

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

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Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Don't Neglect the O.T.

Our Ignorance Robs Us

Alex V. Wilson

You know you have neglected the Old Testament far too much when:

Your preacher says his sermon is from Genesis and you have to check the Table of Contents to find it.

You think Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had a few hit tunes during the seventies.

You open to Ecclesiastes and a World War II war bond falls out.

You keep falling for it every time the preacher says, "Let's turn to the book of 1st Condominiums."

Your favorite O.T. patriarch is Hercules.

You become frustrated because Charlton Heston is not listed in the concordance.

You think the "minor prophets" work in coal mines.

Yours kids raise too many questions when you tell them the bed-time story, "Jonah the shepherd boy and his ark of many colors." (selected.)

Long ago H. L. Olmstead wrote in W&W, "We need to **read the Bible more**, and we need to **read more of the Bible**." He was right then, and it's still true. In an effort to get us out of the rut of reading only our favorite chapters and books while avoiding vast sections of God's Word, this month we will focus on the Old Testament Scriptures. For without doubt that is the part we read least. And believe it or not, I'm guessing you'll find it interesting, relevant and profitable. Share the excitement with others. Formerly many Christian parents regularly read through Bible story books and then the Bible itself with their children. I have fond memories of that, both as child and parent. But since this practice has sadly become very rare, the great majority of people today are grossly illiterate about OT history. Thus they have no sense of God's unfolding plans and purposes through the ages.

For this reason we should urge young or new believers to read Bible story books too -- and then the entire Bible -- in order to see how events fit together in God's overall dealings with humanity. I'm now studying **The Narrated Bible (in Chronological Order)**, edited by Legard Smith. It is particularly helpful in giving the ongoing developments of Bible events, tying together the OT kings with the prophets who ministered during their reigns, and the epistles with the events in the book of Acts. You might find it profitable.

THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Leroy Garrett

This would better read "The Grace of God In the Old Testament Scriptures," for there is an important difference between the Old Testament (better still, Old Covenant) and the Old Testament Scriptures. God made a covenant (that we call "Old" only because it was superseded by the "New") with His special people, the Hebrew nation, at Mt. Sinai. There were of course no Scriptures at this time. The Scriptures grew out of the ensuing experience between God and Israel. First came the covenant, afterward the Scriptures.

The same is true of the New Testament (better, New Covenant), which is a relationship between Christ and His church, sealed by the Holy Spirit through faith and baptism. If the Old Covenant was made with the Jews at Mt. Sinai, the New Covenant was ratified on the day of Pentecost when the church of Jesus Christ became "the new man" or "the new creation." After a generation or so the New Covenant people began to write out of their experiences and eventually there was what we call the "New Testament." So, it was the New Covenant people that produced the New Covenant Scriptures, just as it was the Old Covenant people that produced the Old Covenant Scriptures.

If the Messiah had come shortly after Mt. Sinai, there would never have been what we call the "Old Testament," but there would nevertheless have been the Old Covenant. Or if Jesus had returned within the first generation after Pentecost (as the early Christians thought he would), there would never have been what we call the "New Testament," but there would have been the New Covenant nonetheless. Another way to say it is that the New Testament did not produce the church but the church the New Testament.

This is why we say now and again that unity and fellowship are not based upon a correct understanding of all the "New Testament," but upon a common relationship to the New Covenant. So it is not a matter of being "right" about every point in the "New Testament" that makes fellowship between us possible, but being right in our relationship with Jesus Christ, who is administrator of the New Covenant.

This distinction in no way discredits the place of the Scriptures, either Old or New, but only puts them in proper perspective. It is simply that we need to realize that it wasn't the Bible that produced religion, but religion that produced the Bible. Once produced, it is of course the case that the Bible does much to enhance religious faith.

My thesis for this article is as follows:

The Old Testament is to be interpreted in the light of the New Testament, particularly in reference to the grace of GOD as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. One way to say it is that the Old Testament is the gospel in preparation, while the New Testament is the gospel in realization. Our people have often said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The Old Testament is meaningful to us as it points to the Cross, however distantly, and as it reveals the God of grace, even if obliquely in comparison to the New Testament. As Christians the Old Testament is meaningful to us only as it in some way and to some degree shows us the grace of (and sometimes the Judgment of) God that reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. This means that we have special interest in the great texts and the mountain peaks of the Old Testament as they anticipate the only thing that really matters, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This means that as we study the Old Testament we are to look for the grace of God, which often shines forth in the more obscure passages as well as the better known ones. A few examples of both:

I will set up my dwelling among you, and I will not cast you off. I will live in your midst: I will be your God and you shall be my people. It is I, Yahweh your God, who have, brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should be their servants no longer. I have broken the yoke that bound you and have made you walk with head held high. (Lv. 26:12-13, Jerusalem Bible)

This shows that even Leviticus, with all its ritual, is rich in the goodness and mercy of God. Lev. 26:41 shows that it is circumcised hearts that God wants. The book calls for untainted holiness, offerings that cost something, and a caring brotherhood. In this great passage, which beautifully anticipates the spirit of Christ, a longsuffering God promises to be with his people, deliver them from oppression, and give them such dignity that they can walk with head held high.

And Yahweh said, "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow. And now the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have witnessed the way the Egyptians oppress them, so come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt." (Ex.3:7-10, Jer. Bible.)

Notice how the God of grace acts for his people: I have seen, I have heard, I am well aware, I will deliver, I have witnessed, and at last one of the great lines of the Old Testament, "Come Moses, I send you to Pharaoh." Note too the emphasis on "my people," and the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.

God create a clean heart in me, put into me a new and constant spirit, do not banish me from your presence, do not deprive me of your holy spirit. (Ps. 51:10-11, Jer. Bible)

Notice how Yahweh (or Lord) is regularly used up to this Psalm, which is the name of God and implies more intimacy. God is what he is, creator and judge as well as savior, and not his name. Now that David has committed a grievous sin he bows before the great judge of all mankind, who is God. It is remarkable that in this prayer of contrition David believes that God has never left him, that he is still in God's presence, and that the holy spirit (meaning here the presence of God in his life) has not yet left him. This shows there is forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This majestic passage is but one of hundreds in the Psalms alone that point up the grace of God, some of which refer to the Messiah himself, such as Ps. 22.

This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic.6:8, Jer. Bible)

This may well be the most important passage in all the Old Testament because in but few words it shows what religion is all about. To act justly is to do what is right, to love tenderly is to show mercy or lovingkindness, the Hebrew word being the one that refers to God's covenant love, one of the great words of the Bible. To walk humbly refers to how we should reverence God in all that we do.

When we apply our hermeneutical rule to these passages, look for the grace of God in the Old Testament; they pass with flying colors. It is the case with hundreds of other references. A good rule is to mark your Bible, underlining the lines in red that inspire you. The more you study and the more good sources you use, such as a devotional commentary, the more marking you will do. Then as you thumb through your Bible time and again you can easily be reminded of your favorite verses. It is enriching to commit some of them to memory. This means that we recognize that some things in the Bible, are much more meaningful than other things. All truths from God's word are equally true, but not equally important.

--Condensed from *Restoration Review*

The Answer Is In The Name

Billy Ray Lewter

Most of us know so little of the matchless names by which God has revealed Himself. A vast amount of truth is expressed in the names of God, knowledge that could transform our weary souls.

God's name stands for God Himself. "Call on the name of the Lord," means to call on God. We are told to "trust in his name" (Matt. 12:21), "Praise the name of the Lord" (Psa. 113:1). Also, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower" (Prov. 18:10).

