MB013 Old Testament Survey

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JOSHUA: GUIDEBOOK TO VICTORY

Joshua means “God is Salvation”. In 1 Cor. 10:11, speaking of the Old Testament and naming Moses earlier in the chapter says the Old Testament scriptures are for our admonition, instruction, warning (depending on the English translation). The OT is essential in understanding the complete word of God. The New Testament builds onto the foundation of the Old Testament.

The lecturer chooses Joshua and Daniel as the most important of the OT books.

The land of Canaan is a picture, as we have mentioned, of the Spirit-filled life -- the life that God intended for every Christian to live. -lecturer

Joshua speaks of the entrance into the promised land, it’s conquest, and ends with the vital concerns regarding how to keep possession of this land promised by God.

“Title to it is the gift of God; possession of it is the result of an obedient walk.

‘Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.’ {Josh 1:3 RSV}” -lecturer

God promises to Israel the land. He also promises his presence.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success." {Josh 1:7b-8 RSV}

Their strength lay in the word of God and in following his law. In that regard it is the same for Christians today as it was for Israel then. “The Lord your God is with you wherever you go." {Josh 1:9 RSV} Then and today.

We learn from Rahab’s story in Joshua 2 that the people of Jericho feared the Israelites and their God from the time of the crossing of the Red Sea. There was a sense in Jericho of the inevitability of their defeat at the hands of Israel. God had prepared the way for victory 40 years before Israel was ready for His victory. It’s often the same with us. We hesitate needlessly when God has already prepared the way.

Before challenging Jericho, Israel had to cross another river, the Jordan. Before crossing the Jordan they had to renew their lives with God.

1. The men born in the wilderness must become circumcised. They needed to be wounded in the flesh to allow their hearts and minds to fully rely on the Lord.
2. They needed to celebrate, for the first time, the Passover. They needed to remember the leading of the Lord in the past.
3. In Josh. 5:14, Joshua meets God in the image, the personage of a man with a sword and .Joshua demands to know
   1. “Are you on our side or on the side of the enemy?”
   2. And God replies, “No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.'
   3. Or as the lecturer paraphrases, “It isn't your job to plan the strategy of battle. That is my job. I have given the city of Jericho into your hands."
   4. I find it interesting that God sidesteps Joshua’s question. God planned the victory for Israel over Jericho. But at the same time, he is God also of the people of Jericho even while they themselves, except for Rahab, reject him. And even in today’s wars, God has believing brothers and sisters on both sides of each battlefront.

The lecturer describes the walls of Jericho to be 300’ thick and 60’ high. Pretty impregnable, and yet by following the Lord’s strategy of walking around the walls and leaving the walls to Him, they fell. If only we would come to trust in the Lord in our daily struggles.

We then come to the sins that followed the exhilaration of defeating Jericho. The covetousness of Achan and his family, the pride that brought defeat at the small town of Ai (also related to the theft of Achan), and the deceit by the Gibeonites when Israel failed to consult the Lord. We often experience spiritual highs in our life that blind us to sin in ourselves and our conceit to want to relax out dependence on God.

After this the Canaanite nations joined in battle against Israel at Beth-horon, outnumbering Israel. Joshua lay claim to faith in the Lord who gave Israel victory, even delaying the setting of the sun. After that, claiming the land came easier, the Canaanite peoples resisting less unitedly. But with less resistance, ISRAEL only claimed their inheritance incompletely. Thei unconquered neighbors tempted them into idolatry and immorality as prophesied in Joshua 23:12,13. God says he will no longer “drive out any of these nations from before you.”

In Joshua 24 Joshua tells the people in v. 19,20 “And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.” I think he says, you will not achieve the holiness of God by saying and determining to become holy. But you can worship the holy God. This is what he asks, that we seek to be in his presence for in his presence we absorb, take on a portion of his holiness. On the other hand, if we serve strange gods we take on a greater unholiness and in the end we will become consumed with sin and evil and will some day be consumed.

JUDGES: THE PATTERN OF DEFEAT

Judges is a book primarily about defeat with brief glimpses of a look back at God.

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

They didn’t try to do wrong. But they weren’t careful to worship God as instructed. “They were given over to the folly of consecrated blundering.” -lecturer They recognized no objective authority. So they were easily influenced by the nations around them. Israel cycles through idolatry and returns to a loose faithfulness to God. Just because we know the truths of scripture doesn’t consistently carry through into a joy of Christian living.

“Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants… Ephraim did not drive out… Asher did not drive out… Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants…” Judges 1:27, 29, 31,33. They had been warned in Joshua 23:12,13 that if they failed to drive out the pagan inhabitants from Cannan that they would be influenced to fall into idolatry.

Today we may condemn adulterous, drunken living but minimize our tempers and desire to be like those around us. We feel we’re better people than those lazy people on welfare or those living on the street. We champion our claim to freedom to reject masks and Covid vaccines without concern for the most vulnerable among us.

They [Israel] forsook the Lord, and … Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in sore straits. {Judges 2:13-15 RSV}

Israel found themselves conquered by the tribes around them. They paid tribute to their idolatrous neighbors, the same neighbors who had influenced them away from their protective God. Romans 1 and 2 teach the same warning to the New Testament age with examples of leaders in the new Christian faith who compromised and fell to incredible depths including homosexuality.

RUTH: THE ROMANCE OF REDEMPTION

The book of Ruth is the story of the romance of redemption, according to the lecturer. Benjamin Franklin was a deist, not a Christian believer. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/06/28/how-benjamin-franklin-a-deist-became-the-founding-father-of-a-unique-kind-of-american-faith/#> But while ambassador in France a decade prior to the French Revolution and in Paris only 5 years before the French Revolution, he once read the story of Ruth, changing the names to disguise its origin, to his Parisian friends who at once declared it a most beautiful short story and demanded to learn where he had discovered such a remarkable literary masterpiece. “It was his great delight to tell them that it was from the Bible, which they professed to regard with scorn and derision, and in which they felt there was nothing good.” -lecturer

Ruth in verse 1 starts with Elimelech, Ruth’s deceased father in law whose Hebrew name means “my God is king”. Deuteronomy 11:19 instructs the Israelites to speak often of God, when relaxing at home, when walking or traveling, before going to bed and upon arising in the morning. Emimelech’s parents reminded their son who his king was every time they called his name. The book of Ruth is about God. It starts with the name of God and his intended role in our lives. The Bible doesn’t argue the existence of God, it doesn’t attempt to prove the existence of God to unbelievers. The Bible *assumes* God.

