

Men who Spoke for God



2019
SBS



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Introduction to the Biblical Prophets

Who Were These Prophets?

Under the Old Covenant there were at least five classes of speakers. Three are mentioned as being important to the instruction of the people (Jer. 18:18; Ezek. 7:26). 1) Moses is the one and only lawgiver (Neh. 8:1,14; 9:13,14; Jn. 1:17; 7:19). 2) Wisemen were to give sound counsel. Solomon was the most outstanding of the wisemen. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are included in the books of wisdom. 3) The priests were to teach the law and then tend to the sacrificial duties. The priests, therefore, were often held accountable when the people fell away from the Lord (Lev. 10:8-11; Hos. 4:6; Ezek. 22:26; Mal. 2:7). 4) Psalmists were poets who set forth truth to be sung. David wrote about half the Psalms. 5) The prophets proclaimed the Word of God to the people. Though they did predict, their main responsibility was that of proclaiming rather than predicting. They were forth-tellers, not just fore-tellers.

The word "prophet" comes from the Hebrew word *nabi*. It occurs about four hundred times in the Old Testament as a noun and one hundred and ten times as a verb. Its basic meaning presents the idea of "calling." Thus, the prophet is one called of God and one who proclaims the will of God.

Robert Milligan gives an appropriate definition of the verb "prophecy." "To boil up like a fountain (Heb.). In both the Old and the New Testaments, (a prophet) is one who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit speaks the words and the thoughts of God, whether they relate to the past, to the present, or to the future" (Robert Milligan, *Scheme of Redemption*, p. 298).

God said to Moses that his brother, Aaron, would be a "spokesman...a mouth" (Ex. 4:16); also, He said that Aaron would be Moses' "prophet" (Ex. 78:1). Thus, as a prophet he was a spokesman, a mouth.

Many other terms and phrases have been assigned to prophets by the Word of God, such as, seer (1 Sam. 9:9); man of God (1 Sam. 9:6; 1 Ki. 17:18); servant of God (1 Chr. 6:49; 1 Ki. 18:36); messenger of Jehovah (1 Ki. 42:19) or as the watchman on the wall to warn the people (Ezek 3:17; 33:7). In short, a prophet was a go between by speech for God and man. He was one who had something to say and had to say it (Is. 20:9). These prophets were men and women who spoke for God.

Profiting From the Prophets

Often members of the church have been falsely labeled as those who do not believe in the Old Testament. When considering how little many really know about the prophets or most of the Old Testament, one might entertain a true possibility of this charge. Still others contend that New Testament Christians have no business studying the Old Testament. Yet, several sound reasons exist for our examination of these prophets of both the Old and New Testaments. Failure to study these prophets would rob disciples of Christ and much profit.

First, New Testament Christians were commanded to study the Scriptures. "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). The Bereans were deemed noble, because they searched the scriptures daily to see if the things preach by the Apostle Paul were true (Acts 17:11). This not only proves Paul was referencing the Old Testament when he preached, but since the New Testament was not written at the time it also proves the Bereans were studying daily from the Old Testament. These books are inspired of God and we are told that they are profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16,17). According to Romans 15:4 Paul

claimed, *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"*. Furthermore, the events the prophets of old wrote about happened *"to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"* (1 Cor. 10:11).

Second, the Old Testament prophets aid us in understanding the New Testament better, especially the Messianic prophecies. All except Obadiah and Nahum are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. The New Testament prophets, such as, John the baptist, demonstrate the fulfillment of prophecy by Malachi and Isaiah.

Additionally, these books are filled with prophecies affecting the nations of ancient times. Prophecy of the future of kingdoms provides precise proof of the inspiration of Scripture and the omniscience of God. A student can observe the accuracy of the foretelling of these prophets by reading secular historical accounts of the nations of Israel, Judah, Edom, Assyria, Babylon, etc.

Next, the prophets show the consequences of man's disobedience and how God dealt with it.

Furthermore, *"a knowledge of the writings of the prophets will make reading the daily newspaper and secular magazines and listening to news reports of present-day world events more meaningful. This is not to say that through the prophets God foretold any specific event of today, or pointed to any individual or nation of today"* (Homer Hailey, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 11).

Another reason to study the prophets is that they show the true nature of God to us. When ancient man walked away and forgot the true God, the prophets were sent to remind them of Him. Jonah was very successful with his warning from God to the Ninevites. The prophets pointed out His majesty, holiness, righteousness, lovingkindness, and justice. They showed that God was still immutable in all His attributes (Is. 43:11ff; 44:6,24-26; 46:10).

The final reason for studying the prophets is that modern man is not that much different from those people to whom the prophets were directed. Modern man, just like his ancient counterpart, is still materialistic, easily puts God out of his mind and forgets Him, and still seeks to satisfy his religious needs and please God by scant superficial accomplishments without internal devotion.

Jonah, The Unmerciful & Running Prophet

Jonah 1-4

Charles R. Swindoll said of the prophet Jonah, “he was prejudiced, bigoted, stubborn, openly rebellious, and spiritually insensitive. Other prophets ran to the Lord. He ran from him. Others declared the promises of God with fervent zeal. Not Jonah He was about as motivated as a six-hundred-pound grizzly in mid-January.”

Jonah has been a target of skeptics for years. Mostly because of the miraculous events associated with his stories. Since they cannot accept the idea of a real miracle like Jonah surviving in a great sea creature for three day and nights, they reject the entire book.

However, there is substantial support for the historical Jonah. He is said to be the son of Amittai and prophet of Israel in the days of Jeroboam II (2 Ki. 14:25). He was from Geth Hopher of the tribe of Zebulun which is located a few miles north of Nazareth. He visited a real port, Joppa. He booked passage to a real city, Tarshish. He was sent to preach at a real city called Nineveh. Christ showed His belief that the repentance of Nineveh was a real occurrence (Lk. 11:29-32). The events of this prophecy actually took place around the year 782 B.C.

Jonah Runs From God, *Jonah 1*

▶ **Jonah’s Flight**

God called Jonah to arise, go and cry out against Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Not only was God aware of their great wickedness so was Israel. They were so brutal that when their army showed up to take a city the inhabitants would all commit suicide other than fall into their hands. After capturing a city they would stack a pyramid of human skulls in front of the city gate. They would impale their enemies on sharp poles and let them roast in the hot sun. They were a great enemy and threat to Israel.

The name “Jonah” means “dove”, yet he was not going to be God’s messenger of peace to this heathen city. Instead of took flight in the opposite direction. Instead of heading east, Jonah fled west. Down to the sea port of Joppa, he gain passage on a ship headed to Tarshish which is on the coast of Spain. After all, salvation was for the Jews.

▶ **Sailor’s Plight**

While Jonah is fast asleep in the boat God was working a plan to turn the prophet around in the right direction. First He sends a mighty wind to stir up the sea. The sailors are afraid and begin praying to their gods. They are tossing over the cargo. The captain awakes Jonah and ask him to pray to his God. The superstitious sailors cast lots to discover who brought them bad luck on this voyage. It points by divine providence to Jonah. They find out he is a Jew on the run from the true God. They ask what they should do to calm the sea. Jonah willingly sacrifices his life for the heathen sailors and has them throw him overboard. At first they try to row harder for shore. The sea just gets rougher. So they pray to the God of Heaven to save them and not to hold them accountable for Jonah certain death. After they cast Jonah into the sea it becomes calm. They reverence God and sacrifice and make vows to Him. Ironically, Jonah was running away from his call to preach and ended up preaching and converting a boatload of heathen sailors.

The book of Jonah is filled with some amazing contrasts, such as, the contrast between Jonah and the mariners. The sailors were innocent victims of the storm went to chase down the guilty prophet. Jonah slept through the sailors prayer meeting. He showed indifference about his life and they did everything to save it. He was running from God and they end up running to God. They rejected their

false gods while Jonah was rejecting the true God. Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life, they were willing to sacrifice to God.

▶ **Fish's Appetite**

Man overboard. Jonah expected to drown in the sea, but God had not abandoned this disobedient prophet. God prepared a sea creature to save Jonah and return him to shore. The miracle was not the Jonah was swallowed. There are many cases in history of men being swallowed by great whales or fish. For example:

In February, 1891, an English vessel, *Star of the East*, was sailing in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands. The lookout sighted two large sperm whales three miles away. Two boats were launched. One whale escaped. The other was bombed and harpooned. The boat attached to the captured whale was reduced to splinters when hit by the powerful lash of the monster's tail during the dying struggle. The men were thrown out of the boat and one of them, James Bartley, was mourned as drowned. It took the crew a day and a half with axes and spades to remove the blubber. At the end of that time they attached some tackle to the stomach and hoisted it to the deck. The sailors were startled to see something jumping in the stomach at irregular intervals. Upon cutting the stomach open James Bartley came rolling out, screaming like a lunatic. He remained in that mental condition for weeks. Within three weeks he recovered from the shock and resumed his duties. Writing of the experience later, Mr. Bartley said: "I remembered from the moment that I jumped and felt my feet striking some soft substance. I looked up and saw a canopy of pink and white descending, and the next moment felt myself draw downward, feet first and realized I was being swallowed by a whale. I was drawn lower and lower; a wall of flesh gave way before the slightest movement. Suddenly I found myself in a sack much larger than my body, completely dark. Soon I felt a great pain in my head and my breathing became difficult. At the same time I felt a terrible heat; it seemed to consume me, and I believe I was going to be broiled alive. The thought that I was to perish in the belly of a whale tormented me beyond endurance, while the awful silence weighted me down. I tried to rise to cry out. All action was now impossible but my brain seemed abnormally clear, and, with a full comprehension of my fate, I lost consciousness" (H.P. Lee, *LITERARY DIGEST*, April 4, 1896).