Elohim

In the first verse of Genesis, God is called Elohim, Creator. Elohim is a plural word used in a singular sense, so it gives the first glimpse of the triune nature of God.

Elohim occurs 2,570 times in the Old Testament. The King James translators rendered this Hebrew word as God (capital G and lower case o-d). The root of this name, El, is used in the names of many people and places, Israel, Immanuel, Daniel, Ezekiel, Michael, Gabriel, Bethel. El-Shaddai refers to God Almighty.

Jehovah

YHVH (or YHWH, JHVH, JHWH) first appears in Genesis two. YHVH is the personal name of Elohim (God) which reveals God as the eternal, self-existent "I Am." YHVH gives an intimate, detailed revelation of God's provision and care for man.

YHVH occurs 6,823 times in the Hebrew Old Testament (Hebrew-English Lexicon), but was never pronounced, it was too sacred. It was read aloud as Adonai, "My Lord," or Ha Shem, "The Name." In the 13th century A.D. vowels were added to form Yahweh in Hebrew, Jehovah in English. King James translators used LORD when Jehovah was used, and Lord in the 300 passages when Adonai was used.

Jehovah is a covenant or contract name. God told Moses (Ex. 3:15) I Am "is my name forever." Moses had asked God "Who am I?" but God never answered that. It was not Moses self-concept that mattered, but his God-concept. In Exodus 34:10 God told Moses, "This is the contract I make with you." In Judges 2:1, God said, "I will never break my covenant with you."

Here are seven covenant names which progressively reveal Jehovah's nature and Provisions.

Jehovah-Jireh (Genesis 22:14)

The compound names of God arise from historical events and portray Jehovah as meeting human needs. Jehovah-Jireh comes from the last and greatest crisis in the life of Abraham (Gen. 22:1-18). God commanded Abraham to offer a sacrifice, a burnt offering, of his much loved son Isaac. When Isaac asked "Where is the lamb?" Abraham answered, "God will provide." At the last moment, with his dagger raised, God stopped Abraham and showed him a ram caught in the bushes to use for the sacrifice. Abraham called that place (Mt. Moriah, now part of Jerusalem) Jehovah-Jireh, the LORD will provide.

God will provide. He anticipates our need and makes provision before we are aware of it. "My God shall supply all of your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). What a source. What a supply. Sometimes in our discouragement, however, we find it difficult to believe God will come through for us, but He is Jehovah-Jireh. It's a contract He will never break. Our future is as bright as the promises of God.

Jehovah-Rapha (Exodus 15:26)

Jehovah-Rapha is the second covenant name of Jehovah. Three days after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they came to Marah where the water was so bitter they couldn't drink. They complained to Moses. God showed Moses a certain tree to throw into the water, and it made the water sweet. God told Moses, "I am Jehovah-Rapha, the LORD who Heals.

Rapha, to heal, occurs over 70 times in the Old Testament. Jesus, the Great Physician, makes us whole emotionally ("He healeth the broken in heart"), physically and spiritually ("By whose stripes ye were healed"). It is written in Jesus' blood. He will save us, He will heal us, He will help us. Count on it. It's who He is, not was.

Jehovah-Nissi (Exodus 17:15)

Only a few weeks had passed since the miracle at Marah until they reached Rephidim, where there was no water at all. They threatened Moses.

At Rephidim the Amalekites, descendants of Esau, attacked them. Israel was an ill-equipped, undisciplined mob without military arms or experience. Moses chose Joshua to lead the resistance. Moses stood on a hill overlooking the battle and held up the rod God gave him at the burning bush. When he lowered his arms to rest, Amalek prevailed. So he sat on a rock, Aaron and Hur held up his arms, and Israel defeated the Amalekites. The rod was a symbol of intercession, a

banner of victory. Moses built an altar at Rephidim and called it Jehovah-Nissi, Jehovah our Banner.

Jesus is our banner, our intercessor, our victory. He brings us to His banqueting house and His banner over us is love (Song of Solomon 2:4). He is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and He will bring to completion the work He has started in us (Phil. 1:6). Moses wrote, "Thy shoes shall be iron and bronze; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25).

Jehovah- Shalom (Judges 6:24)

More than 200 years passed. The promised land had been won and divided. But after Joshua died the people forgot God again. "Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 17:6). Don't we still do that?

Gideon, a descendent of Joseph, was a young man at a time of severe oppression by the Midianites. An angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon hiding in a wine press and promised deliverance. Doubtful, Gideon asked, "If the Lord is with us why has all this happened to me?" (Jud. 6:13) But in faith, Gideon built a public altar and called it Jehovah-Shalom, Jehovah our Peace, anticipating the victory and peace, which God then led Gideon to accomplish.

Shalom, peace, occurs 170 times in the O.T. Isaiah 9:6 called the Messiah the "Prince of Peace." Jesus offers us His peace in the midst of our struggles. What a promise. Peace! Even on a rugged road and spiritual warfare with a deadly foe, peace.

Jehovah-Ra-ah (Psalm 23:1)

David, in this moving testimony to God's care and concern for a mortal, sinful, but redeemed man, recounts how Jehovah-Ra-ah, Jehovah our Shepherd, leads, feeds, restores, and protects us.

Ra-ah, shepherd, occurs 80 times in Scripture. Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Heb.13:20), and the Shepherd of our souls (I Pet. 2:25). It was to shepherds the angels made the announcement of Jesus' birth.

We, like sheep, have gone astray and each turned to his own way, but God says, "I am Jehovah-Ra-ah." I am your Shepherd. Is there anything you need?

Jehovah-Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6)

Judah was about to fall. Over a hundred years before this the ten northern tribes were taken captive, never to return. Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would fall to Babylon, God's instrument of judgment. But they would return and Jehovah would raise up a "Branch of right-

eousness" who would reign forever. He would be called Jehovah-Tsidkenu, Jehovah our Righteousness.

Romans 3:20 tells us there is none righteous, not one. Christ Jesus was made our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption (I Cor. 1:30). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). That's incredible! Sometimes God's plan for us is so big only He can see it.

Jehovah-Shammah (Ezekiel 48:35)

Jerusalem had been destroyed; Ezekiel with the rest of Israel had been taken captive to Babylon. Ezekiel, which means "God strengthens," looked beyond their bitter tears (Psa. 137) and had a remarkable glimpse of a glorious future time when the Messiah had returned, the land restored, and the temple rebuilt. Ezekiel closed his book with this climax "and the name of the city that day shall be Jehovah-Shammah (The LORD is There).

This temple and time is one of the sublime mysteries seen by Ezekiel. While we can't completely understand chapters 40-48, there is present, practical edification to us in his final words, "Jehovah is There."

Jehovah-Shammah is the final name God uses for himself. After the captivity there were several of the Minor Prophets, then 400 years in which God no longer communicated with Israel. But even in this dreadful silence, Jehovah-Shammah, Jehovah is there. What hope. Then what an explosion of activity followed when God broke the silence with a visit to Zachariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist.

Jehovah is there. Where? Right where we are. Right when we need Him. Just when we wonder, "Is anybody out there who cares?" Where was God when Joseph spent nearly 13 years in a foreign dungeon? Genesis 39:21 tells us, "Jehovah was with Joseph." That's where He was. He never left.

