

Back To Basics

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GIMMICK OR GOSPEL POWER?

Johnie Edwards

It might just surprise you at the gimmicks churches are using to try to entice folks to attend. Let's take a look:

1) **A NEW HOUSE.** According to an article in the December 28, 2005 *Herald-Times*, Bloomington, Indiana: "In a game-show style giveaway, the Abundant Life Christian Center of La Marque, TX plans to award a \$120,000 three-bedroom house to one of its worshipers on New Years's Eve. They have given away a car, motorcycle, and furniture. It encourages people to come to the service...." The apostle Paul said, "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation..." (Rom. 1:16). Do you think the folks attending these services are there to hear the gospel or win a house?

2) **FREE OIL CHANGE.** A mega Chicago church uses all kinds of gimmicks to draw folks in. Before it was built, area people were asked what they would like to have in a church. Can you imagine letting people rather than the Lord make this decision? They just built a large gym and one of their gimmicks is one can drop the car off for an oil change! God's drawing power is "teaching, hearing and learning..." (Jn. 6:44-45).

3) **FREE MEALS.** Some churches swell their numbers by providing free meals. An area church encourages folks to "come eat on Wednes-

day nights, and be here for church services." Times have not changed much for Jesus said in His day, "...Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (Lk. 6:26). I wonder how their attendance would be if they quit serving dinner.

4) **GYMS AND THE LIKE.** Most denominational churches build or see nothing wrong with building gyms, family life centers, kitchens, and the like. Some of our liberal brethren have done the same. Often these, along with recreational activities, are used as gimmicks to draw folks in. Try reading Romans 14:17 to see if such is the work of the church!

5) **STILL SO.** The September 23, 1951 Gospel Advocate Annual Bible Study Lesson said it just as it is: "It is not the duty of the church to provide entertainment for young or old. It is not a part of the program of the church to provide playgrounds, programs of entertainment or supervisors of such programs...It is no more the duty of the church to provide recreation for the young people than it is the duty of the church to provide a business for every member of the church to conduct. The church has all it can do to carry on the work the Lord gave it, that is, preaching the gospel to the lost, edifying the saved and caring for the needy."

THE LORD'S WAY

John Isaac Edwards

Super Bowl-winning Coach Tony Dungy, of the Indianapolis Colts, recently accepted a Friend of the Family award from the Indiana Family Institute, a state-based family policy council associated with Focus on the Family. During his acceptance speech, Coach Dungy announced his support for Indiana's state marriage-protection amendment, which would define marriage between a man and a woman in the state constitution. "...we're trying to promote the family – family values the Lord's way," explained Coach Dungy. Way to go, Coach! Since the Lord's way is best (Is. 55:8-9), we need to learn to promote and do things the Lord's way.

1) **THE FAMILY – THE LORD'S WAY.** The Lord brought the family into existence, in the very beginning (Gen. 2:18-24), and it needs to be arranged the Lord's way. The Lord's way is for one man and one woman to be married for one lifetime and to have and raise children together. The man is to be the head of the family, the woman is to be in submission to her husband, and the children are to honor and obey their parents (Eph. 5:22-6:2). That is the family – the Lord's way.

2) **THE CHURCH – THE LORD'S WAY.** The Lord built the church (Mt. 16:18), purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28), and is the "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). Everything about the Lord's church – the name that it wears, the work it does, the way it is organized, how it worships – is to be the Lord's way. The church is not like Burger King, where you can have it your way.

3) **EVANGELISM – THE LORD'S WAY.** A lot of folks have gotten away from doing evangelism

the Lord's way. In New Testament days, disciples "went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Local churches, like the church of the Thessalonians, "sounded out the word of the Lord" (1 Th. 1:8). This is evangelism – the Lord's way.

4) **SALVATION – THE LORD'S WAY.** Men have devised lots of different ways of being saved. Since Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9), we must go about being saved His way. Hearing the gospel, having faith in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, being baptized, and living right is salvation – the Lord's way.

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SOME THINGS THAT BLOOM

Melba Edwards

Spring came early here in southern Indiana. It seemed everyday there was a new sign of the coming spring. We went from winter's black and white to spring's vibrant color. As I see so many trees and flowers in bloom, I think of what the Bible tells us about some things that bloom.