The miracle of Jonah was that God spared his life for three days and nights while inside the creature. In God's attempt to turn Jonah around he sent a great wind and storm, controlled the lot that was cast so it identified Jonah, calmed the sea, prepared the sea creature, and then caused it to vomit him out on dry land. Nature readily obeys the Creator. The Creator has to use His creation to convince Jonah to obey Him.

Jonah Prays to God, *Jonah 2*

A teacher once asked her class. "What is the moral of the story of Jonah and the fish?" A little boy answered, "it's hard to keep a good man down." Jonah was going down. He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. He went down into the water. He went down into the sea creature. And finally, he went down into the depths of the sea. However, no matter how far down Jonah went in his flight from God, God was always there.

What is the strangest place you have ever prayed? Jonah has you beat. He prayed in the belly of the sea beast while curled up in sea weed as it swam down into the depths of the sea. It is here the runaway prophet prayed his best prayer under the worst conditions. God heard Jonah's cry just as he heard the cries of those suffering from the wickedness of the Ninevites. Jonah admitted God had the power to cast him away and the right to cast him out of His sight. He longed to return to the Temple and see it once more. Yet he was in a serious predicament. He is about as far from the Temple as he could get. He recognized the mercy of God in saving him from death in the sea creature. His soul or heart was softened and he was now willing to return and remember the Lord. He has faith that his prayers reached the heavenly temple. For a moment in his prayer he may be thinking of the city of Nineveh. They are without the mercy of God because they are given over to idols. He on the other hand will sacrifice with the voice of thanksgiving. It is possible Jonah vowed in his heart to go to Nineveh. If God will give him a second chance, he will speak His message. His prayer closes with the hope of salvation

from the Lord. God disciplined the prophet. He accepted it. He had a change of heart and God forgave and rescued him.

Jonah Preaches For God, *Jonah 3*

▶ **A Great City**

The location of Nineveh remained hidden for over two thousand five hundred years until French archaeologist Layard found it buried under tons of rubble in 1860 near the Tigris River. It was built by Nimrod the great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:8–10). The book of Jonah refers to the greatness of this city (1:2; 3:2,3). The city with its suburbs was sixty miles around. About 600,000 people lived there. The wall of the city had a circumference of about eight miles stubbed with over a thousand towers. One lone prophet, a foreigner was to confront this city filled with wicked men and women. Did Jonah's message stand a chance?

▶ **A Great Warning**

Our God is the God of the second chance. *"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time"* (Jonah 3:1). He preached a simple, direct, blunt message. It is only five words in the Hebrew text. *"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed."* It fit the needs of the hearers. They would not feel good about the message. His preaching was not watered-down and politically correct. They were given forty days warning. They took the message to mean there was a chance to avert God's wrath. Notice that Jonah's message did not mention repentance.

▶ **A Great Revival**

What took place was amazing. The greatest revival of all time took place in the wicked city of Nineveh. The King made reforms to save the people. He listened first and believed God's word. He showed humility, expected the citizens to and animals to show humility by wearing sackcloth and ashes.. They were to call upon God by way of a great fast. History shows that the Assyrian King Adad-Nirari made reforms. The monarchs which followed him did not explain their territory. Jonah's prophecy that Israel was to recover her lost territory would be fulfilled as a result (2 Ki. 14:25) extending her borders to rival that of Solomon's kingdom.

▶ **A Great Show of Mercy**

The hope of the Ninevites was not in vain. God is full of loving-kindness and when they repented He relented. To this day the book of Jonah is read on the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in the afternoon service. When man responds to God's message by changing his heart and his actions, God is willing to forgive and save.

Jonah is Angry With God, *Jonah 4*

▶ **Jonah Angry About Divine Mercy**

Who could possibly be angry with God because He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness? Jonah was very mad with God. It was the very reason he tried to flee to Tarshish. It was like Dwight L. Moody said, "some people have just enough religion to make them miserable." Jonah was like the prodigal son in that he left home and than came back. He is even more like the elder brother who refused to come back and enjoy the celebration over the prodigal sons and daughters of Nineveh had repented.

Again, can you imagine the most successful preacher in history so angry at the success of his preaching that he prayed God he might die?

▶ **Jonah Angry About the Gourd**

Jonah left the city and instead of going down, he goes up a hill. There he waits to see what will happen. Still hoping God's wrath will rain down on the Ninevites. In chapter one God had prepared a wind to created a storm, caused a lot to finger Jonah, a sea creature to swallow him, and they spit him out again. Now God prepares a gourd to give Jonah shade and joy. Next He had a worm kill the gourd and a hot east wind to blast Jonah. Again, Jonah wishes he was dead.

▶ **Jonah Rebuked By God**

Now God had Jonah set up right where He wants the prophet to be for a little lesson on mercy.

Jonah was angry about the plant. He tells God he has every right to be angry about it. God contrasts the Gourd with the city of Nineveh. The contrasts between the two are many. The gourd did not have a soul, yet Nineveh was filled with many souls. The city was great but the gourd small. The gourd came quickly and soon was gone. Nineveh was an ancient city filled with eternal souls. Jonah had pity on the plant but no mercy for Nineveh. Jonah was angry over the loss of one innocent plant God made and destroyed. He was angry at God's failure to destroy Nineveh filled with 120,000 innocent children plus all the innocent animals. God loved the Ninevites and all the little children all whom He had made. Jonah could only muster enough pity for a plant he had no part in making.

Thirty-eight times in this four chapter book God is named. This book is about God and how He is in contrast with His prophet. Jonah was quick to anger, but God is slow to wrath. Jonah was willing to die, God is willing to save thousands from death. Jonah is impatient in contrast to the great longsuffering of God. Jonah wanted God's mercy for himself, God wanted to show mercy to hundreds of thousands. God is not a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11; Acts 10:15; 34-35). God made all, loves all, and has a right to save all.

Application

▶ **Universal Nature of God's Presence**

The first obvious lesson from the prophet is the futility of trying to run from the presence of God. When Jonah was in Israel God was there. When he went to Joppa God was there. When he went down into the ship, God was there. When he went down into the sea creature and down into the depths, God was there. When he went to Nineveh, God was there. When he went up the hill, God was there. The Psalmist asked, *"where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You"* (Ps. 139:7-12).

▶ **Universal Need of Preaching**

God could not save Nineveh without Jonah's preaching. Jonah was reluctant to preach. In fact he would rather run to the ends of the earth than preach for God. He would rather die than see his preaching successful. "Jonah learned, and through his valuable experience millions have learned, that when God enjoins the disagreeable duty, it is far easier to go and do it than to run away from it." (J. W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 54). Jonah was sent and so are we. *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). We can run as far and fast in the other direction from the lost souls of this world, but the job still awaits.

▶ **Universal Need for Repentance**

No city represents the need for or the example of true repentance than that of Nineveh. Jesus then condemns the people of his day for a lack of repentance and contrasted them in the people of Nineveh (Mt. 12:41,42). We need to remind everyone that *"God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30).

▶ **Universal Nature of God's Mercy**

Jonah learned of the need for God's mercy when he was curled up in the belly of the fish. He disobeyed and ran the first time God commanded him to *"arise...go...cry out"*. God recommissioned Jonah to preach to Nineveh (3:2). He is the merciful God of the second chance. God in mercy gave David another chance after his adultery and murder. As a result we have Psalms 32 and 51. Peter was give a chance to repent after his three denials of Jesus. *"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren'"* (Luke 22:31-32).

God loved the Ninevites who were the enemy of His people. All sinners are enemies of God. We are to love our enemies. There is no greater way for God or his children to show mercy than to actively

love their enemies (Romans 5:6-8; Matt. 5:44).

► **Jonah a Type of Jesus**

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here’” (Matt. 12:38-41). The most obvious comparison is that both Jesus and Jonah were three days and nights in the depths and God restored them. But both were also willing to give their lives for others. Jonah was willing to be cast into the sea to save the sailors and Jesus willing went to the cross to save all sinners. Both were on a mission to save Gentiles. Both were prophets from Galilee, despite was the Pharisees claim that no prophet came from Galilee (Jn. 7:52). Both came preaching repentance. Both were sound asleep in a boat during a strong storm where the sailors or fishermen try to in vain to row to shore. *“For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation”* (Luke 11:30). Yet Jesus is greater than Jonah, He was the perfect Son of God.