God said to Moses, "I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12). Moses had been cast adrift at birth in a hostile world. He spent a long, lonely life pursuing a goal that constantly eluded him. He died a lonely death. But Moses knew God would never leave or forsake him (Deut. 31:6,8).

Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, told His disciples "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). They were told to preach this to us. When two or three of us are gathered in His Name, Jehovah-Shammah. He is there, and He is not silent.

Conclusion

All these names come together in Jesus, the Word who became flesh (John 1:14). In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). Jesus is our provider, our healer, our banner of victory, our peace, our shepherd, our righteousness, the "I Am" who is always with us. Jesus is the Name above all names (Eph. 1:20).

There are several other compound names of God, not as well known, but one is surprising. Psalm 46:7 says "Jehovah of hosts (Jehovah-Sabaoth) is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Jacob? Why use Jacob as an example? Jacob, meaning "deceiver," was surely as mean a man who ever followed God in the Bible. What a startling revelation of the nature of God.

Is God concerned for me? Will He really come through for me? Will God forgive me? He was with Jacob! He marshaled the angels, the elements, the hosts of heaven to aid Jacob. Does that answer my fearful questions? Yes! The answer is in "The Name" (Ha Shem) Jehovah! Every name He wears is a blessing He shares.

ABRAHAM:

Life after the Call -- its Victories and Failures

Alex V. Wilson

In Genesis 12 we read how God graciously called Abram (later known as Abraham) -- making breathtaking promises to him and his descendants too.

**I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.**

Then in chapter 15 He justified him, pronouncing him righteous and accepted by the Lord, since he trusted in Him.

So Abram lived happily ever after--a life of never-wavering faith and perfect obedience always.

Similarly in 2001 A.D., when Anna Brown receives Jesus as Lord and Savior and puts Him on in baptism, she too may look forward to

living happily ever after--having never-wavering faith and never-failing obedience.

If you believe that, I have some wonderful property in Florida -- with oil wells and lofty mountains -- which I'd like to sell you. (In other words, don't be naive: life just isn't like that!)

* * *

God called Abram, but Abram later failed and fell so much that God gave up on him, revoked His promises, cancelled His covenant and cast him away forever.

Similarly, when Allen Jones receives Christ as Lord and Savior today, he'd better shape up and walk straight and never fail nor fall nor doubt nor disobey--or God will kick him out of His kingdom and drop him into the dumpster.

If you believe that, I have some beautiful property in Alaska -- with balmy beaches and palm trees -- which I'd like to sell you. (In other words, don't be gullible: God isn't like that!)

I hope you believe the first paragraph above, but not the *ones* after that (except my parenthetical remarks). Let's examine Abram's experiences after God called him, and see the Lord's *dealings* with him. For his God is our God, and we can learn valuable lessons.

Faith is always Tested

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. (12:10.)

Back in verse 1 the Lord had *told* Abram, "Go to the land I will show you." The implication was: *Stay there*. Then in verse 7 He said, "To your offspring I will *give* this land." The implication was: *Live here*.

But there was famine! What a test. God had told him to move to this land, but the food supply is running lower and lower. The farmers' harvest was pitifully meager, and now Kroger's shelves are nearly bare. Did God call him here to starve?

God had also promised that Abram would become a great nation. But he can't even have one son -- Sarah is barren.

How can you trust a God who gives such commands and makes such promises -- and then they all fizzle out?

Have you ever been there? There was a Christian man, a former pastor-teacher, whom God had made a blessing to many. In his old

age he became feeble in body and failing in mind. After he fell asleep in Jesus, his family found a paper he had scribbled during his last dark days. He had written down a number of Bible references containing great promises of God. Then he wrote, "These all sound so good, but I have trouble believing them now." Have you ever felt like that?

No doubt Abram was tempted to think, "What kind of God is this? He must be mocking me, deceiving me. He promised me fantastic blessings, but -- I'm joined to a *barren wife*, and I'm living in a *famished land*. For *this* I left my home?"

Thus difficult circumstances tempted Abram to unbelief. Do you ever feel like that? This may be the address where some of us live right now.

IF Abram had trusted God enough to stay where He had called him, the Lord could and would have supplied his needs *there*. (He did so when Abram returned to the Promised Land a short time later.) But Abram was still quite young in faith, so he left.

This wrong move into Egypt soon exposed him to further temptation. For his wife, who in Canaan *disappointed him by her barrenness*, in Egypt *endangered him by her beauty*.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. And . . . she was taken into [Pharaoh's] palace. He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle . . . menservants and maidservants, and camels.

But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of . . . Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!" Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had. (Gen. 12:11-20.)

What a *wimp* Abram was! What a failure. His faith in God failed. His love and protection of Sarai failed. He acted cowardly, selfishly, and deceitfully.

His conscience must have pierced him ten thousand times that sleepless night. "Oh, what a wretch I am! How I've failed! I cringe when I think how glad Pharaoh was to add my beautiful wife to his harem. And oh--that look of fear and reproach Sarai gave me as she was taken away to his palace. What a total, miserable failure I am!"

Then came Pharaoh's stormy confrontation with Abram: "Why'd you lie to me about your wife? Here--take her and get outta here!" So he booted them out of the country.

True, God worked to preserve Sarai and restore her to Abram, for He had an important role for them to play in His eternal plans. But *what a scandal!* What shame and disgrace Abram brought on himself before the king and all his court and the entire land. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Imagine the gossip that spread through the capital. How the *National Enquirer* must have loved the story. Can't you just see the headlines: "Rewarded Tuesday, Deported Thursday!" *The Cairo Courier & Keyhole Spy* also made booming sales that week with its frontpage pictures of Abram and Sarai, and their sensational story.

Oh what dishonor to Abram's *God*, when His servant's visa was canceled, and he was declared *persona non grata*, and deported by royal edict.

The whole experience was a miserable disaster, which could have been avoided if Abram had thought clearly and trusted the Lord enough to do the right thing.

And notice this: Abram later on *repeated* this unbelief and deception! "In Gerar Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister.' Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her" (Gen.20:2). So once again the Lord had to intervene miraculously to bail Abraham out of the pickle he'd gotten himself into. And the king was furious. And Abraham offered the true-but-weak excuse, "She really is my sister, the daughter of my father but not of my mother. And I was afraid you'd kill me."

Lessons for Us:

#1. Let's begin by defending Abram just a little bit. Remember, he never had the Bible to read: it wasn't written yet. No N.T., no O.T. No Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah or Daniel. No gospels, Acts, Romans or Revelation. He had no idea who Moses was, or David, Peter or Paul. He'd never even read how the story of Abraham ended!

Also he never attended the temple or even a synagogue, much less a church meeting, Sunday School, Bible class, or fellowship week. He never sang a hymn by Isaac Watts or a gospel-song by Fanny Crosby or Bill Gaither. He never read *Word & Work* or heard *Words of Life*. If you asked Abram how he liked the writings of R.H. Boll, Max Lucado, Tim LaHaye or James Dobson--he wouldn't have a clue.

More than that, if you happened to speak of Calvary, or the cross, he'd look blank. If you mentioned Pentecost to him, or the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, he'd say, "Hey, wait a minute. Could you explain what you mean by all that?"

Now of course, to make up for all the blessings Abram *didn't* have, God gave him great privileges *we* haven't had. The Lord spoke to him audibly a number of times. And the eternal Son of God --God's living "Word" (Jn.1:18)-- appeared to him in human form. (Gen.18.) Wow!

