Line Ave., Texarkana, TX 75503-2928.
Bill Johnson, Editor in Chief; Wayne Sewell, Business Manager

Read Through the Bible in a Year

To help you with your Bible reading, we are providing a suggested reading list for each day of the quarter. You will find these suggested readings at the beginning of each devotional quarterly.

The readings include a Daily Reading and the Daily Devotionals. The devotional for each day is based on the Scripture from the Daily Devotionals list. The Daily Readings cover other Scriptures not lesson related. By reading both passages every day, you will have read the entire Bible at the end of the year.

You may use the box beside the date to check when you have read the Scriptures for that day.

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> September 1	Ezekiel 3—5	1 Samuel 1:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> September 2	Ezekiel 6—8	1 Samuel 1:9-18
<input type="checkbox"/> September 3	Ezekiel 9—11	1 Samuel 1:19-28
<input type="checkbox"/> September 4	Ezekiel 12—14	1 Samuel 2:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> September 5	Ezekiel 15—17	1 Samuel 3:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> September 6	Ezekiel 18—20	Matthew 6:9-15
<input type="checkbox"/> September 7	Ezekiel 21; 22	
<input type="checkbox"/> September 8	Ezekiel 23—25	1 Samuel 2:18-21
<input type="checkbox"/> September 9	Ezekiel 26—28	1 Samuel 2:27-30
<input type="checkbox"/> September 10	Ezekiel 29—31	1 Samuel 3:11-21
<input type="checkbox"/> September 11	Ezekiel 32—34	1 Samuel 4:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> September 12	Ezekiel 35—37	Deuteronomy 6:4-9
<input type="checkbox"/> September 13	Ezekiel 38—40	1 Timothy 1:2-6
<input type="checkbox"/> September 14	Ezekiel 41—43	
<input type="checkbox"/> September 15	Ezekiel 44—46	1 Samuel 5:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> September 16	Ezekiel 47; 48	1 Samuel 6:1-21
<input type="checkbox"/> September 17	Daniel 1; 2	1 Samuel 7:1-17
<input type="checkbox"/> September 18	Daniel 3—5	1 Kings 18:17-21
<input type="checkbox"/> September 19	Daniel 6:1-15, 25-28; 7; 8	Ephesians 6:11-18
<input type="checkbox"/> September 20	Daniel 9; 10	2 Corinthians 6:14-18
<input type="checkbox"/> September 21	Daniel 11; 12	
<input type="checkbox"/> September 22	Hosea 1—5	1 Samuel 8:8-22
<input type="checkbox"/> September 23	Hosea 6—9	1 Samuel 9:1-14
<input type="checkbox"/> September 24	Hosea 10—14	1 Samuel 9:15-27
<input type="checkbox"/> September 25	Joel 1; 2:1-27; 3	1 Samuel 10:1-19, 25-27
<input type="checkbox"/> September 26	Amos 1—4	2 Samuel 7:8-17
<input type="checkbox"/> September 27	Amos 5—9	Matthew 6:24-34
<input type="checkbox"/> September 28	Obadiah	
<input type="checkbox"/> September 29	Jonah 1; 3; 4	1 Samuel 13:1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> September 30	Micah 1—3	1 Samuel 14:1-23

October Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> October 1	Micah 4—7	1 Samuel 14:25-52
<input type="checkbox"/> October 2	Nahum	1 Samuel 15:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> October 3	Habakkuk 1—3:15	1 Samuel 15:17-35
<input type="checkbox"/> October 4	Zephaniah	Luke 12:16-21
<input type="checkbox"/> October 5	Haggai	
<input type="checkbox"/> October 6	Zechariah 1—4	1 Samuel 16:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> October 7	Zechariah 5—8	1 Samuel 16:14-23
<input type="checkbox"/> October 8	Zechariah 9—11	1 Samuel 17:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> October 9	Zechariah 12—14	1 Samuel 17:17-40
<input type="checkbox"/> October 10	Malachi 1; 2; 3:7-18	1 Samuel 17:41-58
<input type="checkbox"/> October 11	Matthew 1; 2; 4:1-11, 18-25	1 John 5:4, 5
<input type="checkbox"/> October 12	Matthew 5; 6:1-4, 16-18; 7:1-6, 12-14, 24-29	
<input type="checkbox"/> October 13	Matthew 8; 9; 10:1-22, 34-42	1 Samuel 18:1-18
<input type="checkbox"/> October 14	Matthew 11:1, 11-30; 12:1-42, 46-50; 13	1 Samuel 18:19-30
<input type="checkbox"/> October 15	Matthew 14:14-21, 33-36; 15; 16	1 Samuel 19:1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> October 16	Matthew 17—19	1 Samuel 19:9-20
<input type="checkbox"/> October 17	Matthew 20—22	1 Samuel 20:1-24
<input type="checkbox"/> October 18	Matthew 23; 24:1-3, 14-51; 25	1 Samuel 20:25-42
<input type="checkbox"/> October 19	Matthew 26—28:15	
<input type="checkbox"/> October 20	Mark 1; 2:1-12, 21-28; 3	1 Samuel 21:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> October 21	Mark 4—6	1 Samuel 21:7-15
<input type="checkbox"/> October 22	Mark 7—9	1 Samuel 22:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> October 23	Mark 10—12	1 Samuel 22:11-23
<input type="checkbox"/> October 24	Mark 13; 14	1 Samuel 23:1-13
<input type="checkbox"/> October 25	Mark 15:1-15, 27-47; 16	1 Samuel 23:14-29
<input type="checkbox"/> October 26	Luke 1; 2	
<input type="checkbox"/> October 27	Luke 3—5	1 Samuel 24:1-15
<input type="checkbox"/> October 28	Luke 6; 7:1-35; 8:1-3, 16-56	1 Samuel 24:16-22
<input type="checkbox"/> October 29	Luke 9:7-22, 27-62; 10:13-42; 11:14-54	1 Samuel 25:1-25
<input type="checkbox"/> October 30	Luke 12:1-15, 22-59; 13; 14	1 Samuel 25:26-44
<input type="checkbox"/> October 31	Luke 15:1-10, 23-32; 16; 17	1 Samuel 26:1-20

November Scripture Readings

DATE	DAILY READINGS	DAILY DEVOTIONALS
<input type="checkbox"/> November 1	Luke 18:1-8, 15-43; 19; 20	1 Samuel 26:21-25
<input type="checkbox"/> November 2	Luke 21; 22:1-38, 54-71	
<input type="checkbox"/> November 3	Luke 23:13-56; 24:13-45	1 Samuel 27:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> November 4	John 1:1-5, 38-51; 2; 3	1 Samuel 28:1-6
<input type="checkbox"/> November 5	John 4:1-34, 44-54; 5; 6	1 Samuel 28:7-10
<input type="checkbox"/> November 6	John 7; 8:1-25, 33-53; 9	1 Samuel 28:11-19
<input type="checkbox"/> November 7	John 10—12	1 Samuel 28:20-25
<input type="checkbox"/> November 8	John 13; 15; 16	Ephesians 2:11-13
<input type="checkbox"/> November 9	John 17; 18	
<input type="checkbox"/> November 10	John 19; 20:1-18; 21	1 Samuel 29:1-11
<input type="checkbox"/> November 11	Acts 1—3	1 Samuel 30:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> November 12	Acts 4—6	1 Samuel 30:11-16
<input type="checkbox"/> November 13	Acts 7; 8:1-25, 40; 9:11-43	1 Samuel 30:17-20
<input type="checkbox"/> November 14	Acts 10:1-33, 44-48; 11; 12	1 Samuel 30:26-31
<input type="checkbox"/> November 15	Acts 14:21-28; 15; 17	Revelation 22:11-14
<input type="checkbox"/> November 16	Acts 18; 19; 20:1-16, 25-38	
<input type="checkbox"/> November 17	Acts 21—23	1 Chronicles 1:1—9:44
<input type="checkbox"/> November 18	Acts 24—26	1 Chronicles 10:1-10
<input type="checkbox"/> November 19	Acts 27; 28	1 Samuel 31:8-10; 1 Chronicles 10:8-10
<input type="checkbox"/> November 20	Romans 1:18-32; 2:12-29; 3:1-8, 21-31	1 Samuel 31:11-13; 1 Chronicles 10:11-14
<input type="checkbox"/> November 21	Romans 4:9-25; 5; 6:1-16; 7	2 Samuel 1:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> November 22	Romans 8:10, 18-25; 9; 10:14-21	2 Samuel 1:17-27
<input type="checkbox"/> November 23	11:1-11, 26-36; 12:1-8, 17-21; 13	
<input type="checkbox"/> November 24	Romans 14; 15:1-13, 21-33; 16:1-18	2 Samuel 2:8-32
<input type="checkbox"/> November 25	1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 3:1-8, 16-23; 4:18-21; 5	2 Samuel 3:2-5
<input type="checkbox"/> November 26	1 Corinthians 6:1-8, 13-20; 7—9:18	2 Samuel 3:6-11
<input type="checkbox"/> November 27	1 Corinthians 10; 11; 15:12-58; 16	2 Samuel 3:12-21
<input type="checkbox"/> November 28	2 Corinthians 1:11-24; 2; 3:7-18; 5:1-13	2 Samuel 3:22-39
<input type="checkbox"/> November 29	2 Corinthians 6:1-13; 7:1-9; 8:6-24; 9	2 Samuel 4:1-12
<input type="checkbox"/> November 30	2 Corinthians 10—13	

Hannah's Grief

KEY VERSE: "Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? *am* not I better to thee than ten sons?" 1 Samuel 1:8.

The grief brought on by not being able to bear a child is a common one today. Science has been able to offer solutions to some, but they are expensive solutions and not always effective. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, could not fathom her grief. Why could she not be happy just being his beloved wife, he wondered. But Hannah was inconsolable because of her barrenness, and she shed many tears over her condition.

Sometimes it seems that we have become hard-hearted and find little in life that brings us to tears. But there are some things well worth weeping for. David often wept, saying in Psalm 56:8 that God was putting his tears in His bottle; that is, God was keeping a record of David's sorrow. One of Jesus' followers washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:37, 38). Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus because of the lack of faith of His followers (John 11:35). Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of the unbelief of the Jews (Luke 19:41). Paul wept for three years as he ministered at Ephesus (Acts 20:31).

What brings you to tears? a sad movie? a tear-jerking story? a disappointment? When was the last time you wept over the condition of a lost loved one or friend? Hannah was not ashamed of her tears. We should not be ashamed to be moved to tears because of the condition of the lost world.

Living it: *Let God soften your heart and give you the grace to care about the things that are really important.*

Mary McCalister

Hannah's Prayer and Vow

KEY VERSE: "And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou . . . wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life," 1 Samuel 1:11.

Hannah's vow indicated a lifelong dedication to God and a determination to keep her promise. Literally, Samuel, the child for whom she prayed, was on loan for life.

Hannah wept. Hannah prayed. Hannah vowed. And God answered. We can be sure that, if we become as concerned about circumstances as Hannah was and if we pray to God earnestly and with faith, He will answer our prayers.

Hannah's prayers conquered the bitterness of her spirit. Her sorrow and tears caused her to turn to the only recourse she had—God. We may not realize it, but God is the only recourse we have. The world may offer psychiatry, psychology, analysis and treatment, but none of these can offer us the solutions God can give us.

Hannah's vow tells us she believed God could do what she asked. It also tells us she believed God would do what she asked.

How many times have we said, "Lord, if You will just do this, I will . . ."? How many times have we broken those vows? The Preacher said it is better not to vow a vow than to vow and not pay (Eccl. 5:5).

Hannah's dedication was a lifelong dedication, and her faithfulness to keep her vow is an example for us to follow today. God always honors faithful and obedient followers.

Living it: *It is important to pour out our prayers to God. It is just as important to keep our vows to God.*

Mary McCalister

Samuel's Birth

KEY VERSE: "Wherefore it came to pass, . . . that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, *saying*, Because I have asked him of the LORD," 1 Samuel 1:20.

The next year must have been an exciting one for Hannah. As God had promised, she became pregnant and after nine months gave birth to a son. Those who have been childless can imagine much better than I can the joy she must have felt.

When the baby boy was born, Hannah named him Samuel because, as she said, "I have asked him of the LORD." Hannah did not hesitate to acknowledge that her having a son was God's doing, and she quickly praised Him for it.

When the time came for the yearly trip to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to God, Hannah said, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever" (verse 22). Hannah knew she would have her son for just a short time and she wanted to enjoy every moment of that time.

When Hannah and Samuel appeared before Eli the priest, she reminded him of the promise she had made to God if He would give her a son. She said, "I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD" (verse 28).

Can we have the same attitude toward our children? Are we willing to lend them to God? This is a far better way to keep them than to try to keep them out of His service. We can have many goals and aspirations for our children, but the most profitable one is that they faithfully serve God.

Living it: *God keeps His promises to us. We should make sure we keep our vows to Him.*

Mary McCalister

Hannah's Praise

KEY VERSE: *"There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God," 1 Samuel 2:2.*

If you read the prayer of Hannah without knowing who was praying, the chances are you would never have said it was the prayer of a woman. The gender prejudices that seem to afflict all of us would make us think this must be some prophet's prayer, not the prayer of a woman.

Hannah rejoiced in the Lord. She recognized that God had given her special strength to do what she had to do. She realized that keeping her vow to God made it possible for her to speak out boldly before her enemies.