Hebrews 11:6 goes on to say "whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Jesus said, "Seek and you will find." (Matt. 7:7) If a man never finds God, it is because he never bothered to seek. -lecturer

Cast of Characters

**Name**. **Definition**

Elimelech. My God is King

Naomi. Pleasure, also Mara or Bitterness

Mahlon (son). Sick

Chilion (son). Pining Away

Orpah (DIL). Fawn - little young deer - fawning, superficial love

Ruth (DIL). Beauty

Boaz. Strength

Nearest kin. One who has the right to redeem

Obed. Worship

The lecturer tells the story using the name **Definition**. My God is King married Pleasure, compromising his spiritual belief and worship. He sins. They sin together and give birth to two sons who are sickly and pining away in their spiritual connection. They married Moabite women from an idolatrous background. The men in the family die, father the fallen follower of my God who’s King along with his sickly and pining away sons.

Beauty, feeling her alternate name Bitterness, decides to return to her family in Bethlehem and both daughters-in-law choose to return with her. The compromised religion in the home they married into holds more attraction than their idolatrous homes in Moab. Or maybe they just prefer to spend time with Beauty. On the way back though, Fawn drags along with diminished determination. Pleasure graciously permits Fawn to return home to Moab.

Beauty stays steadfast to stay with Pleasure, saying

“Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; ..." {Ruth 1:16b RSV}

Note that in our wedding, Rebecca and I sang to each other “Whither thou goest, I will go.”

Bitterness, being accompanied by Beauty may have experienced comfort. Along the way to Bethlehem, Pleasure fondly recalled the spiritual teachings of her youth. Among them were these verses from Lev. 19:9, 10

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

Also she shared another teaching, either on the trip or later after arrival from Deut 25:5-6 RSV

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

Beauty gleaned from Strength’s field. Strength introduced himself and invited her in chapter 2:8 to glean “close to my maidens.” These maidens may have been daughters if he were married or perhaps his servant girls who were harvesting. Strength generously instructed the reapers to drop bundles for Beauty because she represented kin.

When Beauty returned with an unexpected bounty from gleaning, almost as if she’s been reaping for herself, Pleasure inquired where she’d spent the day gleaning so plenteously. She recognizes the intentions of Strength who I believe is her younger brother-in-law.

Strength is confidendent in his intention to redeem his brother’s/nephew’s property and name. Any son from this relationship would on paper belong to Beauty’s husband, Pleasure’s son.

But Strength could not yet promise to redeem. He had an older brother I think it was although it may have been a closer uncle. He did promise redemption, I think, knowing that he wanted to be the "one who has the right to redeem."

He visited the nearest kin, arranged legal witnesses, explained the story, and offered the right to redeem the land, which was done. He then told of the widow who also went with the obligation. That was refused. because it might risk the nearest kinsman his own inheritance. Chapter 4:6.

Then Strength announces to the witnesses and all the people,

You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelelch and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day." {Ruth 4:9,10 RSV}

Though Boaz bought the entire inheritance of Naomi’s husband as well as Ruth's and Orpah’s, Orpah is lost in this picture because she turned and went back to her own people and to her own gods. Boaz and Ruth had a son.

Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom [like any good grandmother] and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "*A son has been born to Naomi*." They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David. {Ruth 4:16-17 RSV}

This child's name, Obed, means "worship" -- making our story complete. Ruth/Beauty in naming her son Obed/Worship declared in the most public way she could her decision to worship the God of her twice adopted family, the family she had refused to turn away from, the family who redeemed her first husband’s land and position at a risk to her redeemer’s possible loss of natural inheritance if any.

When "beauty" is married to "strength," the house is filled with "worship." Isn't that a wonderful picture?

The lecturer goes on to compare this story in Ruth to Christological redemption, from lost to death and lost to inheritance and memory to redemption and grace provided by her who was born to be our redeeming kinsman to give us a place at our Father’s table into eternity - if we sit at Jesus’ feed as Ruth lay at Boaz’ feet, claiming God’s promise of redemption.

1 SAMUEL: THE DEATH OF THE FLESH

In psychology books we’re presented with case studies that generate evidence for the principles they lead us to. The Old Testament provides the case studies for the conclusions presented in the New Testament.

Samuel presents the stories of two men whose lives illustrate the struggle of faith each Christian faces. Saul shows us the fleshly struggle while David shows the faith struggle. Neither begins the struggle without a measure of faith and each ends the struggle with absolute victory, one in the flesh and the other over the flesh. Yet we see fairly clearly which travels primarily the low road and which travels largely the high road. Neither is a complete success as role model, only Jesus is, but by the end of their story we know which comes closer to being a worthy role model.

Connecting these two is a third man named Samuel who was chosen by God to end the leadership of Israel’s 400 years led by judges representing God. Because of idolatry in Israel the priesthood was failing, rotten largely from the inside.

The people demand a king, expecting God to bless their plan for success as a nation. They didn’t realize that if they returned to a worship of the Lord, he would bless them without a domineering king. Instead they saw kings in all their neighbors’ lands and wished to be like other kingdoms.

Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." {1 Sam 8:7-9 RSV}

If we imagine we want a second rate plan and insist on it, God allows it. He always allows free will, hoping we will choose his will. Saul hesitated, shrank from taking on the role of king God through Samuel thrust upon him. But then in his first war he won the battle. Buoyed by success he aimed to attack the Philistines, a powerful nation. He lost support of many in Israel. Saul mistook ritual for worship. Saul at least twice confused his role as king with acting also as priest. Perhaps he mistook his right to do so because of real or imagined corruption in the priesthood. Satan obtains great success when church leaders misuse their privileges in the church. We find it easy to excuse our sin when leaders in the church abuse their high calling.

Saul’s son Jonathan helped save face with the Philistines at Geba. Yet the Philistines, along with the Amalikites remained a viscously troubling thorn in Saul’s side throughout his reign. He again battled the Amalikites, won a small victory but provoked the Lord in again usurping the role of priest and was informed by Samuel the prophet that the kingdom would be taken from him.

David’s story begins mid book. Appalled that the giant of the Philistines intimidates God’s people of Israel to impotence, he claims the calling of God to silence the pagan, idolatrous giant of the enemy of God’s people. Using the simple weapons and garb of the shepherd that he was, he faces down this giant and God through this one underaged youth routed the entire Philistine army. Faith in action! “David becomes here a picture not only of Christ, but also of the believer who lives the life of Christ” -lecturer I might add that this was a high point in David’s life, perhaps a high point in faith that he never again experiences. David never loses his faith, but he also doesn’t always live to the promise of his early life faith. I think that might be a realization that many Christians realize as we get old. The challenge of faith isn’t a thing we always surmount to the height we wish.

David at one point was given the priestly bread to eat, something Saul might have wished to obtain. David however never assumed upon himself the right to act as priest. He valued the sacred role of God’s priests and recognized he didn’t qualify to that role, even as king.