But here is the point: We might be tempted to excuse ourselves by saying, "Oh well, I really stretched the truth today, and I didn't treat my spouse fairly either. But anyway, Abram did stuff like that too, so it's not really so bad."

Oh no! Our sins are serious. They land *us* in trouble. They grieve *God* too. And if we start making excuses, He may tell us--"Listen! With all the privileges you have which Abram didn't have, you have absolutely no defense for your selfishness, laziness, unbelief, cowardliness," or whatever.

Lesson #2. See God's faithfulness here, despite His servant's failure. He let Abram eat the bitter fruit he had planted, but He also protected and even enriched him. And the Lord taught him lessons too. Alan Stibbs writes,

The same experience, which made Abraham aware of *his* folly and faithlessness, must at the same time have overawed him with a deeply moving sense of *God's* faithfulness. He must have been thankfully humbled by the practical discovery that God was ready and able to cope successfully with the difficulties and dangers into which he had been brought by his own folly and sin; that when he jeopardized the outworking of God's purposes for his future, God intervened to ensure their fulfilment; that when he failed God, God did not fail him. So Abraham learnt that the certain guarantee of steadfast perseverance was to be found not in his own faith but in God's unflinching faithfulness. --God's Friend

After being deported from Egypt, Abram returned to the Promised Land, "to the place . . . where he had first built an altar. There [he] called on the name of the Lord" (13:3-4).

He had learned some important lessons. Now he returned to the place of blessing, admitting -- as it were -- his mistake in ever leaving there. And with confidence in God but not in himself, he sought the Lord and found close fellowship with Him again.

Another Mistake

By Genesis 16 Sarai was still barren. She and Abram had now been in Canaan ten years and still had no child. A d-e-c-a-d-e, and still no fulfilment of what God had promised.

Few things test us more than having to wait for God. Desperation began to build up within Sarai. So she proposed to Abram a way in which they could give God a helping hand. She suggested that her husband sleep with her servant Hagar, thinking "Perhaps I can build a family through her."

By the moral standards of that day, what she proposed was not adultery nor immoral. It was legal and common for a barren wife to obligate herself to provide a male heir by supplying a slave girl to her husband -- a surrogate mother.

But they did not ask the Lord what *He* felt about such a move. He intended to fulfill His promise through Abram's actual wife. He also intended to fulfill it in a clearly supernatural way, rather than by human cleverness. He did not stop them from carrying out their plan, nor did He even rebuke them for it. But once more He allowed them to reap the natural bitter fruit from what they had sown. Notice the results:

1) Hagar conceives, and as a result becomes proud and arrogant toward Sarai her mistress.

2) Sarai first had blamed *God* for her own condition. "The Lord has kept me from having children." Then after Hagar became pregnant, Sarai blamed *Abram* for the situation which she herself had initiated: "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering . . . May the Lord judge between you and me." It's as though she says, "You shouldn't have gone along with my plan!" (But I wonder what she would've told him if he had refused.)

3) Notice that her reaction showed she recognized her husband's moral headship and felt, rightly, that *Abram had failed to take the leadership* in the home.

4) Sarai then harshly mistreated Hagar.

5) Abram again was too much of a wimp to stop her.

6) The *long-range* result was that Hagar's descendants, the Arabs, have often been a thorn in the flesh to Isaac's descendants, the Jews, from that day to this.

A Lesson for Us Now: Abram and Sarai *sought a Good Goal in a Wrong Way*. They pursued a God-given end by self-dependent means.

We are tempted to do the same: to carry on the work of God by the methods of the flesh, not the Spirit; by self-reliance more than God-reliance.

Week after week I get mail advertising this, that, and the other sensational and "sure-fire" way to get "big results" and "succeed" in God's work -- by using this product or that technique, etc. Some of them are good -- but not automatically so, for all places and all times, as they often claim. Actually, there are *no quick fixes* in God's service! (We should *use* good methods but not *depend* on them.)

I do *not at all* mean that in the Lord's work we should avoid variety, and careful thought, nor that we should do everything the way they did it back in the 1950's. We do need to be relevant and practical. I *do* mean we should prayerfully seek discernment from God's Word and Spirit regarding methods as well as goals, lest we repeat the error of Abram and Sarai.

We can, and should, be *both* prayerful and practical, *both* God-reliant and up-to-date relevant. But it requires spiritual discernment.

More Waiting, and then YES!

By Gen. 17, *thirteen more years* have passed since Ishmael's birth, and the child of promise has not come yet. It's almost twenty-five years since God first made that promise. And the baby bed they made for baby Ishmael hasn't been used since he outgrew it. Abram may wonder if God has forgotten.

But He hasn't. He *appears* to Abram, and He *talks* with him. He assures him that He still remembers: "You will be the father of many nations." And He confirms the covenant He had made with Abram back in Gen.15:18. In 17:1-21, *the Lord uses the phrase 'My covenant' nine times.*

It's as though the Lord God might be saying, "Abram, let's look back over the years. Twice you did wrong, not right, when your faith failed and you said Sarai was your sister instead of your wife. And your faith was weak when you sought through Hagar the son I promised to give you.

"Abram, after my Call came your Fall. But I'm not surprised, or about to give up on you. For you are trusting in Me -- though your faith is sometimes weak. **Despite your failures, I now confirm My covenant with you!**" Oh -- what mercy!

If you think it through, it's also as though the Lord says, "In fact, *it's not only in spite of but because of your failures, that I confirm My covenant with you!* I have let you see that left to yourself you often fall short of My will. But I will be your covenant-God, to do *for* you and *in* you and *through* you what you can't do by yourself." Oh -- what provision!

Listen: "I will establish my covenant as an *everlasting* covenant between me and you and your descendants after you, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (7).

* * *

Don't miss the point. Abram was a man of great faith. He had believed God -- and believed Him enough to obey Him and leave home. The *overall desire* of Abram's heart and the *overall direction* of his life are summed up in Heb. 11:8, "By faith Abram obeyed." He was a giant of faith, a man whose trust resulted in action. But in spite of all that, he was still *flawed and fearful and fallible*, as we've seen.

Yet, despite Abram's occasional lapses in character and fluctuations in faith, the Most High Lord graciously made with him an eternal covenant and used him to further His everlasting purposes.

What should we learn from Abram's Experiences?

We see men's response to God's goodness, and we see God's response to men's badness.

1. How do men respond to God's goodness? All too often, even we Christians respond with failures & sins. "*The best of men are men at best,*" so let's beware!

It's possible for those in the spiritual Hall of Fame (Abraham; David; Peter) to also become members of the Hall of Shame: Abraham's lies; David's Bathsheba affair; Peter's denial, etc. If they fell, how much *we* must be on guard.

Such sins are not excusable, only possible. But *victory* is possible too -- and normal, and should be expected, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. How does God respond to men's failures? He lovingly restores our souls, *if* we will let Him. He picks us up and carries us back home, and personally cares for us. And, as needed, He administers loving discipline too.

So, let's remember Abram, and be careful, prayerful, and thoughtful. And remember the GOD of Abram: Rely on Him.

Be restful in Him. Cast our burdens on Him. He is our covenant-God, and has made Himself responsible for us! He loves us so much. And He yearns to fulfill His eternal purposes through us, as He did through Abraham.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb.13:20-21.)