Hannah gave God all the praise for His holiness, for the rock of His strength, for His power over evildoers, and for His ability to take the poor and the beggar and set them among the rulers, making it possible for them to inherit the throne of glory. She recognized that it is God who determines the position of every person in the world and that He has the power to do with them as He will.

Even more amazing is that Hannah prayed this prayer after she had taken her son, Samuel, to the Tabernacle to leave him in the care and training of the priest Eli. Her faith and strength are shown in this prayer.

We need to step back and take a look at Hannah's earlier prayer (1 Sam. 1:11). She gave God the honor that was His due as "LORD of hosts", placed herself in a much lower position, "handmaid," a lowly human being and then asked for a great favor. Sometimes we think we are not worthy, (and we are not) but we need to be bold in asking God for great things.

Living it: *Women and men both can offer praises to God for His goodness to them.*

Mary McCalister

Samuel's Call

KEY VERSE: “And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth,” 1 Samuel 3:10.

I was always hesitant to talk to my sons about the possibility of their being called of God to preach His Word, thinking, I want it to be God's call and not mine. But I sometimes wonder how their lives would have been different if I had had more of the attitude of Hannah.

What steps did Hannah take to influence her son? It is apparent from Samuel's actions as a young boy that his mother had taught him to love and reverence God and to show respect and courtesy to the men who served Him. Hannah visited Samuel every year, bringing him a new robe she had made for him. Though God blessed her with other children (1 Sam. 2:21), she never forgot Samuel. It cannot be disputed that she prayed for him every day.

Since Samuel was exposed to the evil of the priest Eli's sons, yet was not corrupted by it, his mother must have taught him to keep his eyes on God, His commandments and God's purpose for him rather than to look at the failings of his fellowmen. Hannah must have taught Samuel what we can all teach our children, that God has a purpose for our lives and it is up to us to prepare ourselves for whatever He may have for us to do. Hannah must have taught Samuel that no task was beneath him. As parents, we can all learn a lesson from her in how to raise our children.

Living it: *Teach your children so that, if God calls them to His service, they will recognize and respond to His call.*

Mary McCalister

Matthew 6:9-15

Saturday, September 6

Model Prayer

KEY VERSE: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name,”
Matthew 6:9.

Hannah is an example to us of one who spent much time in prayer. Most of us think we do not have that much time to spare.

Don Hawkins has written a book titled *The One Minute Christian* (Moody Press). Though it is not the tenor of the book, the first thought the title brings to mind is the Christian who does not have more than a minute to give to prayer, Bible study and worship. We see a lot of people like that today.

If you find yourself in this category, you need to decide that your Christian growth deserves more than a few spare minutes out of your life. A good place to start is with your prayer life.

Christ not only emphasized the importance of prayer in the life of the Christian by giving us a model or pattern to follow as we pray, but He also spent much time in prayer Himself. The pattern He gave is based on some important steps we need to take.

We need to recognize that God is truly our Father. We need to reverence and respect Him. We need to recommit our lives, being in submission to His will. We need to rely upon Him for all our daily needs. We need to remit the wrongs others have done to us as God remits our sins. We need to realize that God does not lead us into temptation, but He protects us from evil. We need to render to Him all the glory and honor due Him as the ruler of Heaven and earth, the all-powerful One who holds our future in His hands.

Living it: *Take time to pray every day if you want every day to be what God wants it to be.*

Mary McCalister

Samuel's Ministry

KEY VERSE: "But Samuel ministered before the LORD, *being a child, girded with a linen ephod,*" 1 Samuel 2:18.

As our Key Verse indicates, Samuel began his ministry when he was still a child. During these early years he was trained by Eli to serve God in the Tabernacle. Perhaps at first he was called on only to light a candle, hold a dish, run an errand or shut a door. No task was too trivial for him as he learned what it was to be a prophet and priest of God.

What did his ministry become? We learn he served as a prophet, a priest and a judge. He was involved in intercession; this no doubt was a direct result of his mother's teaching. His own life was a constant testimony and reminder to him of the power of prayer.

Samuel was probably about twelve years old when God gave him his first prophecy, which pronounced judgment on the house of Eli. This is a further testament to the character of Samuel because it took a great deal of courage to confront his mentor, Eli, with the words of God's judgment.

Though he was young, Samuel's ministry had a great impact on the people of Israel. He was able to lead them to renounce their idolatry and shake off the yoke of bondage to the Philistines.

Often God's ministers are called on to speak words of correction and even judgment. They are often maligned for the message God calls them to give. This was not true of Samuel's ministry. All Israel mourned his death as one of the great heroes of the faith.

Living it: *True success comes when we are faithful to the ministry God has given us.*

Mary McCalister

Those Who Honor Me

KEY VERSE: “The LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed,” 1 Samuel 2:30.

Many of us can perhaps relate to the situation in which Eli found himself. It is not uncommon for parents to have children and grandchildren who go astray, bringing much heartache to those who brought them up.

A catalog of the sins of Eli’s sons can be found in 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22. Eli rebuked his wicked sons, but his word did not carry any weight with them.

A man of God, a prophet, appeared to Eli to remind him of all God had done for the people of Israel. All God asked of them was that they honor God by obeying His commandments and walking in His ways. God promised to honor those who honored Him, but He pronounced judgment on those who despised Him. Later, Samuel would give the same prophecy and make it even more explicit.

The result of Eli’s laxness and his sons’ wickedness was that he would have no descendants to carry on his name and his work. Do we value the importance of God honoring our lives? If we do, we should seek to honor Him by living godly, obedient lives. More important, we should teach our children how important it is for them to be morally upright and pure.

The consequences of not doing so are sad indeed. Eli was not able to have his lineage continue because of the wickedness of his sons. Sad to say, Samuel’s life also was not reflected in his sons (1 Sam. 8:3). We do not know how much of this was caused by his failure to teach them. But it shows us that, even with teaching, children do not always walk in right paths.

Living it: *It is important to honor God and His Word. It is fatal to disregard His commandments.*

Mary McCalister

Samuel's Prophecy

KEY VERSE: "And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever," 1 Samuel 3:14.

Samuel was still young when he received this prophecy from God. Until then he had been Eli's student, but the time came when Eli became old and infirm. God was now ready for Samuel to take up the work he had been trained to do.

The first challenge God gave him was a difficult one. He had to prophesy God's judgment on Eli's house for the sins of his sons. This was not an easy task for Samuel.

This passage reads, "Samuel lay until the morning" (verse 15). It is easy to imagine he spent a sleepless night. He had been given a difficult task, made even more difficult by his youth and his relationship to Eli. Indeed, "Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision" (verse 15).

Of course, with the wisdom that came with his years, Eli knew that God had given Samuel a terrible vision. He may well have guessed what it was. But he pressed Samuel until he told him the message God had given him.

To his credit, Eli responded, "It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good" (verse 18). He was willing to accept God's judgment on the wickedness of his sons.

This judgment did not happen at once. In fact, enough time passed to allow Samuel to be well accepted and established as a prophet of God.

God's ministers today often have the task of speaking plainly to people about their sins. Far too often their message is rejected and their words are resented. This makes their ministry more difficult.

Living it: *Accept the truth about yourself, even if it hurts.*

Mary McCalister

Not a Rabbit's Foot

KEY VERSE: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies," 1 Samuel 4:3.

What Dagon was to the Philistines, modern-day Wiccans, shamans and druids are to the pagans of this century. The city where I live recently had a Pagan Pride Day. Their activities included tarot card readings, a drum circle, a prayer labyrinth and autumn equinox celebration. They invoked whatever mystical powers they believed in to bring peace and justice and to bless the harvest. They taught that there are multiple paths to spiritual truth, and people have to find their own way. They even said, "Jesus was cool, too."

There is little difference between this modern-day paganism and the pagan worship of Dagon. The Philistines believed the Ark of the Covenant brought a special protection to the people of Israel. Even the men of Israel believed this. Against God's specific command, they brought the ark into the midst of the camp, but it did not save them. Instead, the Israelites suffered a great defeat.

What would have delivered the Israelites from the battle? Simple obedience to God's commands. Their power was not in the ark but in their obedience to God.

Sometimes even believers have superstitions about what will protect them from harm or make them prosperous. Rabbits' feet, four-leaf clovers, black cats, walking under ladders, all these are pagan superstitions in which that believers often believe. Paul said the Athenians were too superstitious, and he might say the same of us if we rely on superstition instead of God.

Living it: *Trust in God alone to protect you and bless you.*

Mary McCalister

Teach Them

KEY VERSE: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart,” Deuteronomy 6:6.

Hear. Pay attention to what God has to say to you. Verse 3 also uses the word observe and gives the promise “that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee.”

Love unconditionally. Hold nothing back from God, but surrender yourself completely to Him. This commandment is repeated in Matthew 22:37.

Remember. To remember, we must first learn. We must study God’s Word and hide it in our hearts (Psalm 119:11). We study God’s Word so we can be His workmen who are approved of Him (not ashamed), handling His Word accurately and teaching it skillfully.

Teach. How important it is to teach our children morning, noon and night. This includes teaching by our examples. Trust in the promise given in Proverbs 22:6.

Share the Word. Talk about God and His goodness in your home and when you go out among your neighbors. Rehearse God’s blessings when you go to bed and when you get up.

Be public about your relationship to God. When people see you, they should know there is something different about you. What you do with your hands should be a testimony of who you are. The Scriptures should be like a banner worn on your forehead. Your house should be recognized as a house where God rules supreme. This means far more than putting up religious pictures and slogans.

Living it: *Use these Old Testament principles as a guide for your life in the twenty-first century.*

Mary McCalister

In Thee Also

KEY VERSE: “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also,” 2 Timothy 1:5.

If ever we needed a positive example to demonstrate what happens when we do all the principles outlined in Deuteronomy 6, this would be it. We can see how God honors those whose lives honor Him.

Paul rejoiced in the faith of his young disciple, Timothy, and traced it back from Timothy through his mother, Eunice, to his grandmother, Lois. Though they no doubt came from a pagan background, both women were devoted Christians and passed this devotion on to Timothy.

The complete biography of these two women is found in these few words written by Paul, and they are not mentioned by name anywhere else in the Bible; yet, we are able to rank them right along with other great women of the New Testament with whom we are more familiar.

What is the greatest mark of these two women? They taught Timothy the Scriptures from his earliest childhood (2 Tim. 3:15). What greater memorial could a mother leave than that her children know the Scriptures which are able to make them wise unto salvation?

The heartening truth is that the link of faith from Lois to Eunice to Timothy did not stop there. Through Timothy, many other people would come to embrace the same faith and pass these truths on to others.

Living it: *This is one of the ways we can pass the gospel on to future generations, making sure our children know how to be saved.*

Mary McCalister

1 Samuel 5:1-12

Monday, September 15

Jehovah and Dagon

KEY VERSE: “So they . . . said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, . . . that it slay us not, and our people,”
1 Samuel 5:11.

This is a day of ecumenism, amalgamation and homogenization. Churches are encouraged to become a part of a world church just as nations are encouraged to become a world state. We see a beginning for this in the European Union. Worldly scholars have a word for it: syncretism. This is a fancy word for hash. Most of us do not care for hash because we do not know what it is made of.

The Philistines practiced a kind of ecumenism. They had captured the ark of God and brought it to Ashdod. There they installed it in the house of their major god, Dagon. After all, the ark had brought the Israelites good fortune. Would it not do the same for them?

What happened was not what they had expected. In the morning they found that their image of Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark. Well, it could have been an accident, so they set the idol back up. The next morning they found, to their consternation, that the idol was fallen again. This time the head and hands of the idol had been cut off. Only a stump remained.

Not only that, but God also killed many of them and struck many with “emerods” (verse 9). The Philistines got the message loud and clear this time. “Send away the ark of the God of Israel,” they said. They carried the ark from place to place, and everywhere they went, disaster struck. The ark brought them nothing good.

It is no different today. Trying to mix the truths of God with worldliness always brings trouble.

Living it: *You cannot serve God and mammon.*

Mary McCalister

The Ark Returned

KEY VERSE: “The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, *and* fetch it up to you,” 1 Samuel 6:21.

Imagine the dilemma with which the Philistines were faced. They had had the ark of God for seven months, and those seven months had brought them nothing but grief. “Send away the ark,” was their clamor, but the priests and wise men said, “Send it not empty; . . . return him a trespass-offering” (verse 3). After all, this was the way they placated their gods. It should work as well for the God of Israel they thought.

Look at what their offering was! Images of their “emerods” and the mice which had afflicted them! In their minds, these offerings would give glory to the God of Israel and cause Him to stop afflicting them: “peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you” (verse 5), they reasoned.

So, they built a new cart, placed the ark and their offerings on it, hitched it to two cows that had never drawn a cart, took their newborn calves away from them and turned them loose. If they went to Beth-shemesh, they would know it was God who afflicted them. If not, they would know it was just chance.

Where did the cattle go with the ark? Straight to Beth-shemesh! The Philistines were convinced that the hand of God had brought His judgment upon them.

If this were the end of the story, it would not be too bad, but the people of Beth-shemesh, although they rejoiced to see the ark, forgot God’s commands regarding it. Some of them had looked into the ark and, for this disobedience, God struck them with a great slaughter.

They sent messengers to Kirjath-jearim saying, “Come . . . fetch it up to you.”

Living it: *God’s commandments are important and should always be obeyed.*

Mary McCalister

Revival in Israel

KEY VERSE: “Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only,” 1 Samuel 7:4.

Note the steps which had to be taken to bring revival to Israel. The Israelites

1. mourned and sought the Lord. We need to be sorry for our condition and realize only God can help us.