Summary

The prophecy of Nahum is the sequel to the book of Jonah. It foretells the doom on Nineveh. Jonah would have liked better to have been given the prophecy of Nahum. However, because of his message and Nineveh’s repentance the city survived another one hundred years before God destroyed it.

The prophecy of Jonah ends abruptly with God’s question about His right to have mercy on Nineveh being unanswered by Jonah. Did Jonah ever make the connect between his pity on the gourd and God’s mercy on souls? Did he ever see the foolishness of being angry with the grace of God? Did he ever recover from his great success or did he still just want to die? Since Jonah is the author of this book it is most likely he recorded all the negative facts about his attitude toward God and the city of Nineveh. It is very possible he chose to end the book leaving the reader with that same life change question on their mind just as God had left it with Jonah.

Questions:

1. Why did God send Jonah to cry against Nineveh?
2. Why did Jonah go down to Joppa?
3. Where was Jonah and what was he doing during the storm?
4. What did the ship’s captain request of Jonah? Why?
5. What was Jonah’s remedy for calming the sea?

6. What two requests did the sailors make of God?
7. When did the sea stop raging?
8. How long was Jonah in the great fish?
9. From where did Jonah pray?
10. What was wrapped around his head?
11. How did Jonah get out of the fish?
12. What did Jonah preach?
13. How did the people react to Jonah's preaching?
14. How did the King react?
15. What was Jonah's reaction to the repentance of Nineveh?
16. Why had Jonah fled to Tarshish?
17. What did God appoint a worm to do?
18. What was wrong with Jonah's compassion for the plant and anger at Nineveh's repentance?

19. Upon whom in the city did God place particular consideration?

Application & Discussion:

1. What lessons can be learned about proper prayer from Jonah's in chapter two?

2. List ways in which we can be unmerciful to the wicked enemies of God (Luke 10:38; 18:9-14,23,24; Gen. 49:7; Pr. 15:1; 1 Cor. 10:24)?

Homework: Find the least likely candidate to be receptive to the Gospel and share it with them.

Elijah, the Brave & Trouble-making Prophet

1 Kings 17,18,19 and 2 Kings 1,2

Eugene Britnell wrote, "Any man whose life, influence and relation to the God of the universe is such that he can turn the rain off and on like a faucet in the kitchen, multiply food, raise the dead, defeat 450 false prophets, call fire from above, ...and appear at the glorification of the Son of God is worthy of our investigation, appreciation and emulation - the extent that we are able!"

Elijah and Ahab, 1 Kings 17:1

After the reigns of kings Saul, David and Solomon, Jeroboam set up a golden calf at Dan and Bethel. Ahab added to the sin of Jeroboam by leading the children of Israel into the worship of the pagan idols of his foreign wife. Ahab married a Phoenician princess, Jezebel. He permitted her to bring Baal worship into Israel with temples, priests, and altars(16:31–33) She was intent on wiping out God's prophets. God held the King accountable for what the Queen did. *"And Ahab made wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him"* (1 Kings 16:33).

Suddenly Elijah appears upon the pages of Biblical history without little information. *"And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word'"* (17:1). Anyone would have to think twice about killing Elijah. For the next three years he controlled the rain. This was a direct attack on Baal who was the Storm God who supposedly brought fertility through rain.

Elijah & the Ravens, 1 Kings 17:2-7

To protect His prophet, God sent Elijah into a wilderness area. Moses spent forty years in the desert hiding from the wrath of Pharaoh. After his sudden conversion Paul spent three years in Arabia. Just how was God going to protect Elijah during a long drought? The prophet was told to go to the Cherith brook, where ravens brought him food twice a day (1 kings 17:5,6). The raven was unclean however that does not mean the food was unclean (Lev. 11:13–15; Deut. 14:14). After awhile the stream dried up.

Elijah & the Widow, 1 Kings 17:8-24

God sent Elijah to a widow in the city of Zarephath. It was in the Phoenician territory located on the Mediterranean Sea about halfway between the two Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon.. Ironically, Jezebel was from Sidon (1 kings 16:31). Perhaps God knew they would not think to look for Elijah in the Queen's home territory and the center of Baal worship.

God had found a widow to take care of Elijah. He first requested water and then her last bit of food.

She had been gathering sticks and was prepared to cook one last meal before she and her son died. She had little in the pantry: a small flask of oil and a barrel with only a handful of barley. However, Elijah had God on his side who would keep the oil and barley from running out during the drought.

All went as planned until the widow's son became violently ill and died. The widow blamed Elijah for visiting her with discipline for her sins. He takes the boy's body and lays him upon his own bed. Prays to God to send the boy's soul back into his body. He lays down and breaths on the dead child three times. This would have been an unclean act of touching a dead body. He was not merely trying to revive him because the context indicates the boy was dead. He stopped breathing and his spirit left the body.

Since this is the first instance of resurrection from the dead Elijah did not have a precedence to believe God would. When life returned to the boy, Elijah returned him to his mother (Heb. 11:35). Although she had other evidence from the divine preservation of her food, she saw this as proof that Elijah was a true prophet of God.

Jesus uses this to rebuke those in the Nazareth synagogue. He wanted the proud Jewish congregation to realize that the God of Israel was also the God of the Gentiles. *"He said to them, 'You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' "* Then He said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow"*(Luke 4:23-26). Jesus healed the daughter of a Phoenician woman (Mark 7:25-26). The message God was showing in both cases was the grace to the Gentiles.

Elijah and Obadiah, 1 Kings 18:1-16

God sends Elijah to face Ahab. On the way he meets Obadiah the superintendent of the palace. He may have worked for Ahab, but when Jezebel went on a killing spree to wipe out the prophets of God, Obadiah took one hundred and hid them to two caves. He gave them water and food.

Obadiah told Elijah that Ahab had sent out search parties to every nation hoping to find the prophet. Elijah told him to tell Ahab that "Elijah is here." Obadiah fearing for his life refused. Three times Elijah made this request. Finally, Obadiah went but feared the king would kill him.

Elijah and the King with Israel, 1 Kings 18:17-24

True to his word, Elijah did meet with King Ahab. Ahab accused Elijah of being the source of trouble in Israel which was suffering from a severe famine. He asked, *"Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"* Both Jesus and Paul would also be called "troublemakers" (Luke 23:5; Acts 16:20; 17:6). Elijah defended himself by calling Ahab the real troublemaker because he had forsaken the Law of Moses and practiced Baal worship. He commanded the King to send for all Israel with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to gather at Mount Carmel.

Elijah challenged the people to make a choice between Jehovah and Baal. They gave no answer as to whom they were to serve as the true God. He then outlines the contest between the 450 prophets of Baal and himself. Elijah knew he was not the only prophet left in the land but the only one to challenge the false prophets on that day. The people of Israel agreed this contest was a good idea.

Elijah and the False Prophets, 1 Kings 18:25-46

After three years of drought it is time for a Showdown at Mount Carmel. Elijah challenged the priests to a duel of sorts. An altar had been erected on the mountaintop. Two bulls were prepared for sacrifice: one for the Baal flock and one for Elijah. It was suggested by Elijah that whichever god answered by sending fire to consume the sacrifice would be the victor. The Baal priest were to go first and take their best shot. For several hours they called upon Baal to no avail. *"But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention"* (18:29).

Elijah begins to mock the prophets and their god, Baal. *"Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened"* (18:27). What an absurd scene of sincere, grown men dancing, screaming, and cutting themselves in order to gain the attention of their god. Yet their zeal was all in vain. God was laughing at them as well. *"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision"* (Ps. 2:4).

Next it was Elijah's turn. Elijah had given the prophets of Baal some advantages, so now he gave himself some handicaps. He took twelve stones to repair the altar. These were to represent the original tribes under the Law of Moses. He set up the wood and the prepared animal, dug a ditch around it, and drenched the entire altar with water till the ditch was full. A spring of water is near Mount Carmel. It flows

even during extremely dry season. This is why Elijah can have twelve containers of water.

Then he prayed, *"LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again"* (18:36-37).

God answered immediately with fire from Heaven. It consumed the entire altar and the bull including the water and the stones.

After witnessing this the people were ready to give Elijah their answer. "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (18:39).

Next, all 450 prophets of Baal are put to death with the sword. This is in keeping with how the Law of Moses commanded them to deal with false prophets (Deut. 18:20). Baal worship was exceedingly wicked. The temple priestesses were prostitutes for Baal. The young couples who desired to get married would have sex at the temple. The grooms would party with the temple prostitutes and the bride would lose her virginity to a priest of Baal. The temple also feature homosexual prostitutes who were referred to as "dogs" in Deuteronomy 23:18. The sacrifice of the firstborn child was required part of Baal worship. The god of fertility and storms was clearly defeated.

Next, Elijah prays for rain. Seven times he sent his servant to check out the weather on the sea. Then God sent the rain demonstrating his power over Baal. For three years Elijah had been the best, most accurate weatherman the world has ever known.

Elijah had Ahab leave in his chariot for the palace at Jezreel. The prophet ran ahead of it for seventeen miles. Arriving there before the king's chariot.