Saul, representing the man of flesh, descended into the depravity of calling upon witchcraft. He died the next day. His eldest son and David’s best friend also dies that day. Saul, destined to a privileged life of service to God wasted that opportunity to the desire to please the flesh.

2 SAMUEL: THE STORY OF DAVID

Chapters 1-5 tell of David becoming king of Judah and after seven years of all of Israel. He waited patiently on the Lord each step in this process. Chapters 6-10 highlight worship and victory. Chapters 11-20 depict David’s failure and God’s forgiveness. Note that David repents and pleads for forgiveness, something we didn’t see Saul really doing. He pled to Samuel perhaps at one point but we don’t see him repenting and trusting in God. The rest of the book of 2nd Samuel encapsulates lessons to be learned from David’s up and down but never ending endeavor to be faithful to God.

In a sense you may look at David “as a picture of Jesus Christ -- and it is perfectly proper to do so; the Lord Jesus himself used this analogy. David was not only the forerunner and ancestor according to the flesh of the Lord Jesus, but in his reign he was also a picture of Jesus Christ in the millennium. David went through a time when he was rejected, persecuted, hounded and harassed. But in the time of his exile he gathered men around him who became his leaders, his commanders and his generals when he did become king over the land. Thus David was a picture of Christ in his present rejection, forsaken by the world, gathering in secret those who will be his commanders, generals, and captains when he comes to reign in power and glory over the earth. Christ will come to establish his kingdom, to rule and to reign in righteousness as the scripture says, and David is a picture of that, too. As God develops this and brings it to pass we can also see in the present world scene that God is bringing Christ to his throne at last, where he shall reign in righteousness.” -lecturer

You may also look at the picture of David as representing the experience of every faithful, believing Christian. We each have responsibilities. We each have enemies in persons and temptations from the outside. And we each as Christians fight the enemy of self from within. David’s story shows us what happens when we give in to God. We don’t fight the Jebusites and Perizzites but instead we fight jealousy, envy, lust, bitterness, resentment, worry, anxiety and all the other ites, isms, chasms, and spasms that afflict us in our daily walk.

“David is the picture of the man after God's own heart” lecturer but he didn’t live continually a life on a spiritual high. He says in Psalms 119:120-121

My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and *I am afraid of thy judgments.*

Yet he also says

***leave me not to mine oppressors.*** … Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.

David knows his sins deserve punishment, yet he lays claim to mercy and grace.

“The Christian life is not just a shabby imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. It must be the real thing. It must be Christ himself living his life in you.” -lecturer

When reading of David we learn his

1. Willingness to acknowledge his mistakes.
2. Humility to recognize that he was weak.
3. Courage to step up in challenging situations and accept God’s answers.

Skipping section 1 and going to section 2, David’s failure and God’s forgiveness… David determines to bring the ark of the covenant from Shiloh to his new Capitol city Jerusalem. Saul had briefly lost the ark to the Philistines but they had quickly returned it on a driverless cart pulled by cows. David tried to transport it by ox cart but that ended in a terrifying disaster. He and the priests hadn’t studied the instructions given by God for respectfully honoring his presence while moving the ark of the covenant. The ignorance of the Philistines he forgave although he had punished their theft. He may not have punished their simple theft, but he certainly punished their act of contempt when they proudly displayed the ark in their temple to Dagan, their impotent ugly fish god.

David had to put aside his presumptuous pride and initiate a study of worship regarding the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and the lost roles of the priests and Levites. God further disappoints David, who determines to build a temple for God to replace the tent of meeting. God tells him that he has enabled David to win great battles but that God intends David’s successor to build the temple. 2nd Chronicles 7:8

Thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.

Maybe David chose to fight these wars without asking God first. The powerful presence of Samuel had been lost before David became king. There remained prophets such as Nathan but, no longer serving as judges, their influence may have been reduced. Besides, I only see the one judge Samuel following Joshua with a powerful presence.

God graciously explained to David in verse 9 that “a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.”

David accepted what he may have perceived as a reprimand. And we understand that he contented himself with accumulating building materials. This section concludes with David’s continued wars. God had at best chided his shedding of much blood but had not directly condemned his war making. He was attempting to drive out idolatrous nations from Cannan, although Israel never completely succeeded. They were expressly instructed to do this during Joshua’s time when God had created conditions to discourage the Canaanites.

The third section begins with a story of moral failure by this man earlier said to be “a man after God's own heart.” This serves as a warning that when we begin to see ourselves as righteous, or perhaps we know our weakness but have built a reputation for righteousness… we can still foolishly fall into sin, even very public sin.

David saw, he lusted, he took. He took at first in a deceitfully borrowing way. Then he took what he lusted for permanently. There happened more bloodshed, innocent bloodshed. David condemned the sin when Nathan surreptitiously pointed it out to him. Then when Nathan pointedly said “you’re the one who sinned so grievously” (long paraphrase) David immediately acknowledged his sin publically and repented.

Immediate repentance is always due by the Christian when he recognizes the awfulness of our sin. We should not try to hide from the awfulness. We should not excuse it. We should not minimize the awfulness of our sin.

Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house. {2 Sam 12:12-15a RSV}

Punishment was pronounced on David. His new wife Bathsheba also felt the punishment. Later in the story we find one of David’s son’s lusting after his sister and David probably felt the punishment again. In the story of Absalom’s rebellion we learn of David’s great love for his sons. His general Joab condemned him for this love. But David was anguished between his responsibility for his nation and his sons.

The replicated sin of lust by David’s son Amnon triggered revenge in Absalom and led to his rebellion. Bathsheba suffered from the punishment of their first son. David also suffered from the troubles and loss among three of his children by other wives. Unlike many kings, David loved his wicked, conniving children. And the stabbing dagger was that they had learned from his example. Even his son Solomon later left the Lord for many years and it may have been his dad David’s loss of worthiness which led to Solomon’s doubts of God. Then again it may have been the influence of his many pagan wives.

Interestingly, “There is never a word of complaint from David. There is never any attempt to blame God!”

Finally we have the epilogue in 2nd Samuel:

In chapter 22, you have the beautiful eighteenth Psalm. The key to this psalm begins in verse 26. David sings:

"With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;

with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;

with the pure thou dost show thyself pure,

and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.

Thou dost deliver a humble people,

but thy eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.

Yes, thou art my lamp, O Lord,

and my God lightens my darkness." {2 Sam 22:26-29 RSV}

And then this figure which I always love. David sings:

"Yea, by thee I can crush a troop,

and by my God I can leap over a wall.

This God -- his way is perfect;

the promise of the Lord proves true;

he is a shield for all those who take refuge.

When we trust God, he proves his trustworthiness.