Two Women, Two Sons, Two Covenants

Alex V. Wilson

[Read the preceding article first]

God's Covenants are one of the most important and profitable subjects in Scripture. They are not the easiest topic to understand, but we may derive great comfort and challenge from studying them. The hymnwriter Edward Mote was on target when he wrote,

**His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the 'whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ the solid rock I stand....**

So let's follow up our study of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac by looking at some insights by one of my favorite commentators, named Paul of Tarsus. In Gal. 4:21-24 & 28-30 he wrote the following. (I've taken the liberty of interspersing my explanations -- within brackets.)

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law [and by 'under the law' Paul means not only the Jews during the Old Cov. era, but anyone anytime who is self-dependent before God, taking the attitude of self-righteousness], are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Hagar] and the other by the free woman [Sarah]. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way [by natural human ability]; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise [supernaturally, by God's power, because He had promised]. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent 2 covenants [i.e., the Old Cov. or "the law," with its emphasis on man's obedience, & the New Cov. or "the promise," with its emphasis on God's free grace]. One covenant is from Mount Sinai [the law] and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar....

Now you, brothers, [*i.e.*, you Christians, who are under the New Cov.] like Isaac, are children of promise [God's promise to do *super-naturally* what could not be done naturally, in the flesh]. At that time the son born in the ordinary way [God was "not necessary" for Ish-mael's conception; he represents the attitude of "we can do it without God"] persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit [Isaac]. It is the same now. [*So don't be surprised by opposition & persecution, especially by legalists.*] But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance [*i.e.*, the promised land, here representing salvation] with the free woman's son." [*i.e.*, though we may be persecuted by those who are carnal & legalistic, in the end we gain salvation which far out-weighs all the sufferings.]

Thus Paul draws out some deeper meanings and significance from the history of Abram and his two women and two sons. His passage is worth pondering again.

The Covenants Differ, but they belong Together

Here's another way of putting this. God made several covenants, and each had distinct features. His covenant with Abram: the promised descendants and land, with worldwide blessing as a result. With Israel: the law. With David: a descendant who will reign forever. With the Church: a completed redemption plus the abiding Holy Spirit. Yet we must not think of them as unrelated to each other, as though God tried different plans one after the other and then said, "Well, that didn't work very well so I'll toss it out and start over. Maybe my next attempt will be better." No, no. God has had one eternal plan of salvation, foreknown from the beginning. But He has worked it out and made it known to men step by step, with different emphases according to our needs. This resembles parents training their children in various ways during their differing stages of growth.

On this important point, listen to Erich Sauer's book, *The Dawn of World Redemption*. (Feel free to differ with him, and with my preceding explanations--but not with Paul!)

Why did not Christ come at the time of Abraham [about 2000 B.C.]? Does not the NT say plainly that salvation depends on faith alone? And was not faith already present in Abraham? Is not a period of law covering fifteen centuries a needless delay?

The chief meaning of the Law lies in developing an **expectation of the Redeemer by revealing human sinfulness**. Thus the Law would be "a tutor to bring us to Christ" (Gal.3:19, 24). In no sense has it set aside the [earlier] covenant with Abraham, or stepped into its place, but has completed it. It was "added" (Gal.3:19; Rom.5:20).

Nevertheless this addition was necessary. The covenant with Abraham lacked a sufficient emphasis on sin. The whole pre-Christian revelation of salvation divides into 2 chief sections: the covenant of

promise [with Abraham] and the covenant of *law* [through Moses]. But they both belong together. For conversion is two-fold: a turning *from* and a turning *to*, a NO to oneself and a YES to God, or as the NT puts it, Repentance and Faith.

Throughout centuries God spoke the word “**Faith**” into the history of salvation -- this is the meaning of the covenant with Abraham. Through 2000 years it was an education in faith.

Throughout centuries God spoke the word “**Repent**” into the history of salvation – this is the meaning of the law of Moses. Through 1500 years it was an education in repentance.

Then Jesus comes and says, “**Repent and believe the gospel**” (Mk.1:15).

Since that is true, we should use “**Law**” as well as “**Gospel**” in our preaching and teaching. Teach law (God’s commands) in order to puncture people’s pride and produce penitence. Thus we prepare them for the gospel (His provision) by making God’s promise precious, leading the unsaved to seek and trust the promise-maker.

As we Live for the Lord

But understanding God’s covenantal purposes is not only valuable in our dealings with the unsaved. It is beneficial as we seek to follow our Lord in daily conduct.

Leroy Garrett quoted a Scottish writer who observed that in Paul’s teaching he “was not seeking to get **around** the law, but **beyond** it.” Yes! It’s not as though we seek somehow to break God’s commands and get away with it. No, the grace-amazed believer lives for His Savior and serves Him joyfully, going far *beyond* any list of rules. Rarely, if ever, does he ask, “What must I do?” Rather he asks, “What more may I do for you, dear Savior?” He sings “More Love to Thee, O Christ,” and “I want to scale the utmost height....” He counts it a privilege to serve and suffer for the King of Grace who washed His followers’ feet and for our sake was tortured and killed on the cross of shame and redemption.

How do you “trap” a mouse? You attract its attention, arouse its desire, draw it close, & ZAP!....

A Sermon which Resembled a MOUSETRAP

by AMOS, and Alex Wilson

It’s the year 760 B.C. A stranger appears in Bethel, the religious center of the powerful, prosperous, and very religious land of Israel. Dressed in farmer’s overalls, he mounts an outdoor speaker’s stand in the public park and begins an oration.

People pause, puzzled, as he bellows,

**"The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds dry up,
and the top of Carmel withers." (Amos 1:2)**

Elihu and Jabal, two men of Israel, watch, and start to converse:

Elihu: "Who is that country bumpkin, anyway? And what does he mean, making God sound like a lion about to eat the prey he's caught?"

Jabal: "I dunno, but what's he mean saying God thunders from *Zion and Jerusalem*, in the kingdom of Judah? Does he think God lives down there but not in our religious centers here and at Dan? Our religious ceremonies and pageants are better than those of the Jews."

Elihu: "Yeah, what brass for him to say that! And does he think God's gonna send a drought and wither our Mount Carmel? What kind of a God would do that?"

Jabal: "That speaker must be some kind of a nutty, old-fashioned Fundamentalist. I heard some crackpot once say that God warned through Moses, the father of our country, in the book of Dotterunomy, or whatever, that if we forsook God's Covenant by disobedience, God would send punishments like drought and diseases. [Deut. 28:15-24] But I don't believe in an intolerant God like that... Hey, what's that speaker saying now?"

The Lord says, "The people of DAMASCUS have sinned again and again, and I will not forget it.

I will not leave her unpunished any more.

**For they have threshed my people in Gilead
as grain is threshed with iron rods.**

**So I will set fire to King Hazael's palace,
destroying the strong fortress of Ben-hadad.**

**I will snap the bars that locked the gates of Damascus
and kill her people as far away as the plain of Aven,
and the people of Syria shall return to Kir as slaves."**

The Lord has spoken.

Elihu: "HEY, listen to that! This guy might be okay after all--he really denounced those cruel Syrian kings up North."

Jabal: "Yeah, says those brutes are gonna go into exile. Let's stay and hear the rest of this speech, just to check the guy out."

The Lord says, "GAZA has sinned again and again,

and I will not forget it. I will not leave her unpunished any more.
For she sent my people into exile, selling them as slaves in Edom.

So I will set fire to the walls of Gaza,
and all her forts shall be destroyed.

I will kill the people of Ashdod
and destroy Ekron and the king of Ashkelon;
all Philistines left will perish." The Lord has spoken.

Elihu: "We *did* misjudge this fella! I like his views. So God's gonna wipe out all those Philistine dudes--well, it's about time they got their due."