Elijah and an Angel, 1 Kings 19:1-7

Many spiritual giants of the Bible have suffered spiritual burnout, such as, Moses, Jeremiah, and even Elijah. In 1 Kings 19:4 we learn of Elijah's burnout. *"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers' Why was he so depressed?"*

The great prophet's desert depression was preceded by the Mt. Carmel triumph. Elijah had been on the mountain three days earlier, engaged in a remarkable confrontation with the pagan priests of Baal. The next thing Elijah knew he was running for his very life. He had received death threats from Queen Jezebel who was upset at the humiliating defeat of her god at Mt. Carmel. Elijah was afraid, *"And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there"* (19:3). He could have said, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your threats will never hurt my passion. Instead, he asked God that he might die.

Elijah was depressed, ready to give up, to lie down and die. He was running on fumes. Elijah needed some sleep and some good food, and it was provided. God knew just how to deal with the drained prophet. *"Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.'" So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God"* (19:5-8).

Elijah and God, 1 Kings 19:8-21

God instructed him to go to Mt. Sinai (Horeb). Elijah hid himself in a cave. God demonstrated that He was still with Elijah by sending a strong wind then an earthquake, next a fire, and finally a still small voice. God came and asked him to explain his behavior. He told God how faithful he had been and reminded Him of the great defeat of the Prophets of Baal. He tells God this three times. And each time God responds with the command, "Go."

Perhaps, Elijah's was under the false impression that Baal had been defeated once and for all.

However, Elijah needed to focus on burning rubber and “go.” God had work for him to do. When Elijah was suffering from burnout God just didn't let him retire altogether. He sent Him to anoint a new king over Israel, a new king over Syria, and appoint his successor. He was to anoint Hazael as king over Syria, anoint Jehu as king over Israel, and anoint Elisha as his successor as a prophet.

He also reminded Elijah that he was not alone there were 7000 in Israel who did not worship Baal. One of the them is Elisha whom he finds plowing and threw upon his replacement a mantel. For the next ten years Elijah and Elisha would work together.

Elijah and Naboth's Vineyard, 1 Kings 21:1-29

Ahab was not the best person to be involved with in a real estate deal. Although Ahab's capital was at Samaria, he had a palace in Jezreel twenty miles to the north. Next to the palace was a beautiful vineyard that caught his lustful eye. He found the owner, Naboth, and offered to buy it from him. He rejected Ahab's offer and confessed before this Baal serving king his faith in God. No matter how profitable the business deal, Naboth was going to respect his God and his family and keep the land.

Ahab was very disappointed at this rejection. He showed his childlike immaturity and began to pout like a spoiled child. While he was throwing himself a little pity party, his wife, Jezebel, comes along and inquires about his temperament. He whines to his wife about not being able to get his way with Naboth. Instead of encouraging her husband to grow up, she castigated him for his weakness and leaps into action to get him what he wants at any cost. Theirs was truly a dysfunctional relationship.

Two false witnesses would be brought in to falsely charge Naboth with blasphemy. Blasphemy was a capital offense (Ex 22:8) punishable by being stoned to death (Lev. 24:10-16). Not only was he killed but his heirs were killed as well leaving his estate free for Ahab.

Ahab was able to take possession at last (21:16). However, God sent his prophet Elijah to pronounce judgment against the greedy, thieving king (21:17-19).

Elijah appears just as the king is celebrating his triumph over Naboth. Again Ahab insults Elijah asking him, “*Have you found me, O my enemy?*” (21:20). It is always easier to blame the messenger than it is to accept the message. God's warning to Ahab has a profound effect upon the king (21:27). His repentance seems to be sincere, in fact, God does delay part of the announced punishment (21:28-29). His house would not fall in his days, but in the days of his son. This prophecy was later fulfilled in 1 Kings 22:38 and 2 Kings 9:36.

Elijah and Ahaziah, 2 Kings 1:1-18

Ahab reigned over Israel twenty-two years. After his death Ahaziah, his son became king of Israel. Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice work at the palace and became ill. He sent a message to Ekron to ask the god of that city, Baal-Zebub, for a prognosis. God sent Elijah to intercept the messenger with a rebuke and the real prognosis. Ahaziah was to die.

Ahaziah sent a captain with fifty soldiers to fetch Elijah. Although Elijah ran away in fear when he received Jezebel's threat, this time, he remained where he was and faced the soldiers unafraid. Fire came from heaven and devoured them. The king sent another captain with his fifty. He was bolder and demanded that Elijah come quickly. They two were consumed by fire from heaven. Truly God is “*a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). Still Ahaziah sent out another fifty men with their captain. This time the captain showed wisdom and humility. God sent Elijah this time. The message was the same as before. Ahaziah did not get out of bed, but died. It might have turned out differently if Ahaziah had been like his father, Ahab, and repented.

Elijah and Elisha, 2 Kings 2:1-11

Finally, after years of dedicated service it is time for Elijah to retire. Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho. At each stop the sons of the prophets would ask Elisha if he knew that God was going to take away Elijah. Each time Elisha asked them to be silent. At each stop Elijah request Elisha to stay behind. Each time Elisha responded that he would not leave him.

When they came to the Jordan River it parted for them when Elijah struck it with his mantle. Elijah turned to Elisha and told him to ask a blessing from the old prophet. Elisha said, *"please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me"* (2:9b). The request was based on Deuteronomy 21:17. *"...suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horse of fire..and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"* (2:11). Like Enoch God took him before death came. What a spectacular end for a dynamic prophet.

Application

▶ **The Power of Prayer**

The most obvious application from Elijah is the one James made for us concerning the power of one man's prayer. *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months"* (Js. 5:17).

▶ **Bravely and Boldly Deal with False Teachers**

At the Mount Carmel showdown with the 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah shows that truth is not determined by the numbers who embrace a certain position. Truth is truth, no matter how many or how few hold to it at any given time.

Elijah was brave enough to face kings and a well-established religion. He did not just rebuke them in a general way. He did not sugar coat it. He took names and whipped them all. Today, people want a preacher to deal with sin and false teaching without exposing denominations or false preachers. *"The most dangerous rock that one encounters while mowing grass is the rock that is hidden in the grass. The rocks that are exposed to view pose no great threat to the man mowing the grass. So it is with false teachers. When they are exposed for what they are, the man who carelessly follows has no one to blame but himself"* (Andy Alexander, "Preaching Like Elijah", Guardian of Truth, Feb. 6, 92, 8).

Paul and John were not of this belief. They were willing to name names of the false teachers and their doctrines.

▶ **Beware of Spiritual Burnout**

Elijah was in danger of despair and giving up after Mount Carmel. Often depression can come after a great victory. We too can suffer from spiritual burnout. Perhaps, our spiritual burnout is caused by over work or over commitment. Like a car, we only come equipped with gas tanks that will only hold so much. We cannot run on fumes forever. God has promised us success if we don't burnout. *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart"* (Gal. 6:9). We are to abound in our work for the Lord, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58). Burn rubber in God's work and watch your spiritual passion reignite.

▶ **Avoid the Dangers of Inquiring into the Occult**

What was so bad about Ahaziah inquiring an opinion about his sickness from Ekron. God only wants us to trust in Him. What's so bad about reading your daily horoscope or going to a psychic or consulting a Ouija board or having your palm read? According to the Law of Moses this is not just harmless fun. *"And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people"* (Lev. 20:6).

▶ **Daily Trust in the Lord to Care for You**

God took care of Elijah by the brook and in the widows home. God sent an angel to cook him breakfast twice. Saints today need to learn to trust God on a day by day basis. We are to pray for our daily bread. God has promised to take care of our need for food and clothing if we trust in Him (Matt. 6:24-34).

▶ **Reward and Punishment**

God will reward those who are faithful. When he comes again they too, like Elijah will be caught a way in the clouds when Jesus returns (1 Thess. 4:13–18). However, just as the 450 prophets of Baal were executed, doom came upon King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, and fire consumed the two captains with their 100 soldiers so will Christ come one day *"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

Summary

Elijah was such an impressive Old Testament prophet that he is mentioned some thirty times in the New Testament. John the baptist was to come in the spirit of Elijah (Mal. 3:1). Jesus was even mistakenly identified as Elijah. *“So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’”* (Matt. 16:14). At the mount of Transfiguration Jesus met with both Moses and Elijah. Peter said, *“Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said”* (Luke 9:33). However, impressive the prophet was, today God wants us to listen to His Son.

Questions:

1. Why was Ahab as a worse king than other kings of Israel?
2. Who was Jezebel and what role did she play in the story of Elijah?
3. Who had the power to control the rain in Israel?
4. Where was Elijah to flee to after he gave Ahab his no rain prophecy? How did God care for him there?
5. What two miracles were performed for the widow who kept Elijah?
6. Who was Obadiah and what had he done for God?
7. How did Ahab refer to Elijah? To whom did this really apply?