2. returned to the Lord. If we have strayed away from God, we need to return to Him.

3. put away the strange gods. We need to put aside all the false gods which keep us from serving the Lord.

4. committed their hearts to the Lord to serve Him only. This is something we need to do often, especially after we have been tempted to turn away from God and His way.

5. confessed their sins. John said, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Samuel prayed for Israel. Men of God have hearts of compassion and pray often for those under their leadership. Samuel offered sacrifices for Israel, acting as a priest as well as a judge. When God gave Israel the victory, Samuel set up a memorial stone called Eben-ezer, which means “the LORD helped us” (verse 12).

Review again the steps to revival: sorrow for sin, confessing our sins, turning to the Lord, turning away from sin, committing our hearts to the Lord. We do not get on our feet and go to work unless we first get on our knees in prayer for revival and renewal. Revival is not necessarily a series of meetings. It is a commitment which begins in the heart and reaches out to others.

Living it: *Recognize that your help and guidance must come from God.*

Mary McCalister

1 Kings 18:17-21

Thursday, September 18

The Lord Is God

KEY VERSE: “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him,”
1 Kings 18:21.

As you follow the history of the people of Israel, you may well wonder, what does it take for them to learn that God is God? To prove who was really in charge, Elijah challenged Ahab to meet him on Mount Carmel with all Israel, as well as eight hundred fifty false prophets. Then Elijah offered this challenge to the Israelites, “If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” He was saying to them that they had to make a definite choice of whom they would serve.

One of our greatest problems today is that most of our church members have never really made up their minds to follow Christ. They are like Lot’s wife who looked back toward Sodom, or perhaps like Mr. Looking-both-ways in Pilgrim’s Progress. They are like the son in our Lord’s parable who said, “I go, sir” (Matt. 21:30), and did not go. They are like the man whose reply, when asked whether he had trouble making decisions, was yes and no. Or, they are like the Israelites whom Elijah challenged, halting between two opinions, not able to take a stand one way or another.

We do not have the challenges to face that Israel had, but we do have challenges which test our allegiance. How often do we stay home and entertain visiting family instead of going to church and perhaps taking them with us? How many members of our family need salvation and need our testimony that God is God and we choose to serve Him? Outings at the lake, ball games or children’s sports programs all take their toll and cause many to choose them rather than God.

Living it: *What is your choice, God or Baal?*

Mary McCalister

The Armor of God

KEY VERSE: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,”
Ephesians 6:11.

There is no fear like the fear of an unseen enemy. As I am writing this, the urban areas around Washington, D.C., are consumed with fear of an unseen sniper who has shot and killed at least ten people in two weeks. People are afraid to go shopping, to let their children play outdoors or to let them go to school. Living in such a situation must be intolerable.

Christians today are faced with an unseen enemy, the devil, who is clever and wily and will trap us if he can. He is in control of principalities, the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places. He wins if he instills fear into our hearts.

The difference between the fear of the sniper and the fear of the devil is that we can overcome our unseen enemy, the devil. How? Paul instructs us to “put on the whole armour of God.” We can stand firm in the battle if we are wearing the girdle of truth which protects us against the lies of Satan. The breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith protect us against the fiery darts of the wicked one. Having our feet properly shod helps us step out with a firm step, knowing where we are going and keeping us on the road.

How does the helmet of salvation protect us? A helmet protects the head, and it is with our minds as well as our hearts that we know we have salvation and know that salvation is an eternal protection for us.

Finally, as we arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit, we have all we need to fight against the devil.

Living it: *Look to God for instructions and help in defending yourself against the devil.*

Mary McCalister

Be Ye Separate

KEY VERSE: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” 2 Corinthians 6:14.

To please God and to be called a Christian, a person must first be saved. There is no other way to reach God. Then, to please God and to be a happy Christian, a person must surrender his life to God, trusting God to always do what is best for him. The third step is to be a separated person. Separated from what? Separated from the world and all worldly things. You cannot imagine that Paul and Peter would have ever been found in an amphitheater watching a gladiator contest with their youth group, hoping their broad-mindedness would bring the youth closer to God and the church. Paul spoke plainly, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

Of course, Paul was not saying we are to have nothing to do with unbelievers, for to avoid them we would have to leave this world. Instead, we are not to have the same purposes, aims and goals of the world. If two oxen are yoked together and hitched to a wagon, when they move, that wagon will move. They will be working together to accomplish the same purpose. This we are not to do. There is no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, no partnership between light and darkness, no harmony between Christ and the devil, no connection of a believer with an unbeliever, and no agreement between the Temple of God and idols.

Of course, not only should we be separated from evil but also we should be separated unto the Lord. We are to “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (verse 17).

Living it: *Though you live in the midst of evil, do not be touched and influenced by it.*

Mary McCalister

God Rejected

KEY VERSE: “And the LORD said unto Samuel, . . . they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them,” 1 Samuel 8:7.

When people are determined to go their own way and not God’s way, there is little that God’s men can do to stop them. These were the choices Samuel wanted them to consider: they would lose their sons and daughters; they would become the slaves of the king; they would lose control of their property and be taxed exorbitantly; they would lose control of their own affairs.

In spite of all Samuel’s warnings, the people responded: “Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations” (verses 19, 20).

The present-day counterpart of this is when people choose the way of the world and not God’s way. They choose to think making money is more important than serving God, so they make money their god or king. They worship recreation and supplant the attendance at God’s house with sports and recreational activities. They desire a good home, fancy cars, boats and other vehicles more than they desire to serve God. They drift away from faithful church attendance and wonder why their children drift away.

The results of these choices are that they lose their sons and daughters to the drug culture when they do not have their needs fulfilled at home. They become enslaved to the culture of worldliness, wanting to be like those around them. They mortgage all they own so they can have more possessions. They are no longer in control of their affairs. Others make the decisions for them. Life becomes a rat race for them and brings them little or no happiness.

Living it: *Choose God’s way, not your way, for your life.*

Mary McCalister

A Choice Young Man

KEY VERSE: “And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly,” 1 Samuel 9:2.

When you study the life of Saul, you might find yourself inclined to feel sorry for him. He was such a nice man and so good-looking! might have been your comment.

He did have a lot of things going for him. He literally stood out in any crowd, being head and shoulders above most men and remarkably good-looking. At first he seemed to be quite humble, calling himself “little” (1 Sam. 15:17). At first he was a man anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 10:6).

So what happened? Why did he not become the kind of king who would please God? He quit giving God the glory for the victories he experienced against Israel’s enemies and began to exalt his own leadership abilities. The second fatal step he took was to place his own judgment above the Lord’s, deciding to disobey God’s command to completely destroy Israel’s enemy.

From there on it was all downhill for Saul. Samuel had told him God had chosen David to replace him; yet, he brought David to his court to sing and play for him. As David gained in popularity with the people, Saul became jealous of him and tried to have him killed. In his tortured mind, everyone had become a traitor. Affection for David was equal to treason, and Saul felt betrayed even by his son Jonathan, who had become David’s close friend. What had appeared to be a charmed life for Saul became a tragedy which ended in his death. He can be a lesson for all of us. God may give us great talents and abilities, but, if we misuse them, tragedy will come.

Living it: *Be humble and use God’s gifts for His glory.*

Mary McCalister

Saul and Samuel

KEY VERSE: “Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, . . . but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God,” 1 Samuel 9:27.

This passage tells us what God wanted from Saul: “that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam. 9:16). We might call this a lesson on the God of second chances. Though we might make wrong choices, often God extends His mercy and grace to us to help us make the best of what might be a bad situation. As long as we recognize that God is in charge, even after our mistakes, we can often redeem ourselves and go on to do what is right.

Things could have been better for the people of Israel and for Saul. They could have redeemed themselves after making the wrong choices. For a time it seemed as if this might indeed happen. Saul showed himself to be a great military leader, and he led Israel to victory.

In fact, Samuel promised this result to the Israelites: “If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God” (1 Sam. 12:14).

If we find ourselves in error and on the wrong path, it is never too late to turn back to God in contrition and repentance and allow Him to help us get on the right path. Saul did not do this and destroyed himself. What a waste!

There is always hope for us if we confess our sins, letting God cleanse us and put us back on track in our service for Him.

Living it: *Make sure you are living in God's will and not in your own.*

Mary McCalister

Saul Anointed

KEY VERSE: “And ye have this day rejected your God, . . . and ye have said unto him, *Nay*, but set a king over us,” 1 Samuel 10:19.

This is an example of second best. The people of Israel were not willing to accept God’s best for them, which was to abide by the plan He had set up for them. You can read in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 the words of warning Samuel had given the Israelites of what their fate would be if they insisted on having a king. The Israelites wanted a king so they could be like the other nations. They would not heed God’s warning.

What God did next is an example of His infinite knowledge of how His people would react when given the option of choosing how they would be governed. God revealed to Samuel the man whom He had chosen to be king over Israel. The man was Saul. He is described as impressive, handsome, without equal among the Israelites, a man who stood a head taller than any other of the people. Of course, this was just the type of man the Israelites would choose for their king, so God let them have their way.

The lesson for us is that we are not wise enough to choose what is best for us. Like Israel, we look on the outside appearances, but we do not know what the final result will be. It is far better for us to let God make His choices and changes for us.

One thing we need to remember: it is not our choice whether we wish to be “epistles” (2 Cor. 3:2, 3) of Christ or not. We just are! But what is the message others read from our lives and actions?

Living it: *Christ said, “Not my will, but thine” (Luke 22:42). This is a good example for all of us.*

Mary McCalister

Thy Throne Forever

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

God made a covenant with David that his throne would last forever. This is not the first covenant God made with man, but it is important to us. Other covenants God made with man were the Edenic (Gen. 1:28), Adamic (Gen. 3:15), the Noahic (Gen. 6:18; 9:9), Abrahamic (Gen. 15; 17), Mosaic (Ex. 19:5), Palestinian (Deut. 30:3), Davidic (2 Sam. 7:12-16), and the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

The Davidic Covenant is most important to us because it extended God's love and mercy to the whole world in future generations. It reached far beyond the realm of Israel to encompass believers in every generation from every nation.

Isaiah gave us an insight into the importance of the throne of David when he prophesied, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, . . . from henceforth even for ever” (Isa. 9:7).

Jeremiah 31:31 gives the prophecy of a new covenant. Hebrews 9:15 reveals that Christ is the mediator of that new covenant. Jesus, in instituting the Lord's Supper, referred to the fruit of the vine as a symbol of His blood which was shed for the remission of sins. The scope of this new covenant covers the whole world, and it is up to us as its beneficiaries to tell the world about Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.

Living it: *Know that God's promises are sure and that His kingdom shall last forever.*

Mary McCalister

Seek Ye First

KEY VERSE: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” Matthew 6:33.

As Jesus neared the end of His Sermon on the Mount, He covered some principles extremely important to the believer. He taught principles of giving, praying, forgiving, fasting, amassing riches, being of sound mind and purpose. To illustrate this He said, “No man can serve two masters” (verse 24). How important it is for us today to grasp that truth! There has never been a time when men were more divided in their allegiance or when singleness of mind, heart and purpose were more lacking.

When we seek the kingdom of God first, it should be easy for us to “take therefore no thought” (verse 34); that is, we should not worry about our food, drink, the clothes we wear or the future.

Stress is one of the major problems in our country today. What causes stress? It is people worrying about themselves and others.

What can remove stress? It is relying on God to take care of us. Remember that God is your heavenly Father. He loves you and He will take care of you. If God takes care of the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field and the grass on the hillside, will He not take care of His children? Of course, He will!

A child does not worry all day long whether his house will be there when he gets home from school or whether his parents will have a meal for him that evening. Children do not worry about such things because they trust their parents. As children of God, we should always trust our heavenly Father to do what is best for us.

Living it: *Jesus does not say, There is no storm. He says, Trust Me, the Master of the storm.*

Mary McCalister

Foolish Offerings

Key Verse: “And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever,” 1 Samuel 13:13.

Mary wrecked her husband’s new car. She was not injured, but the car was totaled. She was afraid her husband would be upset because the car had been wrecked. The police officer investigating the accident asked to see her proof of insurance. Mary reached into the glove compartment to get the information and discovered a note from her husband. The note stated, “I love you, not the car.” She worried for nothing.

God made Saul king over Israel. God blessed King Saul and the Israelites as long as they obeyed Him. He gave them victory over their enemies and helped them overcome the challenges they faced. God protected Israel because it was His chosen nation.

The Israelites were in combat with the Philistines. The Philistine army was equipped with thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen and a multitude of warriors (verse 5). The Israelites confronted Saul about the situation. The king should have challenged them to have faith in God. Instead, he offered a burnt-offering to God hoping to gain His favor. Saul was not a priest and did not have authority to make sacrifices. God took Saul’s kingdom from him because of his disobedience. Samuel told Saul there was nothing to worry about because God would have given Israel victory over the Philistines regardless of the enemy’s might. Saul suffered because of his foolish actions.

Just A Thought: *Nothing positive is gained by disobeying God.*

Marc Shultz

Jonathan's Courage and Victory

Key Verse: "Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto *these* men, and we will discover ourselves unto them," 1 Samuel 14:8.

The first Allied soldiers on the beach of Normandy were pinned down by enemy fire. The D-Day invasion for the liberation of France during World War II was floundering. A company commander challenged his men to get into the battle. He told them there were two kinds of soldiers on the beach, those who were already dead and those who would die. They must be courageous. Their only hope of survival was to defeat the enemy.