The lecturer points out the final sin for David, ordering a census. He was counting his own resources for continued bloodshed in war, forgetting what history told him God could do for Gideon with only 300 men not really armed. He forgot what God had done for his friend Jonathan and himself as the enemy fled from just the two of them.

1 KINGS: HOW TO LOSE A KINGDOM

Early in Solomon’s reign he

made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been build for the name of the Lord. {1 Ki 3:1-2 RSV}

Before entering the promised land, God said (Exodus 34:12,13)

Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. 13 Break down their altars,

David’s first three wives were all Hebrew. Polygamous… But married within the church of believers. And David’s first three wives were married out of love I understand. Actually his first marriage may have been out of ambition but the wife he married loved him.

Solomon married for international, militarily defense reasons. He may not have disobeyed the letter of the law of God directly by making a treaty by marriage with the nation just across his border. But he disobeyed the spirit of the law forbidding treaties. And Solomon disregarded God’s warning that marrying out of the faith would lead to disruption on one’s personal faith.

Then Solomon began the practice of mixed worship, compromising and melding pagan worship with Godly worship.

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father; only, he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places. {1 Ki 3:3 RSV}

Solomon failed to distinguish honest love of God and pure worship from forbidden worldly approved ritual.

The lecturer explains the sin of the high places. The Israelites defeated a community but did not “break down their altars”. They co-opted altars built to worship Baal and Ashtaroth to perform the rituals of worshiping God. Against God’s express command! I’m unsure whether priests performed sacrifices on these altars contrary to the law to offer sacrifices only at the tabernacle or the temple. God’s presence was recognized at the ark of the covenant in the most holy of holies in the tabernacle and later the temple. He was not at the High places.

Notice that after marrying the Egyptian princess, Solomon focuses on building his own house. Apparently David’s house is too plebeian for Solomon. Then he gets around to building the temple.

The Lord offers Solomon a wish. Solomon maturely requests wisdom. But the focus of this wisdom he seeks is on governing God’s people. He has already chosen his own will in his personal life. God nevertheless grants this wish, in reality and not just in a dream.

God granted wisdom with a twist. He gave wisdom with the, shall we say, temptation that comes with immense wealth and public honor. Solomon’s wisdom so excelled that he attracted the attention of the great thinkers of renown from the East (India and China) and from Egypt. He excelled in the knowledge of the sciences.

God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand of the seashore, so though Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east [including all the so-called wisdom of the orient -- the Chinese and Indian] and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Herman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol [these were the newspaper commentators of that day!]; and his fame was in all the nations round about. He also uttered three thousand proverbs [we have them recorded in the book of Proverbs]; and his songs were a thousand and five [of those we have only one: "The Song of Solomon" or "The Song of Songs"]. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. {1 Ki 4:29-34 RSV}

Had Solomon held the spiritual faith of his father David he might have led the world to faith in the one true God. But Solomon had lost the strength of faith and demonstrated his own great wisdom rather than the most important knowledge of God.

Solomon’s life demonstrates the wisdom Jesus taught:

Watch out where your heart goes, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:34)

Solomon sank into degradation despite his supposed wisdom.

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth [the sex goddess] the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab," {1 Ki 11:5-7a RSV}

Solomon dies after returning to the Lord. But salvation at the end of one's life, while God rejoices at finding the lost sheep, doesn’t negate the influence on others from our rebellious past. Solomon’s son Rehoboam had learned the pride of his father. He soon lost most of the kingdom to a rebellion initially leveled at his father before his death. Jeroboam took 10 of the 12 tribes out of the once United Kingdom. Jeroboam wasn’t intending to lead into idolatry. But to discourage travel out of his northern kingdom to the temple in the southern kingdom, Jeroboam set up two golden calves intended as visual representations of Jehovah. He was forever known as “Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin.”

Eventually Ahab and Jezebel come to rule the northern kingdom. Ahab has some small degree of integrity but falls prey to the evil of his Baal worshiping wife. Elijah pronounces the judgment of God, a famine. God withdraws his blessings after persistent rebellion. After years “the rain of grace begins again and pours down.”

Now Elijah who faced the king and 400 priests of Baal in the showdown battle of worship and prayer, Elijah who outruns the king's horses pulling his chariot, Elijah who represented God in raising to life his benefactor’s son, this Elijah flees in despair from the evil queen. Flees from the queen consort if I may since it is her husband who inherited the throne and should have restrained her. Elijah, the prophet of faith now mostly loses faith. After a high point in our lives we also are susceptible to discouraging low points. Elijah fell to a low point. God nevertheless speaks softly with Elijah and cares for him.

The book closes with the death of Ahab in the moment he exults in the wisdom of his deceit swapping places in battle with the king of the southern kingdom as they battle a common enemy. Expecting the southern king to die, he himself dies instead. He had his opportunity at the showdown on Mt. Carmel but feared his wife and God abandoned him so his choices.

2 KINGS: A WASTED LIFE

The northern kingdom never had a good king and failed to be blessed by God. The southern kingdom on occasion was led by Godly kings and God blessed the kingdom during their reigns. “But when the king disobeyed and worshiped other gods, immediately famines broke out, droughts came, and invasions occurred.” - lecturer

God chose Israel. Israel did not come into prominence because they chose God. Our lives pattern the experience of Israel. We may or may not become rich when following God but when we do follow him we recognize blessings that we find scarce or absent when we choose not to follow him.

The lecturer compares the northern kingdoms to caring for our body, the southern kingdom to caring for our soul, the invisible part that contains the personality, and is so obviously “gone when we look at the emptiness of a corpse and the terrible tragedy of death.” The temple was in Jerusalem and God dwelt in the temple. A focus on the health of the body separates us from God. I might also interject that we need balance in that in sickness we can rely on God but sickness tends to discourage us and it certainly narrows what we can do for God with a full, complete life.

Even with the temple among them, the southern kingdom too often lived without commitment to God. “In your kingdom your will is king and nothing can take place in your kingdom except as it passes by the authority of your will.” -lecturer In the southern kingdom, the primary kings who pleased God were Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah. God spoke to the kings through the prophets, the ones best known being Hosea, Amos, Joel, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha. Kings tells us of Elijah and Elisha.