8. What question did Elijah ask of Israel?

9. What advantages did the prophets of Baal have and what disadvantages did Elijah have in the contest at Mount Carmel?

10. What did the prophets of Baal do? How did Elijah react to this?

11. What did God do to the alter?

12. What was Israel's answer to Elijah's previous question after God answered Elijah's prayer?

13. What became of the 450 prophets of Baal?

14. Why did Elijah want to die in the desert? What did God do for him instead?

15. What three jobs did God still have lined up for Elijah?

16. What sins were committed by Ahab and Jezebel in their take over of Naboth's Vineyard?

17. Why didn't God's punishment come upon Ahab?

18. Why did God sent fire from heaven to destroy the captains with their fifty soldiers?

19. Did Elijah die? Explain.

Application and Discussion:

1. How should we deal with false teachers today?

2. How can we overcome spiritual burnout?

Homework: Like Elijah, go out this week and do whatever God commands while trusting Him to take care of you and for the results.

Daniel, The Wise & Understanding Prophet

Daniel 1,2,5,6

When I was a small boy my grandfather gave me a coonskin cap and I received as a hand-me-down a fake leather jacket with fringe. My parents gave me a rifle that made the sound of a gun shoot when compressed air was release through the barrel. Sporting cowboy boots (instead of moccasins) I was ready to act out my favorite TV show: Daniel Boone. In fact, "Daniel Boone" was the nick name my grandfather always called me during my early years. For an hour every week my parents could count on me being glued to the television set for an episode of my favorite hero played by Fess Parker. Although some episodes were filled with such historical inaccuracies the Kentucky legislature once condemned the show, my boyhood fantasies involved dressing up as Boone and going on a made-up adventure of my own. I can still remember hearing the classic theme song when the show came on:

Daniel Boone was a man. Yes a big man.
With an eye like an eagle and as tall as a mountain was he.
Daniel Boone was a man. Yes a big man.
He was brave, he was fearless and as tough as a mighty oak tree.
From the coonskin cap on the top of ol Dan to the heel of his rawhide shoe
The rippin'est roarin'est fightin'est man the frontier ever knew.
Daniel Boone was a man. Yes a big man.
And he fought for America to make all Americans free.
What a Boone. What a wonder. What a dream comer truer was he.

source: www.lyricsondemand.com

Years later after the show had gone into syndication and my grandfather had passed, I was riding home with my dad having just finished a long shift at the Sohio gas-station. Some how the conversation turned to a discussion concerning who gave me my name and why. I declared with confidence that my grandfather, who had rushed my mother to the hospital the day I was born, had named me "Daniel" after Daniel Boone. My dad just smiled and informed me that grandfather had only started calling my "Daniel Boone" after the show came out when I was three. The truth was I was named after the Biblical prophet Daniel. At first I was disappointed. For years I thought I was named after the famous American hunter, surveyor, soldier, statesman, pioneer, and leader: Daniel Boone. Since then my knowledge about God's famous interpreter of dreams, a statesmen, a counselor to kings, and a spiritual leader has grown.

Living Holy In An Unholy World, *Daniel 1*

► **The Remnant**

God had warned Judah of the need to repent of their gross idolatry and immorality or else face the same fate at the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Judah. These warnings came from such prophets as Isaiah, Micah, Habakkuk, and even Jeremiah. When the Babylonians came the first time they took back with them young men from among the royalty of Judah. Daniel and his three friends were some of the first Jews to be carried away into Babylonian captivity. Isaiah had promised that "the king's descendants" would become eunuchs in Babylon (Isa. 39:7).

As a young prince of Judah, Daniel, was carried away to Babylon in 606 BC. This date marks the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's forty-five year reign as well as the beginning of the empire. Daniel was also the witness of Babylon's fall in 536 BC. and went on to prosper into the third year of Cyrus. He would

have been between the ages of thirteen and seventeen when carried to Babylon. Thus, he lived through the seventy years of Babylonian Captivity of the Jews and to the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire, from 606 BC to 534 BC, in all, a total of at least seventy-two years.

▶ **The Refinement**

The Babylonian court chose the best of the royal men from their many conquests to serve the before the King's court. First, all these young men had to go through a three year training program. Only the brightest and best were to be enrolled. We learn that Daniel and his three friends were healthy, intelligent and handsome. The program was to transform them into Babylonians. They were given Babylonian names. They were taught the Babylonian language. They were given a Babylonian education in literature, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, philosophy, etc. Furthermore they were to be fed a diet prescribed by the king to make them as healthy as possible.

▶ **The Request**

Having to learn a new language, receive new names, and have a secular education were not a problem for the four Jews from Judah. The problem came with the new diet. The king's food and drink was unacceptable for these faithful servants of God. The Law of Moses prohibited the eating of unclean animals such as pigs. It also required the blood to be properly drained so that one did not eat the blood (Lev. 17:10-14). There was also the possibility that the king's wine was fermented and they would refuse to look upon or drink the wine which sparkled in the cup (Prov. 29:23f). The final problem could have been the serving of food that had been offered up to idols. For whatever reason(s) *"Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself"* (Dan. 1:8).

▶ **The Reluctance**

Daniel had already made an impression upon Ashpenaz who is called "chief of the eunuchs." He did not want to change Daniel's diet because it might result in his failure to measure up to the king's standards. This would not only put Daniel's future position in the court at risk but endanger Ashpenaz's head.

▶ **The Recommendation**

As a young captive in Babylon Daniel quickly distinguished himself by refusing to defile himself by eating the King's food. He suggested an alternate diet for ten days. *"And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies"* (Dan. 1:15).

▶ **The Results**

Through this diet and their hard work at training Daniel and his three friends were better able to show them the superiority of God's wisdom. At the end of the ten day trial, Daniel and his friends were healthier than the rest.

▶ **The Reward**

These four young Jewish men did what was right in the eyes of God and trusted Him with the results. God rewarded them for their faith. *"God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom."* In addition to this God gave Daniel *"understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan. 1:17).

When the king tested them at the end of three years he found them to be the best of the best. They were allowed to serve in Nebuchnezzar's royal court.

Application: How to Live Holy in an Unholy World

▶ **Be Resolute of Heart**

The key to Daniel being able to live faithfully as a Jew in the heathen court was his absolute unwillingness to compromise his principles. This did not start the moment a plate of bacon was placed in front of him. Daniel had already "purposed in his heart not to defile himself." He had previously made up his mind to do right. A successful godly life begins with a resolution of the heart. Ezra is another such example. *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel"* (Ezra 7:10).

▶ **Being Holy**

Although as servants of God today we do not have to follow diet of clean animals from which to eat. Daniel's commitment is to encourage us to keep ourselves pure (1 Tim. 5:20). The Bible makes it clear that all foods are permissible to believers (Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:17). *"As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Peter 1:15-16). Young Christians today must purpose in their hearts not to defile themselves with the movies, games, language, dancing, immodest clothing, etc. of this world.

▶ **Beware of What You Eat**

Christians should be careful to some extent what they eat and where they eat it. The church is not a glorified restaurant. Jesus did not die on the cross so we might have "fellowship" meals in the church kitchen. Christians should avoid getting drunk or even wine tasting. A Christian *"no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries"* (1 Peter 4:2,3).

▶ **Be Transformed, Not Conformed**

Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1–2).

The Babylonians were trying to press Daniel and his three friends into their mold to make them conform to a Babylonian image. They could have made many excuses. "When in Babylon, do as the Babylonians." Or "we are not in Judah, we are far from home and the Temple, is it realistic to expect us to keep all these kosher laws?" "It is not like I have completely given up on God. We are just having a couple of pieces of bacon." They could trivialized the importance of keeping these small and insignificant commandments of God. Each believer is either a conformer or a transformer.

▶ **Be Friendly & at Peace**

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Rom. 12:18 niv). Daniel had respect for Aspenaz. He was not willing to neglect his duties to God to please men (Gal. 1:10). Daniel would have compassion even on the magicians when he prayed "do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation" (Dan. 2:24b). They respected those in authority. They did not burn down the palace or the Babylonian flag, they did not neglect their studies, lead a protest, loot or assault others.

▶ **Be Wise**

Throughout this book Daniel is portrayed as one who was wise and understanding. He was also a man of prayer. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

Called to Preach, *Daniel 5*

Daniel's real test of his understanding of dreams came when Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a beast made of a head of gold, arms and torso of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron mingled with clay. His interpretation not only saved his life but that of all the wisemen or magicians of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. This beast was broken up by a rock not made with hands which came down from the mountain. The latter part was fulfilled in the establishment of the church in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.

In chapter three Daniel's three friends refused to worship the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar. They were cast into the burning fiery furnace. But God rescued them and the king gave them a promotion.

King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream which Daniel interprets in chapter four. It is one of punishment for the King due to his pride. Daniel gave the king some wise advice (Dan. 4:27). Nevertheless, the king boast of making Babylon and spent several months living like a beast until

recognized the absolute sovereignty of God.

Between chapters four and five the prophecies of chapters seven and eight occurred. Nebuchadnezzar's reign ended in 562 BC, Evil-Merodach's reigned for two years, Neriglissar was King for four years, Labashi-Marduk was only on the throne for two months, Then came Nabonidus who reigned from 556-539 BC. Finally, as co-regent with his father Belshazzar ruled the city of Babylon in 539 BC. It has been twenty-three years since Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

▶ **The King's Ball**

Belshazzar, his wives and concubines, and a thousand notable guests were feasting and drinking wine while the army of the Medes and Persians waited at the city gates, ready to invade. The city of Babylon boasted that it had impregnable walls and towers some three hundred feet tall.