Jonathan was not only a son of King Saul but was also a courageous soldier. He decided to undertake a secret mission against the Philistine army in battle (verse 1). His desire was not for personal glory but victory over the enemy. Jonathan and his armor bearer stood against a garrison of Philistine soldiers. They did not fear the enemy because they had faith that God would deliver them. Two courageous men defeated a garrison of twenty Philistine warriors (verse 14). Word quickly spread among the Philistine soldiers about what happened. The Philistine soldiers began to worry about their safety, and their strength melted away (verse 16). When the soldiers of Israel heard the Philistines were fleeing, they charged after them and gained a great victory.

The soldier in the Lord's army must be willing to put himself on the line for God. He should not fear the enemy because God is greater than every enemy. He should not fear circumstances because God is greater than circumstances. He should not fear the unknown because God knows all things.

Just A Thought: *God needs brave warriors, not secret spies.*

Marc Shultz

Foolish Oath

Key Verse: “And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed *be* the man that eateth *any* food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted *any* food,” 1 Samuel 14:24.

It was a typically hot Texas day and a young boy was struggling to mow the yard. He had stopped several times to rest and to get a drink of water. His father became exasperated because it was taking so long to finish mowing the yard. He told his son to get busy mowing the yard and not to stop until he was finished. The young boy soon fainted from sunstroke and was rushed to the hospital. The father’s unreasonable demands led to his son’s injury.

King Saul was unreasonable with his warriors. He felt they had let him down. He commanded that none of his soldiers eat food until they avenged his humiliation at the hands of the Philistines. This punishment weakened the strength of his soldiers. Jonathan realized his father had troubled the land with his unreasonable oath. He dipped his rod into a honeycomb and ate the honey in defiance to the king (verses 27-29). If Saul had been more reasonable in his treatment of his warriors, there would have been a greater slaughter of Philistines (verse 30).

Just A Thought: *God does not require unreasonable service (Rom. 12:1). Do not ask Him to do the unreasonable.*

Marc Shultz

Foolish Inquiry

Key Verse: “And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD,” 1 Samuel 15:13.

A police officer pulled over a driver for speeding. Upon the officer’s approaching the car, the driver became agitated and began to argue with the officer. The driver’s wife told her husband to be quiet and follow the officer’s instructions. She then apologized to the officer for his belligerence. She explained he was always combative when he was drunk.

God was specific also in His instructions to King Saul. He was to engage the Amalekites in battle. All the people were to be killed and all the livestock destroyed (verse 3). Saul did not obey God’s instructions. He allowed the Kenites to escape from among the Amalekites (verse 6). He took King Agag alive (verse 8). He also spared the best of the oxen and sheep (verse 9). These actions were a sign of Saul’s rebellion toward God. There was a telltale sign of the king’s disobedience, the bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen (verse 14). Saul attempted to explain the livestock by saying they were to be offered as a sacrifice to God (verse 15). God would rather have had Saul’s obedience than sacrifice. Saul’s disobedience to God set up his downfall as king.

It is foolish to lie to God. He knows the intent of our hearts and the thoughts of our minds. He knows your every action and hears your every spoken word. Be honest with God.

Just A Thought: *“To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22).*

Marc Shultz

Saul Rejected

Key Verse: “For rebellion *is* as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is* as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king,” 1 Samuel 15:23.

Thomas was the star linebacker for a professional football team. He was a free spirit who did not care much for rules. His coach kept attempting to get him to abide by the team rules but to no avail. He often missed practice and was late for team meetings. He ignored his coach’s warnings to correct his negative behavior. During one game, when the team was losing by a large score, Thomas was on the sidelines mugging for the television cameras. The next day the player was cut from the team. His selfish behavior cost him a position on the football team.

Saul’s self-will cost him something also. Saul loved the power and prestige of being king. He soon forgot that God had anointed him to be king. He quit following God and began doing things his way. It seemed like an insignificant thing to him to spare King Agag and the livestock in the battle against the Amalekites. In the eyes of God it was no better than practicing witchcraft or worshiping idols. Saul was engaged in a contest of wills with God. Because of his rebellion, God no longer recognized Saul as king. As a result of Saul’s failure to follow God, Israel was taken captive (verse 28).

Saul was rejected as king because of his rebellion toward God. God will not ignore disobedience. His judgment is swift against those who rebel against Him.

Just A Thought: *It is impossible to win a contest of wills with God.*

Marc Shultz

Thou Fool

Key Verse: “But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” Luke 12:20.

Grandpa held out his two hands and told his grandson to choose between them. In one hand was a quarter and in the other hand was a nickel. The grandson chose the hand that held the nickel. For several days grandpa gave the grandson the same choice and each time he chose the nickel. He finally asked his grandson why he chose the hand with the nickel each time. He replied, “If I had chosen the hand with the quarter, that would have been my last opportunity to choose.” In the end, he received more value from choosing the hand with the nickel.

The man in the parable should have also realized from where his blessings came. He had the choice to share the fruits of his increase but chose to be selfish. Rather than being generous, he hoarded his crops for himself. He chose a foolish plan of action. He decided to build bigger barns rather than to share his blessings.

In every circumstance there is a wise and a foolish choice. The wise choice is to determine the will of God and obey it. The foolish choice is to do what the fleshly mind determines is right. Nothing good comes from foolish actions.

The wisest course of action for a person to follow is to obey the Lord. The most foolish thing he can do is whatever is contrary to the will of God. How wise are your actions?

Just A Thought: *Fearing the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).*

Marc Shultz

David Anointed

Key Verse: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah,” 1 Samuel 16:13.

It happens more often than not. Youngsters come to tryouts for the youth basketball team. The coach watches the hopeful athletes run the court and shoot the basketball. He gathers them all together and tells them that everyone has an opportunity to make the team regardless of size. When it comes time to choose the players for the team, he picks the tallest players without giving the smaller players an opportunity to show their abilities. Is this the wisest choice?

God knew His choice for a successor for King Saul. God told Samuel that one of Jesse’s sons would be the next king. Seven of Jesse’s sons were presented to Samuel. Each had physical characteristics that would have made him desirable to be king, but none of them had been chosen by God. Jesse had one remaining son. He had been left behind to tend the sheep. David seemed the most unlikely of Jesse’s sons to be chosen king; yet, he had one thing none of the other sons of Jesse had, the anointing of God.

God chose David to be king. David did not seek the position. He was satisfied tending sheep. His humble spirit made it possible for him to obey God. Samuel was not distracted by the looks or physical prowess of David’s brothers. He sought the approval of God in anointing David to be king of Israel.

Just A Thought: *It does not matter what the servant of God looks like, but what he does for the Lord.*

Marc Shultz

David Refreshed Saul

Key Verse: “And it came to pass, when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him,” 1 Samuel 16:23.

A prisoner had become violent during a court hearing. He had managed to take a gun from one of the bailiffs and had taken the court reporter hostage. In the tense stand-off that followed, it became evident he did not wish to harm the court reporter. He had allowed his anger to get him into a dangerous situation. He was afraid of being shot by the officers in the courtroom. He asked to talk to the police chaplain. The chaplain was able to calm the angry prisoner. The prisoner surrendered the gun to the chaplain and the tense situation was resolved.

Saul disobeyed God. His disobedience cost him his kingdom. An evil spirit filled Saul. This evil spirit prevented him from having peace with God. Saul asked his servants to bring someone to him who could sooth his troubled spirit (verse 17). The call went out for David to come to Saul and play his harp. David became one of Saul's armor bearers (verse 21). David played his harp to sooth Saul's troubled spirit. God was working his plan to make David king over Israel.

Just A Thought: *An evil spirit is inconsistent with the Christian life. A spiritual outlook helps sooth the troubled spirit.*

Marc Shultz

Goliath's Challenge

Key Verse: “And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, *Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me,*” 1 Samuel 17:8.

The menu at the ice-cream parlor had an interesting challenge. They claimed to have the largest banana splits imaginable. They were also expensive. If anyone could eat three banana splits in one hour, the splits would be free. Most customers balked at the challenge after seeing the first banana split. The few who attempted the second one gave up in misery. According to the management, no one had ever completed the challenge.

Goliath was a frightening warrior. He stood over nine feet tall. He was almost completely covered by armor. The body of his spear was a weaver's beam and the head weighed twenty-two pounds. Saul's warriors did not accept Goliath's challenge. They measured Goliath in their own eyes and not through the eyes of God.

Goliath asked for a challenger from among the Israelite warriors but none was found. They were too scared to fight the giant. Goliath had sealed his own fate. There was no way he could win because he was fighting for the wrong army. Any of Saul's warriors could have won the battle, but none was brave enough to engage the enemy.

God does not trust His work to the timid. It requires courage to stand against the enemies of God. It is impossible to win the battle without engaging the enemy.

Just A Thought: *God needs brave soldiers in His army. Do not be afraid to fight on the Lord's side.*

Marc Shultz

David Meets the Challenge

Key Verse: “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God,” 1 Samuel 17:36.

Super Bowl III pitted the Baltimore Colts of the National Football League against the New York Jets of the American Football League. The common attitude among sports fans was almost unanimous—the Colts would decisively defeat the Jets. Joe Namath was starting quarterback for the Jets. He did not think the Jets were getting enough appreciation. During an interview he guaranteed the Jets would defeat the Colts. Few people paid attention to his braggadocian prediction. At game’s end, the New York Jets fulfilled Joe Namath’s prediction and won the world championship of professional football.

David was out of place among Saul’s warriors. He was sent by Jesse to check on the welfare of his brothers. This wide-eyed youth heard Goliath make his challenge. David was disappointed when none of Saul’s warriors answered the call to battle. He asked Saul a pointed question, “Is there not a cause?” (verse 29). David had faith that God would provide the victory. If none of Saul’s warriors would answer the challenge, David would. He was willing to put himself on the line for the Lord. Defeat never entered his mind because this was the Lord’s battle and God was larger and more powerful than Goliath.

Too many people are draft dodgers in the call to be soldiers in the Lord’s army. Every child of God must have faith that God will deliver him from every enemy.

Just A Thought: *Are you willing to put yourself on the line for the Lord?*

Marc Shultz

David's Victory

Key Verse: “And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the LORD’S, and he will give you into our hands,” 1 Samuel 17:47.

When David insisted on fighting Goliath, King Saul attempted to fit him with armor. Goliath was fitted from head to foot with armor, and a shield bearer preceded him into battle. Saul’s armor did not fit David, nor did he need it. He did not fear Goliath. David refused to fight Goliath on his terms.

David did not fight Goliath in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. He did not have a weapon to match Goliath’s spear. His own weapons were a slingshot and five stones. Only one stone was needed to defeat Goliath. David claimed victory in the name of the Lord. David wanted the world to know that God was the author of this victory.

Goliath’s armor was no match for God. The rock from David’s slingshot embedded in Goliath’s forehead, knocking him out cold. David then took Goliath’s sword and beheaded him. This victory came because of David’s faith in God.

Saul and David had different perceptions of the battle. Saul thought Goliath was too big to hit. David thought he was too big to miss. David became a champion of the people because he was a man of courage. He proved to be a man of God by action. By faith he proved the power of God.

Just A Thought: *It does not matter how large the enemy may be because God is larger.*

Marc Shultz

Faith Is the Victory

Key Verse: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith,” 1 John 5:4.

General Dwight Eisenhower had the weight of the world on his shoulders. It was his decision when to begin the invasion that would liberate Europe during World War II. The invasion of France had been delayed once. Another delay would push the invasion back several months, prolong the war and thousands more soldiers would be killed. Weather conditions did not seem to be ideal for an invasion. To help him make the decision, General Eisenhower visited the troops. He found them eager and ready to go. He decided to have faith in his soldiers and to proceed with the invasion. History proved it to be the right decision.

David’s victory over Goliath was made possible when he decided to enter the battle. David had no doubt that God would give him the victory. Faith was the key to victory. Any of Saul’s warriors could have gained the victory if they had shown the same faith as David. Their lack of faith made Goliath larger in their estimation than he was in real life. Rather than measuring Goliath by how large he was compared to them, they should have measured how small he was compared to God.

Once Goliath had been defeated, David was seen as a man of courage. David knew what God could do. He had no doubt that God would grant him the victory over Goliath. Faith in God was the difference between David and Saul’s warriors.

Just A Thought: *Faith is believing in the victory before it is seen as a reality.*

Marc Shultz

Behaved Himself Wisely

Key Verse: “And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him,” 1 Samuel 18:14.

A snowstorm had blanketed the area. Snow was unusual in East Texas and a majority of stores had closed. The gas station I worked at did little business that day. There was a chance of additional snow before my shift ended at midnight. It was tempting to shut down and go home, but I did not have that authority. About 10:00 p.m. my boss phoned. If I had closed down early, she would have fired me. She then gave me the option of closing the station and going home. I was rewarded for doing the right thing.

David was distinguished by his character. God chose him to replace Saul on the throne of Israel. His valor made him a champion of the people. Jonathan became David's defender before his father, King Saul. David remained calm in the midst of everything happening in his life.

David behaved himself wisely before God. He waited for God to lead him and did whatever God instructed him to do. He trusted God to protect him from his enemies and to supply his needs. David behaved himself wisely before King Saul. Saul was jealous about the affection David received from the Israelites. David returned kindness for the harm Saul sought to do to him. David loved Saul and showed him mercy. David behaved himself wisely before his countrymen. He was a man of action who exercised godly leadership. David's wisdom took him from the sheepfold to the throne.

Just A Thought: *Good judgment is the exercise of wisdom.*

Marc Shultz

David and Michal

Key Verse: “And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and *that* Michal Saul’s daughter loved him,” 1 Samuel 18:28.