Elisha’s ministry began as he observed Elijah ascend into heaven. Elish’s ministry is renowned for the miracles God did through

1. Jordan River parted (2 Kings 2:13-14)

2. Spring purified at Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22)

3. Widow’s oil multiplied (2 Kings 4:1-7)

4. Dead boy raised to life (2 Kings 4:18-37)

5. Poison in stew purified (2 Kings 4:38-41)

6. Food of prophets multiplied (2 Kings 4:42-44)

7. Naaman the leper healed (2 Kings 5:1-14)

8. Elisha’s servant Gehazi becomes a leper (2 Kings 5:15-27) 9. Ax head (of iron) floats (2 Kings 6:1-7)

10. Aramean army blinded (2 Kings 6:8-23)

11. Even when everything looks dead and absolutely gone. the Holy Spirit is still able to transform death into life by a touch. The dead man thrown into Elisha’s grave, upon hitting his bones, sprang again to life. (2 Kings 13:21)

By chapter 17 of 2 kings

the Lord was very angry with Israel [northern kingdom], and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only. {2 Ki 17:13-18 RSV}

“Judah was arrested from decay for awhile by the glorious life of Hezekiah who arose in the midst of darkness. His father had been an ungodly king and his son following him on the throne was an ungodly king. But Hezekiah was marked by the grace of God.” -lecturer Hezekiah’s son Manasseh did turn to God in old age but too late to turn the trajectory of the evil he had introduced as a young king.

Hezekiah ordered the temple cleansed of it’s heathen infestation. He reintroduced the Passover celebration. He destroyed the brass serpent Moses had crafted in the wilderness at God’s instruction to provide healing by faith. Even the things of God the people had corrupted and Hezekiah erased this corruption.

Manasseh returned the land to idolatry and Judah was finally carried away by Nebuchadnezzar. The book of 2 kings closes with Judah’s final king blinded and carried away to Babylon. This second book of kings is about wasted life, theirs and ours when we ignore or spite God.

1 CHRONICLES:

DAVID AND THE ARK OF GOD

1 Chronicles is thought to have been written by Ezra after the captivity and the return to Judah. It is about the king and the temple, most particularly David and the temple. 2 Chronicles continues with other kings and the temple.

The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles are lists of genealogies starting with Adam and charting Seth’s descendants. Cain had children but his lineage isn’t mentioned. Interestingly, short genealogies are given for Hagar, Keturah leading to the Mideonites, Esau leading to the Amalikites I believe, the Edomites (somehow connected to Esau),

Interestingly, in the middle of the listing of the descendants of “other clans of Judah” the geneology breaks out in admiration of Jabez:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” 10 Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

I don’t even see Jabez specifically in the Geneology. But God wanted this faithful believer memorialized.

The genealogy ends with the after thought, the addendum of King Saul’s geneology. Most of the geneology focuses on Abraham’s descendants, most specifically through

Judah’s kings and those who might have been kings after the captivity if Judah had remained faithful after David’s reign. Solomon messed that up. Wisdom outside of faithful commitment to God avails us nothing long lasting.

David longed to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. In his haste his method focused on expedience and not on obedience and reverence. It bypassed the role of the Levites which had been largely lost. Transporting the ark properly would have bestowed honor on the Levite laborers.

After failure and delay, proper procedure was successfully followed. Was the tabernacle also transported to Jerusalem? No. David places the ark on the site where the temple is to be built. In not bringing the tabernacle, David “replaces the authority of the priests by the authority of the king.” -lecturer

This makes me think of people who attend no church, belong to no denomination, contribute to causes that appeal to them, yet glorify in their personal spirituality unlinked to any other spirituality. This I see as a religion where “every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)” without undue consideration for the word of God.

“You are not your own, you are bought with a price." (1 Cor. 7:23) Your life is no longer yours to plan, to program, or to work out in advance. You belong to the Lord and he becomes king in your life. -lecturer

In Chapter 21, God points out the great sin of David, his census of the people to show his great strength. He’s not trusting in God’s power. He seeks to find strength in the power of numbers. He disappoints God in this. He shows his lack of faith.

The Christian must unlearn the paradigms of the world. We must learn that to be first we must be last. And to be strong we may appear to the world to be weak, relying on the ever strength of the Lord. God had always been with David. Why should he have suddenly felt that was insufficient?

A prophet came to David (1 Chronicles 21:10-17):

“I will give you three choices. God has said that you can have three years of famine or three months for your enemies to overcome you and run rife through the land or three days of the plague and pestilence." David did the wise thing. He said, "Who am I to determine anything like this. I will simply cast myself into the hands of the Lord. God is a God of great mercy. Let him do what he thinks is best." The angel of the Lord came into the midst of the people and for three days he slew with pestilence throughout the nation. David saw the angel with his sword stretched out over the city of Jerusalem ready to slay there also, but David pleaded with God: "It is my fault. Why do you take vengeance upon these others? I am the one to blame."

He was then told to buy cattle and the threshing floor of Ornan and to there erect an altar and worship. The pestilence was stayed and there the temple would in due time be built.

David could not build the temple he so longed to build. But God’s grace allowed him to store up materials and order the furniture to be built. 1 Chronicles ends with David and Solomon co-reigning.

2 CHRONICLES:

GOD'S KING IN GOD'S HOUSE

Chapters 1-9 speak of the temple. Solomon builds it on the land designated by David. Small, it is ornate with gold. The only item remaining from the tabernacle is the ark of the covenant. The dwelling place of the Lord couldn’t be replaced.

“The prayer of Solomon in chapter 6 shows that the temple was also made for the restoration from sin. Whether the people were under circumstances of spiritual failure or the punishment of captivity, they were to remember that if they would pray in earnestness -- genuinely confessing their sin -- God would hear them, heal their hearts, and restore them to their rightful place.” -lecturer

The fire of the Lord himself came down from the heavens, consuming the sacrifice in his honor. I can imagine it was the same fire that led Israel by night through the wilderness in the time of Moses.

Chapters 10-36 tell us of Judah’s kings up till the captivity. Nine were good kings and eleven bad kings. Manasseh Reigned 55 years, mostly as perhaps the worst of the bad kings. But as he became old he returned to the Lord as a good king,

Rehoboam miscalculated early in his reign when he ignored the counsel of the old elders in favor of that of his contemporaries. Not necessarily a bad thing. But later we read

When the rule of Rehoboam was established and was strong, he forsook the law of the Lord, {2 Chron 12:1 RSV}

He ignored his senior advisors and later ignored the Lord and the teachings of the law. So many Christians over the centuries choose to ignore the law of the Lord. Although perhaps a few, like perhaps the Old Order Amish choose to elevate the law above the Lord himself. (I’m not an expert on the Amish faith and I find much to admire. Most of what I think I know comes from reading Amish novels written by non-Amish Christians and a few by former Amish. Also I’ve viewed the Amazon Prime documentary “The Amish and the Reformation”.)

2nd Chronicles then tells of the reigns of three good or mostly good kings of Judah: Abijah, Asa who put aside his mother because she worshiped an idol but wrongly allied with Syria, Jehoshaphat to whom the Lord gave a great victory without bloodshed to Judah. The lecturer skips these good kings for the time being, moving on to the drama of the next bad king, much like the focus on TV and the movies.