▶ **The King's Gall**

The king ordered the vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem by his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, to be brought into the feast. His thousand lords, wives, and concubines all irreverently drank alcohol from these.

▶ **The King's Wall**

Suddenly, on a well lit portion of the wall Belshazzar saw a finger writing a message. This interrupted the feast and troubled the king so much his knees began to knock together. He saw "the handwriting on the wall." Written with the finger of God it was a warning. God had turned ballroom into a courtroom.

▶ **The King's Call to the Wisemen**

The message he saw was in Aramaic. Anyone who knew the language could have interpreted it for Belshazzar. But he wanted to know the meaning behind the message. So he calls for the "astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers" (5:7). The one who was able to decipher the message would be greatly rewarded. For the third time in the book of Daniel they fail miserably (2:1-13; 4:7; 5:7,8). Not one of them was able to reveal the meaning.

▶ **The King's Ma**

Since all the king's wives and concubines are at the feast it is most likely that the queen mother is Belshazzar's mother or grandmother. She gave the king some great news about a wiseman whom his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had known and promoted. This new king apparently had removed Daniel from his position and replaced him with his own advisers. She suggests the king call the eighty-something prophet of God out of retirement from some assisted-living home in upper Babylon to explain the meaning of the message.

▶ **The King's Call for Daniel**

The king seems to remember hearing about Daniel and his reputation, but does not seem to know him like his grandfather. If Daniel can give the meaning behind these simple Aramaic words, Belshazzar promises to give him three things: a royal robe and a golden chain, and he would become third ruler under Nabonidus and Belshazzar. Daniel refused on the bases his understanding was not for hire and it would be God who would receive the glory.

▶ **The King's Shortfall**

It is deja vu all over again. Daniel rebukes Belshazzar for his royal pride. His grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, learned the hard way that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men" (Dan. 4:32 niv). Philosopher George Santayana wrote, "those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it."

▶ **The King's Wall Read**

The message of the wall was simple Aramaic monetary terms: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN." "Mene" is from "mina" a verb meaning "to number." "Tekel" is the term shekel and as a verb means "to weight." And "pharsin" is a term meaning to divide. It is also akin to the term used in reference to the Persians. Thus, the last one has a double interpretation. Mene: Babylon's days were numbered! Tekel: the king himself had been weighed by God and has come up short of the full amount of the weight of a genuine shekel. Belshazzar was not a righteous man in God's scales of justice.

[U]pharsin: Babylon would be divided between the Medes and the Persians. “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:10–11nkjv).

▶ **The King’s Fall**

Those in the banquet hall did not have to wait long for the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain” (5:30). In chapter two it was decreed that the head of gold (Babylon) would be replaced by the breast and arms of silver (the Medo-Persian Empire). That night while they were feasting, Cyrus had his Medo-Persian engineers divert the Euphrates River into a freshly dug riverbed around the city. When the waters stop flowing under the city walls, Cyrus’ army simply marched under it and took Babylon intact. All this was prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 13—14; 21; 47) and Jeremiah (Jer. 50—51). Belshazzar was assassinated. Historical records recorded that date to be October 12, 539 BC.

Application: The Call to Preach is a Call to Rebuke

▶ **Indulgence & Indifference**

Belshazzar was indulging himself with his lords and wives eat and drinking. When in fact he should have issued a decree like that of the King of Nineveh and fasted with sackcloth and ashes. In the parable of the rich farmer Jesus tells us of a man how had a bumper crop. The farmer was faced with a dilemma. “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:18,19). Belshazzar met his fate like that of the rich farmer in Jesus’ parable. To whom God said, “*this night your soul will be required of you*” (Luke 12:20).

▶ **Irreverence (vv. 2–4).**

In verses two-four Belshazzar show great gall in having used the articles of the Temple of God for his pagan feast. For such irreverence for the holy things of God the priests, Nadab and Abihu, were destroyed with fire from heaven. Uzzah was struck dead for touching the ark of the covenant. And King Uzziah was struck with leprosy.

▶ **Insolence and Arrogance**

Daniel warned Belshazzar of his prideful behavior by reminding him what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. He rebuked the king, “*But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this*” (5:22). Remember, “*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

▶ **Idolatry**

The prophet also pointed out Belshazzar’s sin of idolatry. “*And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified*” (Dan. 5:23).

Be Faithful Unto Death, *Daniel 6*

▶ **Promotion of Daniel**

When Darius took over Babylon as its king he needed to appoint officers he could trust. Daniel became one of three key administrators over the kingdom. It was eventually divided up into 120 provinces each with its own satrap or governor. By the time of Esther the Medo-Persian empire had grown to 127 provinces under King Xerxes. Daniel had impressed the king so well, he decided to make this aged prophet of God his number-one administrator over the entire kingdom.

▶ **Plot Against Daniel**

Daniel’s new promotion did not bode well with the prideful hearts of the other government leaders. They viewed Daniel as an outsider because he was a captive from Judah. They began to dig up dirt to discredit him. They could find nothing improper with Daniel’s dealings with the government. No hanky-

panky in the palace. He came out smelling like a rose.

With no evidence of political corruption in which to accuse Daniel before the king, they came up with a plan to trap him in regard to Daniel's religion. They came up with a law for the king to sign which forbade any man to pray to a god or man for thirty days. Those caught would be thrown into the den of hungry lions. The only exception would be the king. He would be the "god of the month." Darius must have been very flattered and impressed when the rulers of his kingdom showed up in mass for him to sign this into law. They claimed to be universally in favor of this law. However, there is no way Daniel would have signed off on this. It is noteworthy to consider how quickly the wicked can co-operate when it comes to doing evil against God and His people. *"Their feet are swift to shed blood"* (Rom. 3:15).

▶ **Prayers of Daniel**

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Dan. 6:10). Knowing the law Daniel remained true to his religious convictions and his daily habit of prayer. Perhaps he followed the prayer schedule of the Psalmist: *"evening and morning and at noon"* (Ps. 55:17).

Why didn't Daniel just lock his door and close his windows. He could have prayed in silence. He could have changed the place and time of his prayers. However, his enemies all knew of his prayer life and his devotion to the true God. To hide in this case would result in Daniel looking like a coward and a hypocrite and God would be robbed of His glory.

▶ **Persecution of Daniel**

Daniel's enemies must of caught him in the very act of praying. He was brought before Darius and they reminded the kings of the law he himself has just sign, perhaps that very morning or at least the morning before. The king was set on delivering Daniel until the sun set. The rulers came and reminded the king *"that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed"* (6:15). Darius had Daniel cast down into the den of lions. A large stone was rolled against the opening. Both the king's signet and those of the rulers set a seal. The king had a very sleepless night. Yet the safest place in Babylon that night was in the den of lions where Daniel could have had a good night's sleep.

▶ **Protection of Daniel**

The next morning the king came and called out to Daniel, *"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"* Then Daniel said to the king, *'O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you'"* (Dan. 6:20b-22). Daniel knew that his heart was right with God. He did what was right to others. He trusted God with his very life. Finally, Daniel assured the Darius he had done the king no wrong.

"Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God" (Dan. 6:23). In chapter one, God was the keeper of the faithful. In this chapter God is the protector of the prayerful. The name "Daniel" means "God is my judge." God's judgment of Daniel overturned the unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians.

▶ **Praise of Daniel's God**

Rather than taking the credit and the glory himself, Daniel gives God the glory (27-30). As Nebuchadnezzar had proclaimed praise unto God in Daniel 2:47; 3:29; 4:34-37, so Darius does here in chapter six verses twenty-five to twenty-seven.

▶ **Punishment of Daniel's Enemies**

When extracted from the den of lions, Daniel had no injuries. Indeed no bone of his body was broken. Quite an accomplishment for a man approaching ninety years of age. However, *"the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den"* (6:24). These enemies of God did not learned

that God promised Abraham that he would bless those who blessed His people, and curse those who cursed His people (Gen. 12:1–3). Years later a man named Haman would have Daniel's position in the Medo-Persian empire. He would use his political power to make a law to destroy all the Jews. With the aid of Queen Esther the plan backfired and Haman was hung on the very gallows he had prepared for the Jew Mordecai.

Application: How to Be Faithful Unto Death

▶ **By Numbering Our Days**

Daniel labored as God's spokesman under several kings in two world empires: He prophesied to Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar in chapters 1-4 and Belshazzar in chapters 5,7, and 8. He proclaimed God's greatness to Darius of Medo-Persia in chapter 6 and during the reign of Cyrus came his prophecies of chapters 9-12. We too need to be obedient in serving God all of our lives. Jesus has promised, *"be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10b). The psalmist prayed, *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"* (Ps. 90:12).

▶ **By Continuing to Pray Daily**

Daniel was in the habit of praying from an early age (2:17-18). In his eighties he continues to pray. We are to *"pray without ceasing"* (1 Th. 5:17). Would you be willing to risk your life like Daniel for a daily prayer.