Jabal: "Shush, I can't hear what he's saying now."

The Lord says, "The people of TYRE have sinned again and again,
and I will not forget it. I will not leave them unpunished any more.

For they broke their treaty with their brother, Israel;
they attacked and conquered him, and led him into slavery to Edom.

So I will set fire to the walls of Tyre,
and it will burn down all his forts and palaces."

Elihu: "Hooray--I hope this guy's an accurate forecaster! The people of Tyre have been mad at us ever since Israel got to be as prosperous as those folks have been for a long time. They're always stuck-up because their commercial fleet is number one."

Jabal: "Yeah. Keep up your good work, Mr. Preacher, whoever-you-are. Sock it to them!"

The Lord says, "EDOM has sinned again and again,
and I will not forget it. I will not leave him unpunished any more.

For he chased his brother, Israel, with the sword;
he was pitiless in unrelenting anger.

So I will set fire to Teman,
and it will burn down all the forts of Bozrah."

Elihu: "This is getting better & better. I hate Edomites worse'n almost anybody, those kidnapping slave-traders!"

Jabal: "Yeah, and to think they're related to us: They descended from Esau while we descended from his brother Jacob."

The Lord says, "The people of AMMOM have sinned
again and again, and I will not forget it.

I will not leave them unpunished any more.

For in their wars...to enlarge their borders
they committed cruel crimes,

ripping open pregnant women with their swords.

So I will...burn down their forts and palaces....
And their king and his princes will go into exile together."
The Lord says, "The people of MOAB have sinned again and again,
and I will not forget it. I will not leave them unpunished any more.
For they desecrated the tombs of the kings of Edom,
with no respect for the dead.
Now in return I will send fire upon Moab,
and it will destroy all the palaces in Kerioth....
And I will destroy their king and slay all the leaders under him." The
Lord has spoken.

Elihu: "I like this visiting orator more & more, despite his southern accent. The Ammonites and Moabites are our relatives too, but I can't stand those people."

Jabal: "Me neither. They're scum, even if they are distant cousins or something. They both sprang from Lot's daughters, and Lot was Abraham's nephew. But for centuries they've taken every chance they could to fight us and try to overthrow us. HEY, what's the preacher saying now?"

The Lord says, "The people of JUDAH have sinned again and again,
and I will not forget it. I will not leave them unpunished any more.
For they have rejected the laws of God, refusing to obey him.
They have hardened their hearts and sinned as their fathers did.
So I will destroy Judah with fire
and burn down all Jerusalem's palaces and forts."

Elihu: "Man, I'm glad to hear that. I overheard some guy in the audience say he thought this speaker came up here from Judah. But that must've just been a false rumor, 'cuz he sure blistered those Jews. I wonder who he's gonna blister next?"

The Lord says, "The people of ISRAEL have sinned again and again, and I will not forget it.
I will not leave them unpunished any more.
For they have perverted justice by accepting bribes,
and sold into slavery the poor who can't repay their debts;
they trade them for a pair of shoes.
They trample the poor in the dust and kick aside the meek.
And a man and his father defile the same temple-girl,
corrupting my holy name.
At their religious feasts in my own Temple
they offer sacrifices of wine they purchased with stolen money.
Yet think of all I did for them!

**I cleared the land of the Amorites before them....
 And I brought you out from Egypt
 and led you through the desert forty years,
 to possess the land of the Amorites.
 And I chose your sons to be...prophets.
 But you silenced my prophets, telling them, 'Shut up!'
 Therefore....your swiftest warriors will stumble in flight.
 The strong will all be weak,
 and the great ones can no longer save themselves.
 The most courageous of your mighty men
 will drop their weapons and run for their lives."
 The Lord God has spoken.**

Elihu: "HEY, STOP THAT SCUM! Somebody oughtta grab him, the blankity-blank meddler! Why are they just arguing with him instead of calling the Police? Who does he think he is, anyway, saying all that rot about us Israelites?"

Jabal: "Yeah, and lookit how big a crowd that bozo attracted by all those fakey statements he made earlier attacking other nations. I bet he planned all those denunciations just to attract our attention and win our sympathy.

"I wonder when he's gonna preach again, the bum. They oughtta jail him, but if they don't--I'd like to hear him once more."

[Remember the MOUSETRAP analogy? Think about it.]

QUESTIONS & LESSONS from Amos 1:2-2:16

1. What do you think of Amos' strategy? Why did he do it?

a) To grab attention and arouse interest. b) At the end, to show that the Lord is an impartial judge of all, most especially His privileged people.

2. What lessons might Preachers and Teachers learn from Amos' preaching?

"Amos must have put in hours of study before he went preaching in Bethel. He took the trouble to become well-informed about world history and current affairs, so that he was able to capture and hold his audience's attention by deft allusions to surrounding nations. How his hearers must have loved it, until it came too close to home for comfort!" (J. A. Motyer, *The Day of the Lion*, p. 9)

Years ago I heard a preacher begin his sermon by strongly denouncing the glaring and terrible errors of Marxism, socialism, pro-

abortionists, "modernism," Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses. ("Right on!") Then, Amos-like, he turned his guns on us and our failures -- hypocrisy, arrogant sectarianism, apathy, etc. Ouch! Those Amoses know how to hurt a fella -- just where we need it.

3. In the above article we quoted The Living Bible because of its more conversational style. But what Amos literally said, in the expression he used eight times, was not, "The Lord says, 'The people of _____ have sinned again and again, and I will not forget it. I will not leave them unpunished any more.'" Instead He said, "For three sins of _____ and for four, I will not turn back my wrath." Ponder the following insights on that pregnant statement:

"In His longsuffering, God had waited again and again, looking for some evidence of repentance before finally dealing in wrath; but there was none. In three transgressions they had filled up the cup of their wickedness. In the fourth it had overflowed, and declared that all further testing was useless" (H.A. Ironside, Notes on the Minor Prophets).

"The first time they had done the evil, God had rebuked. The second time, He had threatened. The third time, He had menaced with up-lifted hand. Now, at the fourth time, He smites!" (J. Sidlow Baxter, Explore the Book). Where might the U.S.A. be in that process? Even Thomas Jefferson said, "I tremble for my country when I think that God is just."

4. God is Sovereign Judge of all the nations, watching and examining them (us!), plus choosing and thus foreknowing the times and manner of their (our!) rise and fall.

Counselor's Column

I FEEL LIKE A FAILURE

Dennis Kaufman

Question: Life is not so bad for me right now. I feel like I am blessed, and have a lot to be grateful for. But, I am feeling a lot of stress in my relationship with God. There are still a number of areas where I feel like a failure as a Christian, and this is where the majority of my unhappiness seems to come from. Should it be this hard?

Answer: This is a great question--one I think many Christians have in their heart, but have not found words to describe the feelings. Let me begin by saying that *every relationship requires something*

from us. Our relationship with God is no exception. The Lord is a relational Being, and if our goal is to experience intimacy with Him, it will require growth and change--both of which involve a certain amount of pain.

Recently in a group therapy setting where we were talking about the church's role as the "bride of Christ", one of the participants said, "I feel like me and the Lord need to be in marriage counseling." This person was echoing something similar to your question. I am convinced that the Lord takes us through seasons of our lives where we must learn something that may create tension in the relationship. I think the writer of Hebrews says it best when he writes, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11).