A young lady engaged to be married became sick. Medical tests revealed kidney failure. She would need a transplant. None of her family was a compatible match and she was placed on a list to receive a donated kidney. When she told her fiancé about her medical condition, she told him he could call off the engagement if he so desired. She did not want her medical condition to become a burden to him. Her fiancé refused to call off the engagement. When medical tests revealed he could donate a kidney, he quickly agreed to do so. His love for her was proved through extraordinary means.

David was in love with Michal, Saul’s daughter, and they asked permission to marry. Saul wanted to use David’s love for Michal as a snare to harm him. In place of a dowry, he challenged David to kill one hundred Philistines in battle (verse 25). It was Saul’s desire that David be killed in battle. David was able to meet the challenge. He brought Saul evidence that he had killed two hundred Philistines in battle (verse 27). David’s valor was not only proof he loved Michal but also that God was with him (verse 28).

David proved himself of greater character than Saul. Saul did not care about his daughter’s happiness but about doing David harm. David proved his love and the power of God by defeating the Philistines.

Just A Thought: *Love is expressed in words and proven by deeds.*

Marc Shultz

Jonathan Intercedes

Key Verse: “And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain,” 1 Samuel 19:6.

During a trial, defense lawyers often call character witnesses to testify to the good character of their clients. While these character witnesses cannot testify to the guilt or innocence of the defendant, they can raise a reasonable doubt about their guilt.

King Saul hated David. David's good character convicted Saul of his evil character. Saul let it be known he wanted David killed (verse 1). Jonathan, Saul's son, knew David had done nothing worthy of death. Jonathan told David to hide until he could attempt to reason with his father. Jonathan was David's character witness. He reminded his father that David had acted respectfully toward him (verse 4). He also reminded Saul of David's valor in battle against the Philistines (verse 5). For a moment, Saul's anger softened, and he promised not to kill David.

David and Jonathan became friends. Jonathan protected David against his father's anger. Jonathan interceded on David's behalf because he knew his father was wrong in his actions against David. He kept David informed about Saul's plans to harm him. God used Jonathan to spare David's life.

It was a testimony of Jonathan's character that he sought David's welfare over his own. Jonathan knew God was doing a great work through David. Jonathan was willing to sacrifice his own life so David could be spared from his father's wrath. Jonathan's love for David was proved through his intercession.

Just A Thought: *Jesus Christ interceded to the Father so you could have eternal life.*

Marc Shultz

Attempted Murder

Key Verse: And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night," 1 Samuel 19:10.

The Secret Service uncovered a plot to assassinate President Nixon in 1969. The plot was devised by one man. When questioned after his arrest, he stated no particular issue or cause that would motivate him to assassinate the President. No one else knew of his plot. He stated he did not like President Nixon. He did not like seeing his picture in the newspaper or seeing coverage of him on the television newscasts. He desired to assassinate the President so he would not have to look at him. The Secret Service uncovered the plot before he had an opportunity to carry it out.

King Saul was jealous of David. He did not like the fact David enjoyed favor among the people. Saul blamed his problems on David. When David returned from killing two hundred Philistines, Saul let it be known he wanted David dead. Saul's son Jonathan kept David informed about Saul's plots to kill him. Saul sought to kill David by a javelin, but David escaped before he could carry out the plot (verse 10). Saul's messengers tracked David to Naioth where they had prime opportunity to kill him (verse 18). They did David no harm because they realized the Spirit of God was upon him. The plot against David failed because God had greater plans for him.

Just A Thought: *Those who plot against God's anointed are in risk of divine judgment.*

Marc Shultz

Covenant of Love

Key Verse: “And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul,” 1 Samuel 20:17.

Jim was a veteran of World War II. He was awarded the Purple Heart for being wounded in battle. A soldier he did not know had saved his life. He had thrown Jim to the ground to shield him from shots fired by an enemy sniper. In the process the soldier suffered mortal injuries and died. At the end of the war Jim found the soldier's widow and offered his condolences. They became close friends because they shared a common tragedy.

David and Jonathan had an unimaginable friendship. Jonathan was King Saul's son and David was the man the king wanted to kill. Most people would have expected Jonathan to support his father over David. Jonathan knew his father had an unreasonable attitude toward David. Jonathan loved David in spite of Saul's hatred of him. David loved Jonathan because he had shown him kindness. The bond of love between David and Jonathan was stronger than family.

The bond of love between Jonathan and David was based upon trust. David realized Jonathan was looking out for his safety. Jonathan sought to protect David from the evil his father sought to do to him. Their love was unshakable by events.

The love between God and mankind is unimaginable. Man is a sinner and God hates sin. God extended His love to man in spite of man's sinful nature. In love, God offers eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Just A Thought: *Jesus looks beyond our faults and sees our needs.*

Marc Shultz

The Lord Between Us

Key Verse: “And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city,” 1 Samuel 20:42.

The army sergeant was homesick. He was stationed in Japan far away from home. He heard about an American missionary near where he was stationed. The sergeant attended services at the mission hoping to make friends with the missionary. After a few weeks of attending services at the mission, the sergeant accepted Jesus as Savior. The officer and the preacher established a strong friendship because they had something in common—they both knew Jesus as Savior.

David and Jonathan had kindred spirits. They endured many difficult situations fleeing from Saul's wrath. There was a bond of love between them that even King Saul could not break. Jonathan was willing to put his own life in danger to spare David from Saul's wrath. David took great care to show kindness to Jonathan. David was as concerned about Jonathan's welfare as his own.

The bond between David and Jonathan was built upon godly love. Jonathan knew that God had anointed David to be king. Jonathan would not stand in David's way to the throne. David knew God was using Jonathan to spare him from Saul's anger. David recognized Jonathan's sacrifice on his behalf. Only their love for God was stronger than their love for each other.

Just A Thought: *Love for God is the foundation of all true love.*

Marc Shultz

David at Nob

Key Verse: “Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why *art* thou alone, and no man with thee?” 1 Samuel 21:1.

At the end of each day I had been putting all my change in a large metal can. The money was being saved to buy a much-needed typewriter. I had saved approximately one-half of the funds needed when an emergency happened. The water pump on my car went out. The checkbook balance was low, so I had to take the money in the metal can to fix the car because the car was more important than the typewriter.

David fled to Nob to escape the wrath of King Saul. There he entered the Tabernacle and asked to meet with Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech did not want to make Saul angry at him and attempted not to take sides. David asked for bread to satisfy his hunger. Ahimelech stated that the only bread he had was shewbread reserved for the priests. Ahimelech gave David the shewbread because there was no other provision to give him.

David was waiting for the time when God would place him on the throne of Israel. King Saul was powerless to kill David because God had anointed him for this great work. During the time Saul was pursuing David, God provided for his needs. It was not wrong for Ahimelech to give David the shewbread because he was God’s servant doing a great work. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19).

Just A Thought: *God will not fail His faithful people. His faithful people must trust Him to meet their needs.*

Marc Shultz

David at Achish

Key Verse: “And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath,” 1 Samuel 21:10.

David needed a weapon to protect himself. Ahimelech gave David a prize trophy. He received the sword of Goliath (verse 9). This sword was testimony that the power of man is limited against the power of God. David then fled to Achish the king of Gath. This was enemy territory. There was much bitterness toward David for his power in defeating the Philistines. David was seeking safety in the enemy camp.

There were two camps of thoughts concerning David. There were those who championed him as a man of valor. David was a hero among the people. Others considered David a villain. Through the power of God, David was able to defeat the enemy. King Achish had no love for David.

Servants of God are both hated and loved. They are hated by the secular world because of their stand for God. Their priorities are brought into question because their actions are different from those of the world. The hatred for God's faithful servants stems from a hatred for God and His ways. The servants of God are also loved because of the spiritual influence they exercise. The pastor, missionary, deacon and Bible teacher hold a special place in the hearts of the children of God. They are loved because usually they are the ones winning souls to Christ, promoting the spiritual growth of Christians and serving the Lord. It does not matter what others think of the servant of God as long as God is pleased.

Just A Thought: *The ungodly will never feel comfortable with God's faithful people.*

Marc Shultz

David at Adullam

Key Verse: “David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father’s house heard *it*, they went down thither to him,” 1 Samuel 22:1.

In a bygone era, storm cellars were common. These were underground, outdoor shelters designed to protect occupants during a storm. Occupants of a storm cellar could feel reasonably safe from the torrents of nature.

David was fleeing from Saul. He knew God would protect him. God provided for his needs as he escaped to safety. He fled to a cave at Adullam. The cave offered a reasonable amount of confidence that he was safe from Saul’s threats of violence. Members of David’s family and many outcasts of the community came to offer assistance in his time of need.

God is our shelter in the midst of the storm. He offers safety from the enemy and victory over circumstances. The child of God who trusts Him has no reason to fear anything life may bring him. Christ brings peace in the midst of the storm.

The child of God is never alone during the storm. Four hundred people came to David’s aid while he fled King Saul. These people had problems of their own, but they came to encourage David during his time of distress (verse 2). It is important that children of God encourage one another. We are outnumbered in the world but not powerless against the world. Together we can do great things for God.

Just A Thought: *Children of God are never alone. They have God to sustain them during rough times and fellow-Christians to encourage them when times are tough.*

Marc Shultz

Priests Slaughtered

Key Verse: “And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod,” 1 Samuel 22:18.

A man lived on the Mason–Dixon line that separated the Northern States from the Southern States. During the Civil War he had split loyalties. He could not decide whether he wanted to fight for the North or the South. As a compromise, he wore the blue jacket of the Union Army and the gray pants of the Confederate Army. While plowing in the fields, a Confederate soldier shot him in the chest and a Union soldier shot him in the leg. So much for neutrality.

Ahimelech was in a tough position. David asked him for help while fleeing King Saul’s wrath. Ahimelech did not want to bring the wrath of the king down on himself. He also knew he needed to help David. Ahimelech gave David bread to eat and a sword to protect himself while hoping King Saul would not be any the wiser. The king discovered that Ahimelech had helped David and brought his fury upon him (verse 13). Ahimelech attempted to reason his way out of a difficult situation. He told King Saul he did not inquire to God on David’s behalf but just gave him provisions (verse 15). This explanation did not satisfy King Saul. Eighty-five priests were killed that day because of Saul’s anger at Ahimelech.

Just A Thought: *It is impossible to be neutral toward God. If you are not for Him, you are against Him.*

Marc Shultz

David at Keilah

Key Verse: “Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand,” 1 Samuel 23:4.

The pastor often called upon the church’s only deacon to lead the congregation in prayer during services. He always prayed for God to call men to preach the gospel. With the passage of time it became evident that he omitted that request in his prayers. When the pastor asked him why, he gave a personal explanation. He felt that God was calling him to preach, and he was resisting the call. He felt like a hypocrite praying for others to do what he was unwilling to do.

The Philistines were fighting in Keilah. David was concerned about the city and prayed to the Lord asking if he should go and fight the Philistines (verse 2). David’s men stated they were afraid of engaging in the battle (verse 3). David asked the Lord again if he should fight the Philistines. God assured David that He would deliver the Philistines into his hand (verse 4). David and his men fought against the Philistines and spared the city.

Some people want God to answer their prayers without involving themselves. David was willing to be used of God to fight the Philistines in Keilah. His men did not share his willingness to fight. Victory over the Philistines would not come if they did not engage in the battle. Faith in God should overcome human fear in doing God’s will.

Just A Thought: *Soldiers of the Lord must be willing to engage in the spiritual warfare. The battle will not be won with draft dodgers.*

Marc Shultz

David at Ziph

Key Verse: “And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God,” 1 Samuel 23:16.

John was alone in the ICU waiting room. His wife had taken ill suddenly while they were on vacation. They were several hundred miles from home and knew no one locally. John bowed his head in prayer while awaiting word on the condition of his wife. When he opened his eyes and lifted up his head, he saw a familiar figure standing beside him. His pastor had traveled the several hundred miles to give him encouragement.

David was still fleeing the wrath of King Saul. It was both physically and mentally tiresome always to be on the run. While hiding in the wilderness around Ziph, a familiar person came to encourage him. Jonathan helped David in many ways. He kept him informed of Saul’s plots against him. He helped keep David safe during David’s flight. His most important work was encouraging David. God would make sure Saul did not kill David. Jonathan encouraged David to wait on God.

The world is a discouraging place for the child of God. The enemies of God seek to discourage the servant of God from being faithful to Him. The weakness of the flesh can become a burden as a person seeks to serve the Lord. There are ungodly people who seek to discourage Christians from serving God. Some people can unintentionally discourage the child of God by word or action. It is easy for the child of God to have his zeal for the Lord taken away.

Just A Thought: *Become an encourager to God’s faithful servants. The time may come when you need their encouragement.*

Marc Shultz

David's Mercy to Saul

KEY VERSE: “And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he *is* the anointed of the LORD,” 1 Samuel 24:6.

King Saul and David were bitter enemies. When returning from a battle in En-gedi, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself (verses 1-3). David was hiding from Saul in this same cave. David was so close to Saul that he cut off a piece of the king’s robe as evidence of his opportunity to kill Saul (verse 4). This act brought conviction to David’s heart because he would not do harm to the king inasmuch as David regarded Saul as “the anointed of the LORD” (verse 6). David displayed mercy to King Saul by not killing him.

Wherever there is jealousy, there is usually always strife. Saul was jealous of David’s popularity. This envy bred conflict. Distrust of each other incited anger and bitterness. Resentment swelled up in both men and promoted emotional and physical hostility. David realized this intolerance, and it caused him to show mercy to King Saul.