▶ **By Enduring Persecution**

Like Daniel we too must endure persecution for the cause of Christ. *"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:10). Often Christians are under the delusion that as long as they do right all be go right in their lives. God never promised this. He has promised us persecution if we do right.

▶ **By Living a Blameless Life**

A bank president in Texas once claimed that preachers present the highest risk in bank loans. The prophet of God, Daniel, was a man of great integrity. His peers in government searched for a charge against him, *"...but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him"* (6:4). So the only way they could trap him is by catching him doing what was right before God. Could you imagine any politician in high office being so squeaking clean? Christians are commanded to *"become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world"* (Phil. 2:15).

▶ **By Obeying God Rather Than Men**

Daniel never showed any fear in speaking publically for God and living for Him openly before the world. He was not going to allow any man or laws of men to keep him from obeying God. The apostles were commanded by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court to stop preaching Jesus. They said, *"we ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

Summary

Considering Daniel's faithful devotion to God, his wisdom, his courage, etc. who would not wish for their son to be like him. Of all the heroes to look up to and desire to emulate Daniel is one of the great heroes of faith. Today, I am happy my father took careful thought in selecting my name. Perhaps a new generation of boys will grow up imitating and admiring the heroic adventures of Daniel.

Just before Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC Ezekiel mentioned Daniel along with the dead servants of God, Noah and Job. Daniel was still alive and under forty years of age when Ezekiel claimed that if he along with Noah and Job were in Jerusalem they could have only saved themselves. *"Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God. '...even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,' says the Lord God, 'they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their*

righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:14,20). In Ezekiel 28:3 God asked a rhetorical question to the prince of Tyre which alludes to Daniel’s great wisdom: *“Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!”*

By the way, Daniel Boone was only five foot ten inches. Not even close to Fess Parker’s six foot six inch frame. Neither men were as big as God’s servant, Daniel.

Questions:

1. What happened to the vessels of the house of God?
2. In order to be selected, what characteristics were required of the Jewish youths?
3. Why did they refuse the King’s provisions?
4. What two reasons did Ashpenaz give to Daniel against their rejection of the King’s provisions?
5. What was Daniel’s plan in replacing the royal diet? What were the results after ten days?
6. What did God give these four Jewish youths?
7. How did these four fare in their examination before Nebuchadnezzar? Why?
8. What command did Belshazzar give?
9. What caused the King’s countenance to change?
10. Were the King’s wisemen able to interpret the writings on the wall?

11. What did Daniel say was the cause of Belshazzar's downfall?
12. What characteristics did Daniel attribute to the gods worshiped by Belshazzar?
13. What were the words on the wall, and what did they mean?
14. When and how was the interpretation fulfilled?
15. Was Daniel right in openly defying the government's decree? Explain.
16. How did Darius react when Daniel was accused of defying the decree?
17. If Darius was willing to save Daniel, why did he command that he be cast into the lion's den?
18. What did the King say to Daniel Before Daniel was cast into the lion's den?
19. Why did the King make haste early in the morning to go to the lion's den? What does this tell us about his faith?

20. Who did God send to protect Daniel, and why was he protected?

21. What happened to the accusers and their families? Why?

22. What things did Darius say about God in the decree?

Application & Discussion:

1. Christians should purpose in their hearts not to defile themselves today with...

2. What truths from God's Word should we be proclaiming from God's word today?

3. What is keeping you from praying like you should?

Homework: Dare to be a Daniel this week by keeping yourself from being defiled by the world, proclaiming God's will to the world, and praying faithfully despite the reaction of the world.

John the Great & Fore-Running Prophet

Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 1:15-17; 7:24-30; John 1:6-34

Former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali used to boast, "I am the greatest". Perhaps when it came to boxing he was. Just what does it take to be a great person? The world answers: outstanding athletic ability; to have a fortune; fame; great artistic talent; being a literary giant; possessing musical skills; military achievements; political office, intellectual achievements, great scientific discoveries, born into nobility, etc. If we are to ask Jesus who was a great man, he would say, *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Matt. 11:11). The term "assuredly" which means "truly," or "a fact beyond dispute."

Great Beginning

Zacharias and Elizabeth could not have children and were old. While serving in the Temple an angel surprised Zacharias and said, *"Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. God heard their prayers and blessed them with a child"* (Luke 1:13). John was to be filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born and a Nazarite from birth. *"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb"* (Luke 1:15). Zacharias needs a sign. So the angel says he will not be able to speak unto the day John is born.

John is born and at his circumcision they ask for a name. Elizabeth says "John". Zacharias asks for a tablet and writes "His name is John." After this his speech was restored.

Great Identity

Due to the abundance of prophecies the Jews were looking for the coming of the Prophet like unto Moses, the Messiah, and Elijah who was to come first. When John the baptist came preaching it broke four hundred years of prophetic silence. The Priests and Levites came out to the wilderness where John was preaching and baptizing to see who he was. John told them, *"I am not the Christ." And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?' He said: 'I am "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord"'"* (John 1:20-22). John was quoting Isaiah 40:3 which further states in verse four and five, *"Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

Malachi prophesied that a prophet like Elijah would come before the Lord came. *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts* (Mal. 3:1). *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"* (Mal. 4:5). However, John bluntly stated he was not Elijah or the Christ.

The people asked Jesus, *"Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Then He answered and told them, 'Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to*

you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:11-13). Jesus told the people that John was the Elijah of prophecy "and if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14). Perhaps they thought John was like a reincarnated Elijah or Elijah (who did not die) was sent back to earth. John was not literally Elijah but as the angel Gabriel said that John came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

Although John did not do any miracles like Elijah, in many way John was like the prophet Elijah. Elijah lived in the wilderness (I Kings 19:4) and so did John. Ahab's wife vowed to kill Elijah (I Kings 19:2). John told Herod that his marriage was unlawful (Mark 6:19) and Herod's wife desired to kill John (Mark 6:20). As Elijah boldly contended with the false prophets of Baal, John boldly rebuked the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The dressed the same (2 Kings 1:8).

Great Character

▶ **Simple Life of Self-denial**

At some point John left for the wilderness. Jesus would ask the people, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts" (Luke 7:24,25). He wore a camel's haired-garment and a leather belt around his waste. He was not very fashionable and his kind of clothing did not provide much in the way of comfort, but it was practical and long-lasting. His diet was equally primitive. He ate wild honey and locusts (Matt. 3:4-6). The law allowed the Jews to eat locusts (Lev. 11:20-23).

He was to herald the coming of the messianic King. He looked more like a hermit or a bum. The kings announcers normally would dress in the finest clothes, eat the king's food, and stay in the best hotels.

▶ **Humble**

John had a great role in the scheme of redemption, but he did not let this go to his head. Concerning Jesus and himself, he said, "He must increase, but I decrease" (John 3:30). Of Jesus He said, "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matt. 3:11). The Jews didn't mess with people's feet. It was an insult, the work of a slave. John said he wasn't even worthy to do that. Although he was of the priesthood he chose rather to be a prophet. John was a messenger not the Messiah. He was the King's herald not the royalty.

▶ **Open-minded to Evidence**

While in prison John may have had some doubts about Jesus. After all, there were several who came a dime of dozen. So he sent to Jesus some of his servants. John's servants asked Jesus, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' " And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Luke 7:20-22). Jesus simply gave them the evidence and let John deduce his own conclusion.

▶ **Self-Control**

John was self-controlled drinking neither "wine or liquor" (Luke 1:15a).

▶ **Courage of His Convictions**

"As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?'" (Matt. 11:7). The reed to which Jesus referred was common along Near Eastern river banks, including those of the Jordan where John baptized. A reed is a long slender plant, easily swayed to and fro by the passing breezes. John was not the type to sway here and there in the breezes of popular opinion, but he had unshakeable convictions. Christian are to be like him. "We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Eph. 4:14).

Great Mission

John's unique greatness was in his role in the scheme of redemption. He was the forerunner of the Messiah. His mission for God was a one of power and privilege paving the way for salvation to the world.

► **To Prepare the Way of the Lord**

Jesus introduces John the baptist, *"For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight' "* (Matt. 3:3). The imagery is that of building a roadway. Pot holes need to be filled. Fallen trees and boulders removed. Gorges need to be bridged. That which is crooked made straight. Crookedness is often associated with unrighteousness. For example, a thief is a crook. *"They have corrupted themselves; They are not His children, Because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation"* (Deut. 32:5). *"That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world"* (Phil. 2:15). "And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, *"Be saved from this perverse generation"* (Acts 2:40). Making ready for the Lord is preparing the hearts of the people to receive Him. John was on assignment from God to prepare the people for the coming kingdom and its King.

The herald would proclaim the king's coming to everyone he encountered. The coming of a king would require a herald to go before him to announce and prepare the way on which the king was to travel. In fact the term "preaching" has the primary meaning of "to herald." John prepared for the coming of the Messiah by preaching about Him and the need to be ready via repentance and baptism.