When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he slew all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Judah. {2 Chr 21:4 RSV}

Moreover he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. {2 Chr 12:11 RSV}

The high places were a place of mixed worship that detracted from visiting and worshiping in the presence of the Lord at the temple. The high places distracted the northern tribes of Israel and would so distract the people of Judah.

Ahaziah, another bad king reigned a year. The previously deposed mother of Asa killed what she thought was all the royal sons. However, a royal daughter rescued Joash and hid him six years while his evil grandmother reigned.

A coup against the grandmother was engineered and

Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beersheba.

And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters.

And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord. 2 Chronicles 24:1-4

There followed Uzziah who reigned 52 years. “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did.” 2 Chronicles 26:4 He was punished with leprosy after a bad choice to act as a priest king.

Jotham ruled in the absence of his father until he himself became king “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord. And the people did yet corruptly.” 2 Chronicles 27:2 it appears that while not a bad king, he failed to set the example of worship at the temple. And apparently neither did many of Judah’s citizens. What’s more, ignoring worship the people became corrupt.

“The next bad king is King Ahaz. In chapter 28, verses 1-2, we read:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like his father David, but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made molten images for the Baals; {2 Chr 28:1-2 RSV}

And he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. {2 Chr 28:3-4 rsv}

After 16 years, Ahaz was captured by Syria according to the punishment determined by God. God holds leaders to a high standard.

“By contrast, the good kings reflect the grace of God in cleansing and restoring and they also reveal the instruments that he uses.” -lecturer We have seen blessings on

Judah during the reigns of good kings. Their individual wreckless sins of high multitude were punished, but God blessed the nation during their reigns, either through peace time or victories and national stability.

We have other good kings. We have other bad kings. The lecturer counts nine good kings and eleven bad kings. The ratio of good to bad is better than what I’d previously realized. Josiah was perhaps the best of the good, restoring the temple, discovering a lost book of the law and interestingly and significantly I believe unexpectedly going to Hulda, a woman of all persons in his time and perhaps even in ours to verify the authenticity of this lost book.

EZRA: THE WAY BACK

Ezra follows the captivity in Babylon and tells of the return of 50,000 to their homeland. The lecturer think the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah occur parallel although that is a minority view. In Ezra the temple is rebuilt. In Nehemiah the city and walls are rebuilt. Cyrus, in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy authorizes the return to Jerusalem. The last verse of 2 Chronicles and the first verse of Ezra are identical:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing.

After a break of 70 years, the history of God’s people, of Judah, resumes! The book of Ezra starts with the ministry of Zerubbabel and ends with that of Ezra. Judah had entered captivity a nation of sheep herders but in Babylon they transitioned to prosperous shopkeepers and bankers. The initiative to return to Jerusalem didn’t come from God’s people, comfortable in their new lives. The initiative came from God!

the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia. *Ibid*

They restored the altar first, I assume for sacrifices. They then laid the foundation for the temple. It’s finish was accompanied by cheer for accomplishment and among the old men, probably unable to physically work there was voiced disappointment. The new temple would look ordinary, not magnificent. God would be satisfied with a place where they could seek and meet with him.

They faced opposition from the Samaritans who had begun to move in. I’m not sure the lecturer and I see eye to eye on who the Samaritans are. I understand them to be the usurpers that Assyria replaced the people of the northern kingdom. God so frustrated them that Levites were sent to them to teach them of God. Levites weren’t priests. These new people didn’t want to completely follow a new God. And the Northern tribes had largely lost a good deal of their religion so the Levites could only incompletely teach them. Thus the Samaritans believed in the same God as the Jews did but worshiped differently.

Zerubbabel didn’t permit Samaritan help. The Samaritans then mocked and taunted them, used legal means to stop the work of rebuilding the temple. They discouraged the builders. God sent Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the Jews and moved on the hearts of the Persian kings Darius and Artaxerxes to deauthorize the rebuilding effort. On eventual completion they celebrated the Passover, marking the beginning of their sojourn with God and their renewed sojourn with Him.

Ezra now comes on the scene, having “set his heart to study the law of the Lord,… and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.” {Ezra 7:10 RSV}

Ezra soon learned of intermarriage with pagans around them. The men confessed and put away their families. One of these men is Uri, the Hebrew equivalent of George, my name. He did the hard thing, like Abraham did with Hagar and Ishmael. Sin brings tragedy and heartache. But it need not separate us from God.

NEHEMIAH: REBUILDING THE WALLS

The Hebrew Bible orders these three books as Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezra. We have them the other way around. This gives us the priorities of God: temple rebuilt, city and walls rebuilt, And then we have the history of the woman called by God to influence the Persian king to start the ball following.

The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?”

With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.”

The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request.

I also said to the king, “If it please the king, let me have letters addressed to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River,[b] instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah. And please give me a letter addressed to Asaph, the manager of the king’s forest, instructing him to give me timber. I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself.” And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me. Nehemiah 2:4-8

The queen beside the king seems to be Esther who has ingratiated herself into the heart of the king, known by the titles Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus but named Darius the Mede. God set it up, soothing the heart of the king to please his Hebrew wife.

Six chapters of Nehemiah tell of rebuilding the wall while the next seven tell of instructing the people. Nehemiah begins apparently in confusion, weeping and praying while looking at the ruined walls.

I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. {Neh 1:4 RSV}

A renewed connection with God and strength in his will begins with sorrow for our wasted days and prayer seeking the way forward. He confesses,

"O Lord, let thy ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who delight to fear thy name; and give success to thy servant today. ... and grant him [Nehemiah] mercy in the sight of this man." {Neh 1:11 RSV

Nehemiah then remembers who he is.

“Now I was cupbearer to the king.” {Neh 1:11c RSV}

A sermon I heard recently described the cupbearer as the most influential advisor to a king. He wasn’t cupbearer to die first if the drink was poisoned. He was highly trusted! Appointments to high office today require sensitive vetting, detailed background searching. Nehemiah had been vetted and discovered worthy of being trusted. The king expected Nehemiah to successfully rebuilt Jerusalem. And God had called him to the task.

Nehemiah was confronted by the Ammonite who again determined to stop this rebuilding. But Nehemiah organized and equally determined set about the work.