Mercy may be defined as a transitive love for an individual, meaning that mercy leads one to seek the temporal good of one’s fellowman. David displayed this kind of mercy to Saul. A born-again believer should be motivated to show mercy to other human beings, especially those who cannot help themselves.

God’s mercy may also be defined as His love in action. In love, God gave His only begotten Son—Jesus Christ—to save us from our sins. (See John 3:16-18.)

How much does God love us? So much that “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

JUST A THOUGHT: *Christ sends us out to show mercy and compassion to those who are in need.*

Gene C. Smith

David More Righteous

KEY VERSE: “And he said to David, Thou *art* more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil,” 1 Samuel 24:17.

David did not harm King Saul in the cave in the wilderness of En-gedi because he regarded him as the Lord's anointed. (See 1 Samuel 24:1-6.) Yet, David said the king had no just cause in hunting him down (verses 14, 15). In repentance, King Saul acknowledged that David had lived a righteous life (verse 17) and that David would indeed be the next king of Israel (verses 18-22).

The Bible clearly teaches that man is a sinner. (See Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:1.) As such, man is separated from God (Isa. 59:2). A big question is formed on the mind of a sinner seeking God. How can a righteous God and a sinful man be brought together in reconciliation? This is indeed a good question that must be answered correctly. Here is where Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, comes into view. Jesus entered the world of mankind by means of the virgin birth. He was reared in a godly home. He lived a righteous life as He preached the gospel in the land of Israel. He consummated His life on earth by going to the cross and dying in our place. In so doing, He satisfied the justice of God and, therefore, can offer mankind mercy on the basis of God's justice being satisfied (Isa. 53:11; Rom. 5:8; Titus 3:5).

Our part in the plan of salvation is that we must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3, 5) and receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 1:11-13; 5:24). When Christ is received, we are born again into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 7), and we are enabled to live righteous lives for God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The most powerful testimony for God is a holy life.*

Gene C. Smith

Nabal the Fool

KEY VERSE: “Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and *she was* a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb,” 1 Samuel 25:3.

Nabal was a wealthy but churlish (surly, boorish, miserly and hard to control) sheep master of Maon (verse 2). The name Nabal means “fool or foolish.” Nabal is a striking example of a man with a name indicative of his nature. When David sent ten young men to Nabal requesting food for his hungry men, this surly man refused (verses 4-12). David set out to kill Nabal for denying his request (verse 13), but Abigail, Nabal’s beautiful wife, pled for the life of her unworthy husband (verses 14-16). Abigail said to David, “For as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him” (verse 25). In effect, she said, Pay no attention to my churlish husband. He is a fool by name and a fool by nature.

The Bible tells us of several foolish men.

- The atheistic fool, Psalm 14:1.
 - The men who are fools because of their transgressions, Psalm 107: 17.
 - The fools who despise wisdom and instruction, Proverbs 1:7.
 - The foolish farmer, Luke 12:20.
 - Those who professed to be wise but became fools by turning from God to idols, Romans 1:22, 23.
 - Those who do not walk circumspectly, but as fools, Ephesians 5:15.
 - The fool who utters all his mind, Proverbs 29:11.
- And many others. In fact, the word fool is used over one hundred times in the Word of God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *It is foolish indeed to live without Jesus Christ as Savior, die in sin and go to an eternal hell.*

Gene C. Smith

David's Mercy to Abigail

KEY VERSE: "And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spake unto her, saying, David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife," 1 Samuel 25:40.

When David heard of Nabal's death (verse 38), he saw in this turn of events a sign from God (verse 39). Obviously struck by the beauty and character of Abigail, David proposed marriage to her. She gladly accepted David's proposal and became his wife. Thus, David added another wife to Ahinoam and Michal, whom he had previously married.

It will be enlightening to open the Bible and read again the account of marriage in Genesis 2:18-25 and examine again the biblical principles of marriage. A family is to be constructed and function on the following principles that are set forth in this account.

The first principle is that God made one man for one woman. It was never in God's plan for a man to have several wives. (See Matthew 19:3-9.)

The second principle is that the wife is to be a helper to her husband (Gen. 2:18).

The third principle is that the man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife (verse 24). In so doing, they become one: living in unity, harmony and peace with each other. Marriage breakups were never in God's plan. Couples are to work at the task of keeping their marriage together.

The fathers and mothers are to teach their children. (See Titus 2:1-6.)

A couple is to reproduce, bearing children as God blesses. (See Genesis 4:1, 2.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *Jesus said, "What . . . God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6).*

Gene C. Smith

David's Enduring Mercy

KEY VERSE: “And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?” 1 Samuel 26:9.

King Saul’s final pursuit of David is set forth in this chapter of 1 Samuel. Saul learned from the Ziphites about David’s hiding place (verse 1). So Saul mustered an army of three thousand chosen men to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph (verse 2). Again the Lord miraculously delivered David (verses 3-6). David and Abishai, a skilled and faithful soldier and Joab’s brother (verse 6), went down to Saul’s camp one night (verses 6, 7). Saul lay sleeping in a trench. David came so close to him that he stole Saul’s spear (verse 8) and water jug (verse 12). Again David declared that he would do Saul no harm because he was the Lord’s anointed (verses 9, 11).

In application of this episode we may examine the relationship of a pastor and the church he pastors. Invariably, there are a few people in most congregations who become disgruntled and dissatisfied with the present pastor, whoever he may be. They usually become troublemakers and stretch forth their hand against the Lord’s anointed—the pastor. Because God placed him in the church, he is God’s anointed one. If the disgruntled ones set themselves against him, the “Lord shall smite” them (verse 10).

This writer recalls having heard of a man who became so angry with his pastor that he drew back his fist to hit the man of God. As he did so, he fell backward and died of a heart attack. Christians are to stand behind their pastor, to pray for him and to cooperate with him in the Lord’s work rather than to oppose him.

JUST A THOUGHT: *To rule your life, let Christ reign in your heart.*

Gene C. Smith

Saul's Confession

KEY VERSE: “Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly,” 1 Samuel 26:21.

God's protection over David was so evident to King Saul that he could only confess his own wickedness (verse 21) and recognize fully and finally that David was destined to be the next king of Israel (verses 22-25). Saul was evidently resigned to his fate and never again tried to interfere with the will of God for Israel and the next anointed king. (See 1 Samuel 27:4.)

Saul's confession was, “I have sinned” (verse 21). These three words are the hardest words ever uttered by a human being. Man is a sinner by nature, by choice and by practice. Even though one has been saved by God's power, he still has the sin nature present in him. This nature is not eradicated in one's salvation nor in his sanctification, but it is ever present with him. The sin nature often takes control over a child of God and causes him to sin against God. One's sin brings about an intervention of one's fellowship with God. He does not lose his salvation—his relationship with God—but his fellowship with God is affected. He is to confess his sin to God and be restored to fellowship with Him. (See 1 John 1:9, 10.)

Saul also confessed that he had “played the fool” and “erred exceedingly” (verse 21). The child of God who follows the pathway of sin is indeed playing the fool, or doing foolish things. Departing from God's way, one will err (sin) exceedingly like the prodigal son. (See Luke 15:11-24.) Almighty God, like the compassionate father (Luke 15:20), is always willing and eager for a sinful child of God to return home to Him and be restored to fellowship.

JUST A THOUGHT: *One can be in a right relationship with God tomorrow if he walks with Him today.*

Gene C. Smith

David Given Ziklag

KEY VERSE: “Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day,” 1 Samuel 27:6.

David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22); yet, he had his faults. They are recorded, not for our imitation, but for our admonition. The devotional reading for today is a record of how David prudently took care of his own safety as well as his family's. He deserted his own country and went to dwell in the land of the Philistines (verse 1).

The king of Gath, Achish, assigned David and his men to the city of Ziklag (verse 6) that had been taken from Judah. Ziklag was located in the Negeb, the southern desert area of Judah. It was about twenty-five miles southeast of Gaza and about twenty-five miles southwest of Hebron. It was the largest city in that area.

David's taking exile in Ziklag reveals how prone God's people are to sometimes go contrary to the will of God. Believers are to do God's will regardless of the cost to themselves. David was to remain in Israel, but he got out of God's will by following his own will. Christians often make the same mistake David made.

A Christian should never defect to the enemy as did David. The world and the devil are real enemies to a child of God. To defect to either is a sin against God. Christians who depart from the will of God will, in time, encounter many troubles and heartaches as did David in his defection to Ziklag. When a condition like this exists in one's life, a positive action is needed to correct it.

JUST A THOUGHT: *To be out of God's will places one in hostile territory.*

Gene C. Smith

Saul's Hopeless Enquiry

KEY VERSE: "And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets," 1 Samuel 28:6.

While David was living in Ziklag, war broke out again between the Israelites and the Philistines. King Achish informed David that he and his men were to fight on the side of the Philistines (verse 1). David indicated that he would gladly do so (verse 2).

In the meantime, King Saul tried to contact the Lord in his troubles. The Lord did not answer Saul (verse 6). There are times when, like King Saul, we all struggle with unanswered prayer. Someone has stated that God answers prayer in three ways: yes, no and wait awhile. When God says yes to our prayers, He sends the answer in due time. When He says no to our prayers, in effect this is His final answer. For God to wait awhile indicates that He will answer when the time is right. Meanwhile, we go on struggling with our prayers sometimes seemingly not being answered. The heavens seem to be like brass, allowing no communication between the one praying and God. We wring our hands in despair and cry out, Why doesn't God answer our prayers? We must learn to wait on God in these times.

King Saul tried dreams, but God did not answer by this means. He tried the Urim. The Urim, along with the Thummim, was used by the high priest to determine God's guidance in certain matters. (See Exodus 28:30.) This avenue did not give King Saul the answer he sought. He even inquired of the prophets, but no answer was given. Saul then turned to the witch of En-dor for help (1 Sam. 28:7, 8). This was a tragic mistake on the part of Saul.

JUST A THOUGHT: *God does hear and answer our prayers in His own time and way. (See Psalm 65:2.)*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 28:7-10

Wednesday, November 5

Saul's Hopeless Decision

KEY VERSE: "Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, *there is* a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor," 1 Samuel 28:7.

God had strictly forbidden the Israelites to have anything to do with black magic, fortune-tellers, witches, wizards or anyone else who claimed to bring forth spirits from the dead (Deut. 18:9-14). In fact, sorcerers were to be put to death (Ex. 22:18). Occult practices were carried on in the name of pagan gods, and people turned to the occult for answers that God did not give. Such was the case with King Saul.

Practitioners of the occult have Satan and demons as the source of their information. God did not reveal His will to them. Instead, He spoke through the prophets and by His Word. God reveals His way for us today through His Word (2 Tim. 4:15-17) and by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

King Saul disguised himself by putting on another garment. He took two other men with him and went to see the witch at En-dor by night (verse 8). Upon arriving at her house, Saul asked her to call unto him a familiar spirit. At first the woman refused and reminded Saul of how he had exterminated the witches and wizards in the land of Israel (verse 9). Saul assured her that no punishment would be inflicted upon her for doing what he asked (verse 10). She then asked Saul whom she was to bring up from the dead. He informed her that he wanted Samuel (verse 11). The witch called for Samuel and became highly excited when there actually did appear something that Saul took to be Samuel (verse 12).

God's people must never deviate to such measures as black magic in trying to determine God's will in any given matter. A sincere prayer uttered in faith will result in acquiring God's ear and receiving His answer.

JUST A THOUGHT: *The secret of coping with the issues of life is hope in God.*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 28:11-19

Thursday, November 6

Saul's Hopeless News

KEY VERSE: “Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow *shalt* thou and thy sons *be* with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines,” 1 Samuel 28:19.

King Saul had asked the witch of En-dor to call up Samuel from the dead. Whether the character called up was Samuel or not remains a mystery. It was perceived by the witch and King Saul to be Samuel. Saul received a message from this one that he really did not want to hear (verses 19, 20).

King Saul was told that Israel would be delivered into the hand of the Philistines. The Israelites would be utterly defeated. Saul and his sons would die in battle. This was sad news to King Saul. It happened just as he had been told. (See 1 Samuel 31:1-13.)

It is a tough thing indeed to hear some hopeless news. We must cope with gloomy news about family affairs, financial reversals, health problems, loss of a job and many other matters. It is devastating to receive such news, but these things must be dealt with in a rational manner.

The first thing a Christian should do when bad news comes is to pray about the matter. Jesus said, in giving the Sermon on the Mount, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7). He then told about God’s response to one’s asking (verses 8-11).

The next step in dealing with hopelessness is to be submissive to God’s will. He may well be directing or redirecting a person in life’s problems. (See Matthew 6:10; Romans 6:11-14 and Ephesians 5:17.) Submissiveness to God and His will relinquishes the despair and brings hope to the heart of the one yielding to God and His will.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Spend your time counting your blessings from God and not airing your complaints to others.*

Gene C. Smith

Saul's Hopeless Despair

KEY VERSE: "Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night," 1 Samuel 28:20.

When Saul heard the hopeless news contained in verse 19, he fainted and fell full length on the ground and was dreadfully afraid (verse 20). His strength was gone from him because he had eaten no food all the day and all night. The woman with the familiar spirit revived King Saul and persuaded him to eat, and then he returned to the camp of Israel (verses 21-25). The final step of despair of an unrepentant man, facing death and too hardened to repent and confess his sins, is viewed here in King Saul's actions.