Romans 6 makes it clear that the person who lives simply to please the flesh will have less inner conflict in the *short* run. To enter a true relationship with our Creator and Savior puts the flesh and the Spirit at odds with each other, and we should expect times where we feel like a "walking civil war." This is a part of the cost of discipleship and the desire to be made holy.

There is another angle to your question that I would like to respond to. Certainly, some of the heaviness that we carry in our attempt to be faithful to God is unnecessary and self-inflicted. For those of us who deal with a perfectionistic streak, the dilemma is easy to see.

1) We hone in on verses like I Peter 1 :16 where the Lord says, "Be ye holy, as I am holy ."

2) We cannot reach this level of perfection in this life.

3) We are depressed half of the time over our failures.

If we get caught in this downward spiral of thinking, we can unconsciously spend a lot of time wanting out of our oppressive relationship with God. Most of us have no desire to stay in a relationship where you cannot possibly win.

The main problem of perfectionism is that it tends to forget the Biblical coupling of truth and grace. I cannot find any evidence where God lets us off the hook by lowering the standard of holiness. This is what the world would have Him do. However, no one can miss the message from Scripture that there is no condemnation for those in relationship to God through Christ. Our failures are not met with harsh

judgement, but with a depth of understanding and compassion that we will never be able to grasp this side of heaven.

Is there pain in the growth process of relating to a Holy God? Absolutely. Is it worth the sacrifice? Yes, it is the greatest bargain in the entire universe in all of time. Does God want my relationship with Him to be primarily miserable? No, that comes from the deceiving perfectionism that pervades my flesh and is ultimately a manifestation of pride.

May your "marriage" with God provide eternal bliss and be worth every moment you spend in counseling with Him.

--From *Southeast Outlook* by permission

WHAT IF IT'S THE END?

Joyce Broyles

Shingles. Small thin pieces of leather-like building materials, often with one end thicker than the other. Overlapping rows as a covering for the roof or sides of a building. Right? Not always.

In a doctor's office, the word *shingles* strikes alarm in a patient's mind because it means pain, and lots of it. Shingles, or herpes zoster, is an acute infection that begins with pain, then lesions, and then more pain. The same virus that causes chickenpox in children seems to start it. Some say stress may be a major contributor.

Tuesday, the second day of school this year, I moved some furniture in the library. That evening, I experienced intense pain like I had never had before. Thinking I had pulled a muscle, I took some aspirin. Then more. No medicine helped. By Friday, a small red spot appeared on my lower spine. My sisters diagnosed my condition as shingles. They suggested a visit to the doctor when possible.

The pain continued in its intensity. By Saturday evening, I could take it no longer. The emergency room doctor did not agree with our diagnosis, however. He told me to see a dermatologist fast because I had a melanoma!

I spent the weekend curled up in bed, trying to work out my priorities. If I had a short time to live, there were many loose ends to tie up. I had notes to write to explain to whoever would take my place at school, at church, and at home.

Early Monday morning, Douglas called my doctor. He saw me immediately and said it was shingles. At any other time, I would have been upset, but this time, I was happy to hear it! I could deal with pain, but I found that my instincts wanted to fight death!

By receiving treatment early, I was fortunate. Friends prayed for me, and the pain went away after a few days. Since then, I have heard horror stories of people who suffered months, even years with pain after the rash went away.

The experience was a wake-up call for me. I did not have any energy or strength for many weeks, but soon as I did recover, I began to empty closets and cabinets! I have begun a manual for the next librarian. My new will is prepared, and Miguez funeral home has my instructions.

Most significant of the things I realized needed changing was my attitude toward my family members. Now I empathize with their pains and try to make more time available to spend with them. Perhaps this was the way to shake up my personal expressions!

VOICES from the FIELDS

Karen Ashley

Papua New Guinea

April 2001

Last time we wrote we told you about the major changes in our lives which resulted from the June 5th coup in the Solomons. Since evacuating and coming to Papua New Guinea we have continued translation and checking from the SIL center here at Ukarumpa. James made one trip back to the Solomons and Jonathan came here for three weeks in February, enabling them to do some face to face checking and to exchange materials worked on in the intervening time.

We have made some good progress, getting Acts and I Corinthians through the consultant check stage and other books checked by the village reviewers. We had planned to continue in this mode until the beginning of next school year, when we would put Philip and Susan in the dorm here and return to the Solomons (just the two of us).

Now all of that is up in the air again.

A few weeks ago the director of the Central Bank in the Solomons announced that the country was about six weeks away from exhausting its foreign monetary reserves, which would result in a total collapse of the economy. All imports, including necessities like fuel for the power plant and all transportation services, medical supplies for

the hospital, and imported food, would cease at that time. This is partly a result of the closure of at least 75% of the country's export industries due to the unrest, and partly due to the government allowing millions of dollars of duty exemptions for their friends and family businesses. The only hope for economic survival is for aid donors and organizations like the World Bank to bail them out of the crisis, but their help is contingent upon the Solomons government turning away from its past record of corrupt and unwise practices.

Four translation teams have returned to the Solomons since the first of the year, but they are now facing another possible evacuation. James and two other men went back last week to take care of personal assets and dialogue with national translators on strategies to continue the work from afar if we cannot return to stay or even get back into the country for months or possibly years.

At this point nobody knows how bad the crisis will get, but there will almost certainly be shortages and curtailing of basic services. The worst case could cut off all power, close all banks, and send the entire country back to a subsistence level. Somewhere in between is a hazy line where inconvenience becomes great enough to make us unproductive. When and if that happens, our personnel will have to leave (again).

While we wait to see what develops we must work with a dual set of plans. Our director must look ahead to plan conferences and workshops in case the economy is rescued. At the same time he has to plan how to leave, how to best protect property left behind, and how to still keep the translation work going if we are again scattered to other countries.

We Ashleys are looking at staying here in PNG another year if the situation is not stable by July. In case that happens, James has gotten permission from the HAM radio licensing office to teach Jonathan the skills needed to use the HAM radio to talk to us here in PNG. They will grant him a provisional license and waive the normal Morse code requirement. This will involve a very steep learning curve for Jonathan, and James will be staying in the Solomons until the week after Easter to get it done. He will also be trying to get the book of Galatians ready for consultant checking. If time allows, he will go through our belongings and bring out anything irreplaceable that we didn't get the first time.

While we know you already support us with your prayers, we are asking you to pray especially for the current situation in the Solomons and for the future of Bible translation in that country. Please also pray for James and our Sa'a friends as they work together in the next three

weeks and as they develop various strategies and work plans for the uncertain months ahead.

I realize all of this sounds very negative. While it is true that the problems are of a serious nature, these last two years of turmoil may be what the Solomons needs to motivate them towards growth and maturity as a nation. With regards to translation, the hard times have made us all realize afresh the urgency of our task and the need to train Solomon Islanders to take more responsibility for translation in the future. God has surprised us again, rather uncomfortably, yet we are confident that His ways are ultimately far better than ours.

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Paul & Virginia Kitzmiller
March 25, 2001

St Petersburg, Russia

After much prayer and evaluation we have concluded that the time has come for us to finish our work here and return to the States. Lord willing, we will continue here until May as scheduled, but this will be our last extended trip. Please understand that no sudden crisis has developed forcing us to make this decision; we have simply decided that the Lord through many ways is leading us to make this change. After almost four years of ministry in Russia it will not be easy to leave, but we are also looking forward to other works that the Lord has prepared for us to do. At this point we are not sure what that will be.