I suggest you pay special heed to the process of reconstruction set forth in the book of Nehemiah. We learn, first of all, that the people were willing to work; second, that they became involved and immediately started doing something. Nehemiah, in the wisdom that God gave him, set each of them to work building whatever part of the wall was nearest to each of their own houses so that they were personally involved in the work. The rest of the chapter describes how they went about building. It all centered on the ten gates of the city of Jerusalem. The people would be assigned a certain portion of the wall defined by the gates that gave access to the city. -lecturer

The lecturer spends several paragraphs telling of the various gates to the city. Ezra begins with the sheep gate where the sheep will enter for sacrifices. He cycles through eight additional gates repaired. The discussion of repairs ends,

The other goldsmiths and merchants repaired the wall from that corner to the Sheep Gate. Nehemiah 3:32

The lecturer now calls this the gate of the Cross. The purpose of the sacrifices was always to point to the cross. The people sacrificing were ignorant of the details of Christ’s life and crucifixion. But as far back as early life on our sin cursed world, Abel understood the intent of grace behind the sacrifice. He didn’t live long compared to his contemporaries, but he understood the promise and honored the God of the promise.

It’s as if in repairing these walls and gates they pulled a fast one on their enemies. They were organized and suffered mocking and threats but continued. After the gaps had been repaired their enemies raged with fury and at last discouraged some. Nehemiah placed guards at the lower walls. In faith, they counted on “our God will fight for us!” As families began feeling the shortages and pain of the siege, they complained. The rich had taken advantage of the opportunity and impoverished their fellow Jews.

Rather than fight, their enemies spread rumors of treason. In only 52 days they completed the walls and their enemies took notice, beginning to fear them.

They then studied the law. “And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” {Neh 8:8 RSV}

In chapter 12 they celebrate!

Probably before the captivity and certainly during the captivity the people had begun to forget the Sabbath.

When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. {Neh 13:19a RSV}

The book of Nehemiah ends with a problem with intermarriage with daughters of their enemies who taught pagan ways to the children of Jewish fathers. That was resolved harshly but effectively by Nehemiah and these wives and children were put away. Still, I hear discussions in church where yanking on hair and punching faces is found potentially acceptable because “it worked successfully” in Nehemiah’s day and there’s no record of God repremanding Nehemiah for this world-like violence.

ESTHER: A QUEEN UNDER CONTROL

Esther is raised by her uncle Mordecai, known to be a humble man. The king, identified in the lecture about Nehemiah was titled Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus but named Darius the Mede. He’d wished to flaunt the sensual beauty of his wife the queen during a six month celebration. She refused and he arrogantly deposed her.

Interestingly, this humble uncle proposed his niece audition for the role of new queen. She bedazzled Darius and was selected. Not glamorous! She was locked up with other wives and called at his will to his bedroom. She independently approached her husband at threat of death. She had little freedom or respect outside possibly the rest of the group of lesser wives, those bedroom partners who weren’t queen.

Haman is prime minister, a Agagite descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites whom Samuel viscously executed after Saul disobeyed and left this king of the Amalekites live. He had kept this resentment from 400 years earlier and now sensed the power to, in his eyes, right a wrong.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them." {Est 3:8 RSV}

Amalekites would later oppose and threaten Ezra and Nehemiah when rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They played a role in bringing down Saul’s dynasty. They attacked Israel in the wilderness. Esau forgave his brother Jacob. But his descendents who could have known and worshiped God as their God, as fellow descendents of Isaac failed in the opportunity to know Him.

Haman flatters the king into giving him “power of attorney” through personal possession of the king’s mark of authority, his signet ring. Mordecai learns of the plot, becomes distressed, his niece notices, they hesitantly communicate and Esther learns by circumstances the role God placed on her when bringing her great beauty to the attention of the king.

Haman doesn’t suspect Esther’s ethnicity. Neither did the king. Esther protested her role. She could be executed on the spot for presuming to approach the king uninvited. Didn’t Mordecai know that? Her uncle replied that she couldn’t trust on Haman not finding out who she was. She accepted, but asked

Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." {Est 4:16 RSV}

Community prayer! I like the thought of fellow Jews fasting at Susa. But even more I like Esther bringing in her maids also into fasting. These maids were not likely fellow Jews. God hears well intentioned prayers of people from various backgrounds. Or perhaps Esther had already shared her faith in the palace. After this community prayer, Esther then approaches the king, fearful in her mind but strong with her heart filled with the Holy Spirit. She either timidly or wisely asks for nothing. She simply issued an invitation to the king and the prime minister to another dinner. Maybe it was at the discretion of the Holy Spirit or maybe it was procrastination.

Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. {Est 5:9 RSV}

This grates on Haman and eats at his heart, and he says to his wife and sons, "I cannot live, I cannot stand it as long as this man Mordecai is in the court." His wife says, "If he stands in your way, get rid of him. Hang him. Erect a gallows 75 feet high (that's how high 50 cubits is) and in the morning go tell the king to hand him." Isn't that just like the flesh? If anything gets in your way, get rid of it. Don't let anybody stand in your way. Move right on through. Assert yourself. Stick out your chest and walk right on in as tyrant -- king of your world. -lecturer

The king was also disturbed, couldn’t sleep.

On that night the king could not sleep; and he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. {Est 6:l RSV}

He found how certain men, Bigthana and Teresh, two of his own guards. had plotted against his life. He read that Mordecai had found it out and reported it, so that these two men were put to death as traitors against the king. This was recorded in the book and it was by the book that deliverance began to come. for there the king discovered who his real friend was. And as he read, he noted that he had done nothing to honor Mordecai. -lecturer

Haman comes in [next morning] and the king asks him for advice:

What can the king do to the man in whom he delights?" {cf, Est 6:6}

Of course the flesh always knows who that is. Haman thinks, "Well, who else would be the king's favorite but me?" Thus he thinks of the greatest honor he could possibly enjoy. He says to the king, "If you really want to honor the man in whom you delight, then give him your crown, your robe, your authority, everything you are, and set him on your horse. Then appoint some prince to lead him through the city and cry out, 'This is the man in whom the king delights!'" So the king says, "Haman that is wonderful. Go do it for Mordecai." -lecturer

Utter humiliation for Haman. He’d walked right into it, even though the king did not mean to humiliate him.

I can’t imagine how Mordecai felt. He must have felt uncomfortable because he knew this only further inflamed Haman’s desire for revenge. But Mordecai could also likely see the hand of God in this unusual situation.

At dinner the next day, Queen Esther reveals the perfidy of Haman. The king was horrified. He ordered Haman hung on the gallows Haman’s wife had suggested for Mordecai. The king then unwittingly punished Haman’s wife.

On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, {Est 8:1a RSV}

Through the faithfulness of Mordecai and Esther, God influenced a pagan king to protect the people of Judah, to later authorize and fund a return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city.

I read that some scholars think of Esther as a book of mythology, partly because it doesn’t directly mention God. They find fault with Mordecai suggesting his Jewish niece enter a pageant to become a wife of this obviously immoral king. But prayer is suggested in the text requesting her people fast for three days. And if Nehemiah 2:6 can be assumed to refer to Queen Esther,

The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request.