► **To Be a Witness of the Christ**

The other part of John's mission was to bear witness as to the identity of the Christ, the Son of God. "John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). He pointed out Christ, and bore witness of his divinity. *"And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God"* (John 1:32,33).

Today, we must point out that Jesus is the Son of God and the only means by which man can receive forgiveness.

Great Preaching

What is great preaching? Normally, one would think of their favorite preacher's personality and mannerisms. Many great preachers are promoting themselves. James Denney once said, "you cannot at the same time give the impression that you are a great preacher and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior."

► **Preaching Repentance**

John was to prepare the way of the Lord by turning *"the hearts of the fathers to the children"* (Luke 1:17). This is how he prepared the way of the Lord. This demanded the preaching of repentance to all who would be prepared for the coming kingdom. John refused to baptize people who failed to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance"* (Mt. 3:7,8). Repentance always involves a change of mind leading to a change of life in the way they thought, talked and conducted themselves. Repentance was exactly the same message with which Jesus began His preaching and the apostles began theirs (Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; Mark 6:12).

► **Preaching the Kingdom**

The motive for the people to repent was the coming of the kingdom. John preached *"repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* (Matt. 3:2). "At hand" means the church had not yet been established

but preparations were underway. It was not in existence at the time. It was not thousands of years in the future. Furthermore, John could not have been in the Kingdom. It was established after his death. John prepared for the coming kingdom by pointing to the king of the kingdom, but did not live to see it come. When Jesus promised to build His church, John had already been beheaded (Matt. 16:18). John was a forerunner and not a follower of Jesus.

A famous nineteenth century Baptist preacher in London claimed, "John was the first Baptist Minister to lose his head through dancing." John was not a Baptist preacher. He was so-called baptist because his ministry was to call people to repentance and then baptize them. The term "baptist" is not John's official title but merely tells us what he did. He was one who baptized. He did not establish the Baptist church. John was not the bridegroom. Jesus was and the church was his bride (Eph. 5:23f).

▶ **Preaching Life Changing Application**

John's preaching made direct application to the people. Bring forth fruits of repentance involved a change of attitude and action. The people in general were to be generous to others. The tax-collectors were not to collect more taxes than appointed. Soldiers were to be content with their wages. (Luke 3:10-14). Too much of today's preaching does not make demands on the hearers of the Word. It does not ask the listeners to make any changes in their hearts or conduct.

▶ **Preaching Confession of Sins**

John required those he baptized to demonstrate fruits of repentance. This would involve confession of their sins (Matt. 3:6).

▶ **Preaching Baptism**

John preached the baptism for repentance for the remission of sins (Mk 1:4; Luke 3:3). This was something new to the Jewish community. It was not a traditional Jewish ceremony. It was not like the Levitical washings, which consisted of washing the hands, feet and head. It was not the continual ritual washings of the Essenes. John's baptism was not repeated, it was one time only. It was not a sprinkling of water upon the subject. John baptized in the Jordan river and other places where there was "*much water*" (Jn. 3:23).

The baptism of John is not the one baptism of the New Testament today (Eph. 4:4-6). John's baptism was a belief that Jesus was to come in the future. Jesus has already come, died, resurrection, and ascended into heaven. Those who had been baptized with John's baptism at Ephesus had to be baptized with Christ's baptism. Paul said, "*John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus*" (Acts 19:4). Christ's baptism requires as a prerequisite a confession of one's belief in Him. John's baptism was preceded by a confession of sins (Matt. 3:6). John's baptism was not in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit like Christ's baptism (Matt. 28:19). Unlike Christ's, John's baptism was not in the likeness of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3,4). Christ's baptism puts one into the church and into Him (Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:47). John's did not. Neither did John baptize anyone into the Baptist church, because it did not exist until 1606 AD. John's baptism was temporary, but Christian baptism is to continue unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

However those who did not heed John's preaching to be baptized were rejecting God's commandments. "*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*" (Luke 7:30).

▶ **Preaching Hell**

John preached about hell. He warned the Pharisees when they came to him to be baptized without first repenting, "*for I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Matt. 3:9,10). He spoke about "the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7). John spoke of the baptism of fire which would one day be administered by Christ. "*His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*" (Matt 3:12)

Great Success

The angel Gabriel foretold concerning John *"he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God"* (Lk. 1:16). Jesus said of John, *"for I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist...And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John."* (Luke 7:28,29). Later Jesus said, *"the law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it"* (Luke 16:16). When John pointed to Christ after His baptism, two of the disciples left John to follow Jesus (John 3:29,35). This speaks well concerning John's successful ministry.

Great Courage

John had an unwavering commitment to preach repentance. His courage did not waver when criticized, rejected by the religious establishment; or face governmental powers. He called the Pharisees a *"generation of vipers"* (Luke 3:18-19).

The greatness of his courage is seen in he rebuking of Herod, *"It is not lawful for you to have her"* (Matt. 14:4) . As the fame of Jesus spread throughout Galilee and Perea during those early days of His earthly ministry, it was inevitable that news of Him should reach the ears of the governor of the region, Herod Antipas. "Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" (Mark 6:14-16). Herod's guilty conscience compelled him to make this assertion. As if trapped in a Shakespearean tragedy Herod feared John even though he was beheaded.

Why was John the Baptist feared so much by Herod? It was not simply because he had beheaded an innocent man. Another Herod beheaded the apostle James without any appearance of regret. Perhaps, Jesus' estimate of John can shed some light on this. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Mt. 11:11).

Before looking at John let us take a look into the background of Antipas and Herodias who were involved in John's death. Herodias, therefore, had married her uncle Herod Philip I., who was disinherited by Herod the Great, and lived as a private citizen in Rome. Antipas on a visit to Rome stopped to see his brother. During that meeting, Herod proposed marriage to Herodias; Herodias agreed to the proposal on the condition that Herod should divorce his first wife, the daughter of Aretus IV, king of Nabatean. So Antipas, sent her back to her father at Petra for the sake of Herodias. Herodias was actually his own niece as well. Josephus tells us that Herodias's daughter was named Salome; she was both the niece and great-niece of Herod Antipas

John opposed the marriage of Antipas and Herodias as unlawful for three reasons: 1) The husband of Herodias was still living. The Mosaic law forbade the marriage of a brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except for levirate marriage (Dt. 25:5). Since Antipas's brother had a daughter Salome, and more importantly, his brother was still living, levirate marriage did not apply. 2) The lawful wife of Antipas was still living. And finally, 3) Antipas and Herodias, being nephew and niece, were related to each other within the forbidden degrees of blood relationship.

Today, many have the concept that "we will live together so long as we both shall love", instead of "so long as we both shall live". When any trouble comes in the marriage, the two parties throw up their hands in disgust, get a no-fault divorce, and go their separate ways. Modern type preachers flatter the great and honorable ones of the earth to secure their favor. Faithful preachers need to preach the same message as John preached. John the Baptist had condemned the marriage of Herodias and Herod Antipas by proclaiming to Herod, "it is not lawful for you to have her".

Notice how Herod responds to John's preaching. He shut up the preacher by shutting him up in prison. Herod wanted to please his wife, but killing John would displease he people. Herod seems to have a respect for John. He knew John was right

Drinking dulls the ability to reason and stay focused on what is right. Herod had drank freely and was soon freed from his faculties. A drinking king is not a good judge.

During a party for his lords Salome danced. Oriental dancers were immodest and lascivious in movement. She danced in such impressive way that Herod momentarily "lost his head," and made the rash vow.

Herod soon regretted his rash vow. If the making of the oath was wrong, it was a greater sin to perform it. Two wrongs do not make a right. It merely doubles the wrong. Sinful oaths must be repented of, not performed. He had promised a dancing girl up to half of his kingdom rashly motivated out of his own lust. The mother of Salome told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod should have refused Salome, telling her that John's head was not in the half of the kingdom he promised her.

Herod was led on step by step from one degree of wrong to another. Herod lusted after Herodias and was in an adulterous marriage. He threw John in prison to stop his preaching. Next, his lust for Herodius' daughter caused him to lose his head. When Herod lost his head over lust, John lost his head. John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

Questions:

1. What sign was Zacharias give concerning the birth of his son?

2. Who prophesied Elijah was to come?

3. Did John claim to be the Christ or Elijah?

4. How is John like Elijah?

5. How did John dress and eat?

6. What evidence did Jesus give to John who had some doubts while he was in prison?

7. What does it mean that John was not like a *"reed shaken in the wind"*?

8. What was John's two-fold mission?

9. Why did John refuse to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees?

10. Show that John could not have started the Baptist Church?
11. What practical changes did John require of those repenting?
12. Why is John called "*the baptist*"?
13. Why is John's baptism not the one baptism of today?
14. What is the "*baptism of fire*"? Who will administrate it?
15. What demonstrates John's great success?
16. Why did John rebuke Herod?
17. Why did Herod think John had risen from the dead?
18. How did John lose his head?

Application & Discussion:

1. Should we require people to bring forth fruits of repentance before baptizing them today? Explain.
2. How should we deal with those we are associated with that are living in an adulterous marriage?

Homework: God has sent us all on the mission to tell people about Jesus and encourage them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sin so they can enter the Kingdom.

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