We are very thankful to each of you who have supported us through your prayers and gifts. In Russia, we have been personally involved in giving the "Good News" to hundreds of precious souls. We have witnessed the growth of faith in the lives of many and we've been privileged to have had a part in the "New Birth" of some. It has been a great joy to strengthen and encourage the church in Russia in its still budding stages. Thank you for the part you have had in this work and for making it possible for us to be here.

Now we have a strange task before us. We must ask our financial contributors to stop sending money to the Russian Mission fund at Hamburg Church of Christ. It is an unusual thing when we send out a notice asking Christians to cease giving to a work, but this is just such an occasion. In part, it is a tribute to the great faith and generosity of those who have shared in this work. Enough money is already on hand to take care of final expenses and obligations of this ministry. Praise God for His Goodness and Provision!

Certainly there is still much work to do in Russia and there are still many open doors here that have not yet been entered. In fact, as we have opportunity we are planning to continue encouraging mission work in Russia. We pray that souls here and around the world will continue to be a burden on your heart. May God urge each of us to greater faithfulness and service.

Mark & Candy Garrett Thies, Senegal March, 2001

Many of our Muslim friends invite us to their feasts during the year, so Christmas is an occasion for us to return the favor. Of course at the same time we seize the opportunity to communicate the Gospel. This is what we did this past Christmas in the big courtyard of one of our co-workers.

Each couple on our team invited key friends that they wanted to hear the Gospel. We even printed up individual invitations (which is the rage here when local people put on a party). About 100 friends came, majority Muslims. We think that many of our Muslim friends felt more at ease coming to someone's house rather than to our Ministry Center. This party happened after dark Christmas Day. Our Muslim friends were still observing the fast of Ramadan where they don't eat or drink during daylight hours so it would have been impolite to offer them something during the day. We put on a program of music, scripture reading, and children's drama. The children of the team acted out the Christmas story while a local believer narrated in Wolof.

We sang several Christmas songs in Wolof. You would recognize some of them, like "Joy to the World" and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." However, the songs that the people loved the best were the new Christmas songs that had been composed only two weeks before! Titles like, "Come believe this Miracle of God" and "Listen everyone, What's happening is a Miracle."

To close the program the narrator challenged everyone to follow Christ and we sang an evangelistic song in Wolof, "Who is your King?" Then we served up hundreds of Christmas cookies and refreshments which were devoured in no time.

Our neighbors and friends have been thanking us for the invitation for a long time afterward so we know that it was greatly appreciated. And some of our neighbor children are still singing those new Christmas songs as they play. Who knows what God may do? May God use His Word in their hearts to bring some to faith!

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

Sis. Lorraine Schreiner went home to be with the Lord on Monday April 2. After a private burial, a memorial service was held at the Southeast Church of Christ. Sis. Schreiner was the last living member of the first graduating class of Portland Christian School.

Praise the Lord: Bill & Rita Smallwood began their 12th year of ministry at the Ralph Ave. Church of Christ on April 15th.

Bad & GOOD News: The bad news is that Kenneth Preston has been at the UK Hospital now for over 5 weeks due to critical surgery & then pneumonia. The mass around his pancreas & stomach was large & surgery took 13 hours! The good news is, it is not malignant!

But then it seemed *more* surgery was needed, for doctors found a hole in his colon. On Ap. 8 at Kenneth's request, several elders anointed & prayed for him. (James 5:14.) Next day the scheduled operation was cancelled because the hole could not be found. Give God glory!

Lilly Dale Revival this year will begin Mon. July 30 and run through Sun. August 5. Ben Rake will be the speaker.

Antioch Camp Dates: 1st Chance: June 1-3. Jr. Week: June 10-15. Sr. Week: June 24-July 1.

Teen Week: July 8-14. Jr. Music Week: July 22-27. Singles Retreat: August 3-5. Contact Lyle Baker, 355 Bark Branch, Frankfort, KY 40601. (502) 223-7056

A Helper in Japan: A Hawaii-born 3rd or 4th generation Japanese-American young man now studying in Lincoln Christian College, Lincoln, Illinois, a Christian Church school, wants to come to the mountains for the summer to engage in a required practical missionary training program for his credit with Lincoln. Please pray for this Steven Saito. --Moto Nomura

George Galanis, evangelist/teacher in Greece for over 36 years: "The Lord has raised up a younger missionary by the name of Nick Tsagarakis (resident of Crete) who has been an acquaintance of ours for about 10 years. He has the gift of an 'evangelist' and needs support. For more information: George Galanis, 126 Erythrou Stavrou, 186 48 Drapetsona, Piraeus - Greece

A Good Man, A Good Book: Before he went to heaven, J. Miller Forcade was able to complete his autobiography. During a long lifetime he served the Lord in many places in the U.S., & also in Zimbabwe and Japan. He had an interesting life, and the book has helpful lessons from his

many years of serving the Lord. He taught against the widespread sectarianism that he encountered in many places. He also emphasized the Biblical teaching, *Talk TO one another, not ABOUT one another*—especially when it comes to faults or disputes.

If you want a copy of the book, write his daughter, Harriet Hawley, 4832 Casa Loma Ave., Yorba Linda, CA 92886; or adelamaya@aol.com

Philippine Mission Update. The Lord willing, I will be leaving for the Philippines on April 9th for our annual 3-day Lectureship and to visit as many churches as possible, returning on the 27th. (T.Y. Clark)

Reunion Planned: Some Southeastern Christian College alumni have engaged the old Library Building on the old campus of SCC, which is now Winchester's "College Park," and also the Picnic Pavilion which is

nearby, for May 28, 2001 for a reunion party for Ky Bible College, SCC, Bible Institute alumni and former teachers. SCEC will provide meat and drink for those who tell us they are coming, and participants are expected to bring pot-luck dishes of potato salad, vegetables and/or dessert. Contact Cecil Garret at 399 College St., Winchester, KY 40391 or e-mail at rgarrett@mis.net

Cane Ridge Revival: The 200th anniversary of this mighty work of God will be celebrated the week of August 6 - 12, 2001. Everyone is invited to be among intercessors and prayer warriors for this great celebration. The week will feature worship & praise, testimonies, times of confession & repentance, ministry, fellowship, communion festival, and an all-night prayer meeting. For additional information and registration form contact Jim Bevis at 256: 381-9034.

Thoughts on simplicity and solitude

"I cannot refrain from remarking that the most ominous sign of the coming destruction is the passing of the home. We no longer live in homes, but in theaters. The need for solitude and quietness was never greater than it is today. Retire from the world each day to some private spot. Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you.

Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds and listen for the inward voice of God till you learn to recognize it. Reduce your interests to a few. Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while, you can do this even while you work. Practice candor, childlike honesty, and humility. Read less, but read more of what is important to your inner life. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration."

—A. W. Tozer; quoted from *Highland bulletin*

x1-05 Z:1
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(Continued from the inside front cover)

Yes, God does accept and love us as we are, whatever our appearance is. He hears us when we cry to Him regardless of our dress. But, we are not dealing here with God's acceptance of us, but with how we show respect to Him.

Let's finish with some scripture that tells us what God's will for us is:

Romans 12:1-2, We are not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds." This is an act (non-conforming) followed by an attitude (transformation).

Ephesians 4:1, We are entreated to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

2 Timothy 4:12, Show yourself as an example in speech, conduct, and purity.

Should we not set an example to the world that the church (made up of us as individuals) is the Bride of Christ., and that Bride is CHASTE in behavior AND appearance?