(and with time proximity it seems reasonable), then this woman in the Bible seems to have influenced the character of the king if not his religion. It might be that having a second courageous wife brave his pomposity, both queens may have softened his behavior. We certainly see God in control of the events of man in the book of Esther.

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1. How has this module helped your studies?

I’d add the following to David’s final sins.

I’d go to 1 Kings 2 and say David in his last conversation with Solomon instructed his successor to put blood on his hands. Men that David had promised protection to he told his son to kill. David pretended to keep the promise but I consider that breaking a promise. God overlooked and even specifically forgave bloodshed in the case of Uriah. But God denied David the pleasure and legacy of building a temple *because* of blood on his hands. Now in feeble old age he tells Solomon to put blood on his hands. Where’s the integrity in doing that. God had promised to David that his successor son, named by God as Solomon even before Solomon was born, would have a peaceful reign and build the temple. In faith there was no reason Solomon needed to kill these men in order to shore up his ability to rule as king. David failed to trust God in his old age. Of course, I don’t think old age even from a mostly faithful life is easy. I actually think it gets harder in old age because you see at least traces of self remaining that you’ve always struggled with.

I find questions 1, 2, and 4 to be closely equivalent.

2. What new lessons have you learned?

I find it interesting that Boas is listed in both genealogies of Jesus. I would have thought that in redeeming Elimelech’s son (“that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his native place”) that Elimelech and his son would show in the genealogy. Ruth is named, unusually, in Matthew’s genealogy which my google search says shows Joseph’s lineage. I don’t know whether Ruth is named to prominently show that she as a foreigner, non-native Israelite demonstrates God’s eternal intention to be God of all people, not just Hebrews, Israelites, Jews, and Christian (which I do believe). Or perhaps this was a way to show redemption of a childless Israelite. Note that I also see Rahab named but she’s so close to Obed that it seems difficult to understand her to be the Rahab of Jericho (although I’ve always been told she was the same).

I might also note that while Bathsheba isn’t listed by name, she is among the few women mentioned in the geneology; as the wife of Uriah. Whether this is to memorialize David’s sin or to obliquely remember another foreigner, non-native Hebrew, I don’t know.

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The lecturer explains the sin of the high places. The Israelites defeated a community but did not “break down their altars”. They co-opted altars built to worship Baal and Ashtaroth to perform the rituals of worshiping God. Against God’s express command! I’m unsure whether priests performed sacrifices on these altars contrary to the law to offer sacrifices only at the tabernacle or the temple. God’s presence was recognized at the ark of the covenant in the most holy of holies in the tabernacle and later the temple.

I’ve never before heard a description of what was wrong with the high places; only that worship at the high places was forbidden. It always seemed strange to me that one had to travel such long distances to worship. Still does. But the explanation explains the sin of the high places.

Question: Did Solomon himself perform sacrifices at the high places? Or did he bring priests to offer sacrifices at the high places. Or just observe locals sacrificing at the high places? RE:

he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places. {1 Ki 3:3 RSV}

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Ezra soon learned of intermarriage with pagans around them. The men confessed and put away their families. One of these men is Uri, the Hebrew equivalent of George, my name. He did the hard thing, like Abraham did with Hagar and Ishmael. Sin brings tragedy and heartache. But it need not separate us from God.

If only these followers of God had taken the responsibility to personally take on the responsibility to teach their sons and daughters about God, about worship, how to pray and worship. Men don’t need to take the easy path, leaving religious training and nurturing to only mothers. They could have saved and kept their children. And who knows, the wives may have listened in, they may have recognized a better way following their husband’s faith. Just because Jewishness is through the mother is no reason to throw up your hands and give up your children to the devil.

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The book of Nehemiah ends with a problem with intermarriage with daughters of their enemies who taught pagan ways to the children of Jewish fathers. That was resolved harshly but effectively by Nehemiah and these wives and children were put away. Still, I hear discussions in church where yanking on hair and punching faces is found potentially acceptable because “it worked successfully” in Nehemiah’s day and there’s no record of God repremanding Nehemiah for this world-like violence.

I think it’s the wrong lesson to emphasize. I think fathers should be taught by the church to take at least an qual hand in the nurturing and spiritual education of their children.

3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. We mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

I understand the lecturer’s intention to tell the story of Christ’s grace and redemption to us as fallen sinners, foreigners to eternal sinless perfection. I however believe the fact that Orpah and Ruth continued to live with Naomi after their husbands died is a testament to the love and faith they learned in this Hebrew home. Society at the time, I believe, would have forced upon them that they needed to remarry as soon as possible. Women were dependent on men. Here we have not one but three women without financial support. They had all three experienced unusual love among these men in a society that typically used women as objects.

Yes, Orpah had second thought about losing connection to her biological family. And society probably allowed her to return to her father for support. And she did in the end return, possibly fearing life as a hated immigrant in a foreign country. She may have seen this family as the exception, not the rule. And I dare say she was right. Although as we see with Boaz, he was respectful, generous, and diligent to obey Hebrew law and custom; just like I see Naomi and Elimelech.

So I agree with the intention of the analogy but disagree with the foundation and family dynamics underpinning the analogy.

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11. Even when everything looks dead and absolutely gone. the Holy Spirit is still able to transform death into life by a touch. The dead man thrown into Elish’s grave, upon hitting his bones, sprang again to life. (2 Kings 13:21)

This needs to be corrected in the text since the text typoed and says it was Elijah’s bones. Elijah had ascended into heaven, a living, breathing body/soul.

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They (people with Ezra) faced opposition from the Samaritans who had begun to move in. I’m not sure the lecturer and I see eye to eye on who the Samaritans are. I understand them to be the usurpers that Assyria replaced the people of the northern kingdom. God so frustrated them that Levites were sent to them to teach them of God. Levites weren’t priests. The people didn’t want to completely follow a new God. And the Northern tribes had largely lost a good deal of their religion so the Levites could only incompletely teach them. Thus the Samaritans believed in the same God as the Jews did but worshiped differently.

4. How does this lesson help you?

Ruth in verse 1 starts with Elimelech, Ruth’s deceased father in law whose Hebrew name means “my God is king”. Deuteronomy 11:19 instructs the Israelites to speak often of God, when relaxing at home, when walking or traveling, before going to bed and upon arising in the morning. Emimelech’s parents reminded their son who his king was every time they called his name. The book of Ruth is about God. It starts with the name of God and his intended role in our lives.

The meaning of Elimelech name is essential to the understanding of the book of Ruth. He’s hardly mentioned in the book. He is not in the lineage of Jesus, nor is his son; only his daughter-in-law whom it appears Elimeleck never met.

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