This writer was clearing up an area and cleaning it out in my vast backyard. I thought all the snakes must have packed up and moved away. As I was working, I felt several pecks on my boots. I thought I had stepped on a dead twig. Upon further investigation, I discovered several poisonous baby copperhead snakes striking at my feet. The hoe I was using to clean the area served as a valuable tool to eliminate the poisonous copperheads once for all.

My encounter with the snakes served as a valuable wake-up call to me. The Word of God tells us to be alert to the presence of our spiritual enemy—the devil (1 Peter 5:8). We must never pretend that Satan does not exist. Knowing his destructive potential, we must depend on God to enable us to resist him (James 4:7, 8). We must ever be careful and alert to his tactics (2 Cor. 2:11). We need this wake-up call every day because Satan is real.

JUST A THOUGHT: *No one is hopeless whose hope is in the Lord.*

Gene C. Smith

Ephesians 2:11-13

Saturday, November 8

Having No Hope

KEY VERSE: “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world,” Ephesians 2:12.

In Twein churchyard, a short distance from King's Cross Station in England, stands a great four-trunked tree growing out of a grave. Apparently, the tree had grown right out of the body in the grave. The grave is that of Lady Anne Grimston. Here is the story that lies behind the strange growth of the tree out of the grave.

Lady Anne Grimston did not believe in life after death. When she lay dying in her home, she said to a friend, “I shall not live again. It is as unlikely that I shall live again as it is that a tree shall grow from my body.” She was buried in a marble tomb. The grave was covered with a large marble slab and surrounded by an iron railing. Years later the marble slab was discovered to have been moved slightly. Then it cracked and through the crack a small tree grew.

The tree continued to grow, tilting the stone and breaking the marble masonry, until today it has surrounded the tomb with its roots and torn the railing out of the ground with its huge trunk. The tree is a massive one. And so God answered the challenge of this unbeliever. A tree grew out of her grave and her body.

But God is not through dealing with her. She will be resurrected and appear before the Great White Throne and hear her final doom (Rev. 20:11-15). Her resurrected body will not be a body of glory but one of “shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).

All unbelievers will die “having no hope” and “without Christ” and “without God” (Eph. 2:12). They can expect nothing else but an eternity without hope.

JUST A THOUGHT: *You may go to Heaven without health, wealth, fame and a great name, but you can never go to Heaven without Christ.*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 29:1-11

Monday, November 10

David Kept from Evil

KEY VERSE: “Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host *is* good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favour thee not,” 1 Samuel 29:6.

The Philistines gathered all their armies together to do battle against Israel. David and his men accompanied King Achish against Israel at Aphek in Mount Ephraim (verse 1). The other princes of the Philistines did not trust David and, therefore, would not go into battle with him (verses 2-4). Consequently, Achish was constrained to send David and his men back to Ziklag (verses 5-9). Again David indicated his willingness to fight beside Achish, but the Philistines, other than King Achish, feared that David might desert to Israel. David was then sent back to Ziklag (verses 10, 11). It is significant to note that King Achish found no evil in David during his stay in Philistia (verse 6).

God has a way of turning evil into good. The French philosopher Voltaire predicted that Christianity would be swept from existence within one hundred years; yet, just fifty years after he died in 1779, The German Bible Society had occupied Voltaire's house and was using his printing press to produce stacks of Bibles.

During World War II, Adolph Hitler erected a massive stone structure in Monte Carlo. It was to be a radio station from which to broadcast Nazi propaganda into North Africa. Today, from that same building, Trans World Radio beams the gospel of Christ's redeeming love all across Europe and into Russia and Africa.

Although some of the Philistines did not trust David, King Achish had “not found evil” in him and labeled him a “good” military leader (verse 6).

JUST A THOUGHT: *The way to victory is to see no evil, speak no evil and hear no evil. (See 1 Thessalonians 5:22.)*

Gene C. Smith

Amalekite Invasion

KEY VERSE: “And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire,” 1 Samuel 30:1.

When David was dismissed from the Philistine army (1 Sam. 29), he did not go back to the camp of Israel, but, being expelled by Saul, he observed an exact neutrality and silently retired to the city of Ziklag. Upon his arrival in Ziklag, David discovered that the Amalekites had surprised the city when it was left unguarded, plundered it, burned it and carried the women and children captives (1 Sam. 30:1, 2). David and his army immediately set out in pursuit of the Amalekites (verse 10).

Incidents such as the one David encountered often invade our lives. We are susceptible to discouragement when things like this come our way. The Lord God has stated in His Word, “Fear not, neither be discouraged” (Deut. 1:21).

The devil decided to have a garage sale. He displayed all the items for sale, and they were soon sold except for one tool. Several people offered to purchase it, but he adamantly refused to sell it. What was that one tool? He called it the tool of discouragement. The devil uses this tool on God’s people constantly. We must not ever give in to discouragement but constantly encourage ourselves with God’s promises to us.

Believers can turn their discouragements into hope by relying on the Word of God to bolster their faith. One sure way to victory over discouragement is to rely on the Lord.

JUST A THOUGHT: *A Bible that is falling apart is usually the possession of someone who isn’t.*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 30:11-16

Wednesday, November 12

An Egyptian Slave

KEY VERSE: “And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water,” 1 Samuel 30:11.

In his pursuit of the Amalekites, David and his soldiers found an Egyptian in a field. They gave him food to eat and water to drink (verses 11, 12). Being guided by this sick and abandoned Egyptian slave, David’s army came upon the army of the Amalekites, defeated them, regained their families and possessions and took a great spoil from the Amalekites (verses 13-20).

We do not have to rely on something that is not trustworthy or elusive in nature as David did in seeking to determine God’s will and direction in our lives. We have God’s direction revealed to us already. Please note the following items. First, we have the Bible—the Word of God—to guide us. It is God’s revelation to us. There is no need for much speculation when we have so much revelation. (See Psalm 119:11, 105 and 2 Timothy 3:13-17.) God makes His will and way known to us by His infallible, inerrant Word. Follow it.

Second, prayer is another way to determine God’s will and direction for our lives. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, told us to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). God’s will is executed speedily by the angels of God in Heaven. We should always be ready to do His will. (See Luke 11:1-13.)

Third, the Holy Spirit has been given to us to be our guide (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit directs God’s children as we do God’s work. (See Acts 1:8; 2:14-47; 8:1-8, 26-39 and 13:1-5.)

Fourth, the providence of God directs us in God’s will and way. Make sure you are where God wants you to be today, and He will place you where He wants you to be tomorrow.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Our needs will never exhaust God’s supply. (See Philippians 4:19.)*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 30:17-20

Thursday, November 13

Amalekites Defeated

KEY VERSE: “And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives,” 1 Samuel 30:18.

The Amalekites were an ancient and nomadic marauding people dwelling mainly in the Negeb from the time of Abraham to Hezekiah. They are first mentioned as being among those smitten by Chedorlaomer in the days of Abraham (Gen. 14:7). They are also mentioned as being the offspring of Esau (Gen. 36:12). They were warlike in nature and often raided those around them. They had invaded Ziklag, smote it and “burned it with fire” (1 Sam. 30:1). They also carried some of David’s family with them (verses 2-16). David pursued them and overtook them. He “smote them” (verse 17) and “rescued his two wives” (verse 18) and “all the flocks and the herds” and “cattle” that belonged to him (verse 20). David viewed his victory as a blessing from his great God.

I stood one day on a mountain and beheld the glory of God in His creation. His handiwork may be viewed in every direction in this complex world (Psalm 19:1). For example, the distance of the earth from the sun is approximately 93,000,000 miles; yet, it seemed to me, as I viewed the rising sun in the eastern sky, that I could almost reach out and touch it.

True evidences of God’s remarkable design exist throughout His vast creation. This may be seen not only in the plants but also in the architecture of the human eye, the social behavior of the tiny ant and the variety found in snowflakes. These all speak of God and His order, design and greatness.

God also cared for mankind in that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. (See John 10:11-18.) The great Creator became our Savior. How great is our God!

JUST A THOUGHT: *All creation is an index finger pointing toward God. (See Psalm 19:1.)*

Gene C. Smith

Presents for Friends

KEY VERSE: “And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, *even* to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD,” 1 Samuel 30:26.

David shared the spoils of war with his soldiers (verses 21-23), with those who remained behind with the “stuff” (verse 24) and with others (verses 27-31).

This act of kindness teaches us that God’s mercy to us should make us merciful to others. Every post of service is not like a post of honor; yet, those who are in any way serviceable to a common cause ought to share equally in the rewards of victory.

A well-known pastor in Texas was invited to dinner in the home of a wealthy man. After the meal, the host led the pastor to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area.

Pointing to the oil wells towering above the landscape, he boasted saying, “Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now as far as you can see belongs to me.” Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling wheat fields, he said, “That’s all mine.” Turning eastward where huge herds of cattle could be seen, he bragged, “They’re all mine.” Then, pointing to the west to a vast forest, he said, “That, too, is all mine.”

He paused expecting the pastor to compliment him on his great success; however, the pastor pointed heavenward and asked him, “How much do you have in that direction?” The man hung his head in shame and confessed, “I never thought of that.”

The wise investor lays up treasure in Heaven (Matt. 6:19, 20). So live that you, too, will reap eternal benefits.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21).*

Gene C. Smith

My Reward Is with Me

KEY VERSE: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be,” Revelation 22:12.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is going to return to planet Earth someday. In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament there are over three hundred references to Jesus' second return to earth. This constitutes about one-fourth of the New Testament. The apostle Paul referred to this event some fifty times in his writings. Every chapter in the two epistles to the Thessalonians refers to this great event. It is the theme of the book of Revelation. While all of this is true, the best evidence we have of Jesus' return to earth is found in the fact that He said so Himself. (See John 14:1-6.) The last promise of the Bible testifies to this wonderful truth. (See Revelation 22:20.)

Added to His promise of a return to planet Earth, the Key Verse proclaims a “reward” by way of judgment that a believer may receive from Him at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) this truth is illustrated in the “five” talented man and the “two” talented man. Each one used the talents his lord gave him. Upon his return, the lord said to each of them, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Salvation is a free gift from God to the believing sinner. (See Ephesians 2:8, 9.) Rewards are a recompense for good works done for the Lord after salvation. (See Matthew 10:42; Luke 19:11-27; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8 and Revelation 2:10; 22:12.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *Jesus Christ said, “Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 24:44).*

Gene C. Smith

History of God's Chosen

KEY VERSE: “And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep *me* from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested,” 1 Chronicles 4:10.

The words history and chronicles are synonymous. They both relate to an account of what has happened in the life or development of a people or country. The first book of Chronicles sets forth a history of Israel from Adam (1 Chron. 1:1) through King David (1 Chron. 11:1—29:22).

This writer has been a lover of history, being inspired by a history teacher in college and by yet another teacher of biblical history in the seminary. History is important because it casts a shadow of things to come in the future. This is what we learn from history.

For this devotional, I want to focus on the life of one of the sons of Judah—a man by the name of Jabez. Please note the following six things about him set forth in the Key Verse.

1. Jabez called on the God of Israel. This identifies him as having been a man of prayer.
2. He asked God to bless him. We view God's blessings on Israel and Jabez in particular in Israel's history.
3. Jabez asked God to “enlarge” his “coast” or borders. He wanted to reach out to others. This was the purpose for which God established the nation of Israel, that is, to reach others for God.
4. He asked God that His hand would be with him. He wanted God to lead, direct and bless him. The same was true with all Israel.
5. Jabez wanted God to “keep” him “from evil.” This would involve anything that hindered his service to God.
6. God heard and answered Jabez's prayer. God does indeed hear and answer the prayers of His people. (See Psalms 77:1; 86:1-3; 102:1-5; 116:1; 120:1; Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:1-13.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *No force is greater than the power of God working for His people.*

Gene C. Smith

Death of Saul

KEY VERSE: “So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together,” 1 Chronicles 10:6.

This devotional reading is an account of King Saul's death on the battlefield. Once again we view the Philistines warring against the Israelites (verse 1). The men of Israel were quickly routed, and many of them were slain in Mount Gilboa (verses 1, 2). Three of Saul's sons were killed, including Jonathan (verse 2). Saul was struck by an arrow and evidently mortally wounded (verse 3). Lest he linger on and the Philistines come and abuse him, he begged his armor bearer to kill him (verse 4). The young soldier was afraid to do what Saul asked him to do, so Saul fell on his own sword killing himself (verse 4). The armor bearer also killed himself (verse 5).

The next day the Philistines found Saul and his sons when they stripped the dead (verses 8, 9). They took Saul's armor and his head and sent them into the cities of the Philistines (verse 9). Saul's armor was put in the house of the Philistines' god and his head was put in the temple of Dagon (verse 10). This was the house of worship of their false god and this act signified that their god had conquered the God of Israel. How mistaken they were!

This reveals the devastating results of warfare. Fathers, sons, brothers, friends and others are killed. This writer lost the best friend he ever had in battle while fighting in the United States Army during the Korean War. This is a sorrow I have borne for many years. The only solace I have is that he is now with the Lord in Heaven. A short time before we both left to serve our country during the war in Korea, I was used by the Holy Spirit to lead my friend to Christ for salvation. Praise God!

JUST A THOUGHT: *Salvation is not what we achieve, but what we receive.*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 31:8-10
1 Chronicles 10:8-10

Wednesday, November 19

Saul Dishonored

KEY VERSE: “And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan,” 1 Samuel 31:10.

After the battle was all over between the Israelites and the Philistines, the Philistines returned to the battlefield to “strip the slain.” In so doing, they discovered the dead bodies of King Saul and his three sons in Mount Gilboa (verse 8). They cut off Saul’s head, “stripped him” of his armor, and sent them into the land of the Philistines (verse 9). They placed his armor in the house of Ashtaroth, one of their false gods, and nailed his body to the wall of Beth-shan (verse 10), an Israelite city that they had captured. In doing these things they dishonored Saul. Because he was the king of Israel, they should have been more respectful of him than to do these terrible acts.

During World War II, a large number of German soldiers who had been taken captive were placed in a concentration camp near my hometown. My father farmed at this time and help was scarce because so many young men had gone into the armed services. The United States government permitted us to hire these German soldiers for \$1.00 a day for each one. During harvest at least one hundred of these soldiers worked for us. Although they were our enemies, we respected them as human beings. We treated them kindly, talked with those who could speak some English and fed them the noon meal each day they worked. They seemed to enjoy working on our farm. They laughed, sang and displayed a contented countenance. We were happy to have had them work for us.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Almighty God is bigger than any problem we face. Trust Him!*

Gene C. Smith

1 Samuel 31:11-13
1 Chronicles 10:11-14

Thursday, November 20

Valiant Men

KEY VERSE: “All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there,” 1 Samuel 31:12.

Upon hearing of Saul’s death, the “valiant men” of Jabesh-gilead came by night, took the bodies of Saul and his three sons from the wall of Beth-shan, burned their flesh, buried their bones and then fasted for seven days (1 Sam. 31:11-13). (See also 1 Chronicles 10:11, 12.) These deeds were done to show their honor for King Saul because he had rescued them in the early years of his reign as king of Israel.

Saul died for his transgressions or sins (1 Chron. 10:13). Saul’s sins cost him his kingdom and his life. Saul disobeyed God and sought counsel of a familiar spirit (medium) rather than inquiring of God. (See 1 Samuel 28:1-19.) Therefore, the Lord allowed the Philistines to take his life. Saul’s kingdom was then turned over to David, the son of Jesse (1 Chron. 10:14).

Derek Humphrey in his book *Final Exit* gives instructions on how to commit suicide. One critic called it a “manual for killing.” Early in his discussion of self-murder, Humphrey said, “If you consider God the master of your fate, then read no further.”

That statement raises some decisive questions. Who ultimately controls life and death? Do we hold the title deed to our own person, or does God? Who decided when we were to be born? Do we have the right to end a life we did not create? What are your answers to these questions? My view is the same as David’s when he wrote, “My times are in thy hand” (Psalm 31:15).

JUST A THOUGHT: *Love demands a loving deed when one sees someone in need.*

Gene C. Smith

David and the Amalekite

KEY VERSE: “And David said unto him, Thy blood *be* upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD’s anointed,” 2 Samuel 1:16.

David had returned to the city of Ziklag for two days after the battle with the Amalekites (verse 1) when an Amalekite brought him news that he had found Saul wounded and that Saul had asked the Amalekite to kill him (verses 2-9). The Amalekite said that he had indeed killed Saul. He then brought to David a bracelet and a crown that belonged to Saul as proof that he had killed the king (verse 10).

It was evident from the divine record that this Amalekite was lying because Saul had taken his own life. (See 1 Samuel 31: 4, 5.) This Amalekite, knowing that Saul and David were in a measure rivals, supposed that he might ingratiate himself with David if he could bring evidence that he had killed Saul. There is no doubt that this Amalekite was at the scene and found Saul’s body. No doubt he stripped the dead body of the bracelet and the crown, but he was lying about having killed King Saul.

The Amalekite thought he would get a reward from David for stating that he had killed Saul, but, much to his surprise, David had him killed for testifying that he had killed the Lord’s anointed, King Saul. (See 2 Samuel 1:13-16.)

Is it wrong to lie? Yes, it certainly is wrong to lie about any matter. (See Colossians 3:9.) We all came into the world with what might be called the “S” chromosome—S for sin. It is never right to lie, no matter what the circumstances are that one is in. When we are aware that we have sinned in telling a lie, we must confess it and ask for God’s forgiveness. (See 1 John 1:9.)

JUST A THOUGHT: *Confession of one’s sins to God always brings cleansing from Him.*

Gene C. Smith

David's Lament

KEY VERSE: “And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son,” 2 Samuel 1:17.

David lamented over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (verse 17). The lamentation expressed in the devotional reading is one of the most beautiful elegiac poems in the literature of the world. It is not necessarily a religious song. It is a funeral song, an elegy, afterward called “The Bow.” David had this song, referring to Jonathan’s bow, taught to the children of Israel (verse 18). Every admirer of good poetry bears tribute to this exquisite gem. The poem has this excellence—it forgets the faults and extols the virtues of the deceased.

The praise of their bravery and David’s feelings for them are seen in the thrice-repeated refrain of this poetic lament, “How are the mighty fallen” (verses 19, 25, 27). In his conduct and actions at this time, David showed his true feelings toward the house of Saul and, doubtless, won favor with and admiration from Saul’s friends and all the people wherever the news of it was carried.

Loyalty is one of the most costly qualities. It is the most selfless part of love. To be loyal one cannot live only for self. Loyal people not only stand by their commitments but also are willing to suffer for them. Although Saul had been trying to kill David for many years, he did not rejoice upon learning of Saul’s death. David maintained respect for Saul’s position as God’s anointed servant. In spite of the shortcomings of our leaders, we should maintain respect for the positions they occupy.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Christians are most useful to God when they are most useful to others.*

Gene C. Smith

Ish-bosheth King of Israel

KEY VERSE: “Ish-bosheth Saul’s son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David,” 2 Samuel 2:10.

David was staying at Ziklag, the Philistine city in the Negeb, when he received word of the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:1-16). The deaths of the king and his son altered David’s position and made action necessary. He had been anointed as the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:12, 13); now, he would likely be the next king of Israel.

David was received as the king of Judah. He left his place of refuge in Ziklag and went to Hebron, some twenty miles to the north and east, as the Lord instructed him to do (2 Sam. 2:1-7).

Abner, the captain of Saul’s army, upon hearing that David had been made king of Judah, took Ish-bosheth, Saul’s only surviving son, and set him up in Mahanaim, east of the Jordan River, as king over all the tribes of Israel, except Judah (2 Sam. 2:8-11). This action divided the kingdom of Israel.

This episode is a subtle suggestion to God’s people to be unified in the Lord’s work. We must never be a party to any disunity and division in the work of the Lord. A unified effort is necessary for success in the work of the local church and the fellowship of the Lord’s churches on a national basis. Our battles become glorious victories when we have learned to work together in God’s service to glorify Him. When we love the Lord and His work, unity may be achieved.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Be patient, humble and prayerful and God will use you in His work and service.*

Gene C. Smith

David at Hebron

KEY VERSE: “And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess,” 2 Samuel 3:2.

A long civil war ensued between David’s army and the army of Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. 2:12-32). In this battle, Abner, the captain of Ish-bosheth’s army, was defeated, and it appeared that the eleven tribes of Israel had little interest in fighting for the house of Saul any longer. The house of Saul became “weaker and weaker,” while the house of David grew “stronger and stronger” (2 Sam. 3:1).

The sons of David who were born while he reigned in Hebron are named in verses 2-5. Some of the more prominent ones were Amnon, who seduced his half sister (2 Sam. 13:1-22); Absalom, who rebelled against his father (2 Sam. 15:1-13); Adonijah, who usurped the throne when David was on his death bed (1 Kings 1:5-9). There were six sons in all who were born in Hebron, but some of them were never prominent men. During those seven and a half years, the cause of Ish-bosheth became even more feeble, while David’s cause was daily becoming stronger and stronger. God has a way for His people, and we should strive to walk in that way.

A man once said to this writer, “All roads lead to God. It is like going from here to downtown. You can take one of the several streets in order to get there. They all lead to the same destination.” Such inclusiveness is popular today; yet, it runs counter to Jesus’ words when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We must never compromise with the enemy in the Lord’s work, but ever be true to “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

JUST A THOUGHT: *Spend your time in counting your blessings and not in airing your complaints.*

Gene C. Smith

Abner and Rizpah

KEY VERSE: “And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and *Ish-bosheth* said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father’s concubine?” 2 Samuel 3:7.

Abner, the captain of Saul’s army, came to see the ultimate outcome between David and Ish-bosheth. Therefore, he decided to defect to David’s army. The event that brought this matter to its culmination was Ish-bosheth’s quarrel with Abner because Abner had taken Saul’s concubine, Rizpah, to be his (verses 7-11).

There have been many fights and killings over women in days gone by, and it seems to get worse as time goes on. Because of the mixing of men and women in the workplace for several years, this problem has grown tremendously. Adultery and fornication are two sins that have scaled new heights in recent years; yet, few, if any, men of God denounce these sins from the pulpit. This writer personally knows of such an incident, and a pastor preached against the sin of adultery one Sunday. A short time later he was gunned down on a street in his city, probably by someone connected to this incident.

Believers are urged to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). The expression the faith refers to the body of teachings contained in the New Testament and believed by the first century Christians who lived it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Why did he give such an admonition? It was because false teachers were subverting the truth (verse 4). They were “ungodly men” who turned “the grace of our God into lasciviousness,” or lewdness, and denied “the only Lord God.”

We must never compromise the truth to please men, but ever be true to the Word of God.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Father, forgive us for not giving Jesus Christ the honor He deserves.*

Gene C. Smith

David and Abner

KEY VERSE: “And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose *is* the land? saying *also*, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand *shall* be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee,” 2 Samuel 3:12.

In retaliation to Ish-bosheth, Abner went to David and planned to deliver all the tribes of Israel unto his hands (verses 12-16). David accepted Abner’s proposals. Abner returned to Israel and began to effect the allegiance of the elders of all the tribes of Israel to David (verses 17-21).

There were three major accomplishments in Abner’s life. He was the commander in chief of Saul’s army and a capable military leader. He was also able to hold the people of Israel together for several years under the weak king, Ish-bosheth. Furthermore, he recognized and accepted God’s plan to make David the king over all Israel. Abner made one major mistake; he was selfishly motivated in his effort to reunite Judah and Israel rather than being motivated by a godly conviction.

There is an important lesson to be learned from the life of Abner. This lesson is that God requires more than conditional halfhearted cooperation. Abner realized that it was useless to fight for the weak ruler, Ish-bosheth, for nothing could prevent David from becoming king over all Israel because God was with him (verse 18). Abner recognized this and pledged his allegiance to David (verse 19). He made a wise choice in this decision, but it ultimately resulted in his untimely death.

We all have many important decisions to make in life. Sometimes we make wise choices and at other times we make bad choices. We live with whatever decisions we make in life.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Does your walk as a Christian square with your talk?*

Gene C. Smith

Great Man Fallen

KEY VERSE: “And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?” 2 Samuel 3:38.

Joab, the captain of David’s army, became angry with David for allowing Abner to escape and secretly sent, in David’s name, a message for him to return (verses 22-26). When Abner returned, Joab called him aside and murdered him for his slaying of Asahel, Joab’s brother, in battle (verse 27). This might have hindered David’s cause with some of the tribes had he shown his genuine grief over Abner’s murder (verses 28-30). David made a proclamation that “all the people” mourn over the death of Abner, and he himself followed the “bier” to the grave (verse 31). All the people wept as they buried Abner (verse 32).

King David “lamented” over Abner’s death but bluntly said, “Died Abner as a fool dieth?” (verse 33). However, David privately stated to his servants, “A prince and a great man” is “fallen this day in Israel” (verse 38). He further stated that the Lord would “reward the doer of [this] evil according to his wickedness” (verse 39).

The lives of King Saul and his followers show us the enormous price of disobedience. Saul never realized that his continued willfulness and stubborn pride would eventually cost him his honor, his friends, his influence for good and his fellowship with God. He lost it all. These were costly acts of disobedience.

This reveals to us that we must be obedient to God or pay the price for our disobedience.

JUST A THOUGHT: *Sin adds trouble to one’s life, subtracts from one’s spiritual power and multiplies one’s difficulties in life.*

Gene C. Smith

Ish-bosheth Assassinated

KEY VERSE: “And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged *them* up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried *it* in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron,” 2 Samuel 4:12.

When the news of Abner’s death was generally known, Ish-bosheth feared for his own life (verse 1). Two renegade Benjaminites came into his bedchamber, cut off his head and fled to David with it, thinking to receive a reward from him (verses 2-8). David, however, condemned their action instead (verse 9).

The bearer of the news of King Saul’s death claimed to have killed him at his request to spare him any shame (verse 10). Joab had provocation for Abner’s murder in the slaying of Asahel, but these two had committed a dastardly deed in slaying a defenseless man on his bed (verse 11). They were, therefore, executed. Their hands and feet were cut off because of their wicked deed, and their bodies were hung up for public viewing. The head of Ish-bosheth was buried in Abner’s tomb in Hebron (verse 12).

As can be clearly seen in these events, relationships are important in all arenas of life. These relationships may include one’s family, friends, relatives and co-workers. God has provided the supernatural resources through the Holy Spirit to keep one on the right track in these relationships. Through one’s identification with Christ’s death on the cross, His burial and resurrection, the power of sin can be conquered in a person’s life. As a Christian, one does not have to be a hostage to his feelings. He can experience the love of God in a new dimension that revitalizes his faith. This, in turn, can strengthen one’s relationships.

JUST A THOUGHT: *No influence is greater than the power of God’s love.*

Gene C. Smith

Prayer Requests

Notes