1) **CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD.** Jesus said, in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:27-34, “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, Oh you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” How much of our time is spent worrying? What will our worrying change? If we can do something about whatever the problem is, then we need to get busy and do something. Many times we worry about things we cannot change. Or we worry about things, as in this text, we need to remember that the Lord will provide.

The point Jesus is making is to “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Do we put our faith and trust in the Lord? If we are worrying, we aren't. Next time we see some lilies of the field, let us take some time to consider what our Lord said about them and stop worrying so much.

2) **REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR BEFORE THE ALMOND TREE BLOSSOMS.** We can read about the almond tree blossoming in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. Here Solomon is telling the young, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say I have no pleasure in them.” Among many other things that come with difficult days or old age, Solomon said, “... the almond tree blossoms.” If we live long enough, our hair turns white or silvery. If we are older, we need to teach our children and grandchildren to remember their Creator while they are young. If we are young, we need to remember our Creator now, in our youth. Some day we will grow old and not be able to do the things we once could. We need to serve God with all our strength while we have strength. As we look at the almond tree, we need to remember our Creator.

There are so many lessons we can learn from God's wonderful creation. As we look around, let us take time to enjoy the handiwork of God. While at the same time, meditate on the lessons we can learn from it and then get busy and do what the Lord said to do.

CHURCH SAYS REMARRIAGE NOT ADULTERY

Donnie V. Rader

The Associated Press released a story with the above title. Below is a portion of it.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Church of God of Prophecy has voted to reverse its position that people who remarry after a divorce are committing adultery. The majority of the 8,000 gathered at the denomination's general assembly in Nashville voted Sunday in favor of the new policy. The denomination has long held that remarriage after divorce is a violation of biblical teachings, though that doctrine has made it difficult in recent years to attract new followers amid high divorce rates, according to church leaders. Church pastors can now determine on a case-by-case basis the reasons for a divorce and whether a divorced person who remarries is in an adulterous relationship, said Shaun McKinley, spokesman for the Cleveland, Tenn.-based denomination, which has nearly 1 million members. The new policy also affirms that marriage is sacred, encourages spouses in troubled marriages to reconcile and says the church does not recognize same-sex or polygamous marriages. It also said that the church must recognize "some things are beyond human ability to repair and reconcile" and redefined the church's definition of "fornication," as mentioned in the Bible. The definition previously included divorced people in subsequent marriages, but now the definition includes sex outside marriage, "sexual immorality," homosexuality or bestiality. The church, which already has female clergy, voted to allow women to become church deacons.

I'm reminded of Paul's statement about those who ignored God's righteousness (his plan) and went about to establish their own righteousness (own plan) and thus did not obey God's word (Rom. 10:1-3). This is obviously an extreme case. However, before we point too many fingers at this Pentecostal group, we might take this as a warning to us about how far things can go.

1) **WHY REVERSE THEIR POSITION?** Nothing is said about a study of the text (Acts 17:11) and concluding that they have been wrong. Rather, it was because, "that doctrine has made it difficult in recent years to attract new followers amid high divorce rates, according to church leaders." Could brethren be doing the same today? Could we feel the pressure of so many turning aside when they learn what the Bible says on divorce and remarriage?

2) **HOW COULD THEY HAVE BEEN WRONG?** Since the Church of God of Prophecy is one that believes in Holy Spirit baptism today, how could those who were guided by the Spirit when they taught that remarriage after divorce led to adultery have been wrong? Was the Holy Spirit wrong? Did they not have the Spirit when they took the previous position? How do we know that those who hold to the new position are guided by the Spirit?

3) **WHY VOTE?** Is the Bible position determined by how many raise their hand? What if the majority had voted to keep the old policy? Would that have been the truth? When the question of circumcision arose, that was settled by appealing to command, example, and necessary inference (Acts 15), not by a show of hands.

4) **CONTRASTED TO JESUS.** Jesus said, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Mt. 19:9). Thus, one who remarries following an unscriptural divorce commits adultery. Voting does not change that!

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PRECIOUS PROMISES

Alan Jones

Could you put a price on the promises of God? That is why Peter calls them *precious* (2 Pet. 1:4). Though most of us may realize the value of God's promises, as Peter said, it is good to be reminded (2 Pet. 1:12). Why are God's promises worth so much?

1) **WHO PROMISED.** I am writing just before election time. Commercial after commercial speaks of promises. Those trying to unseat the incumbents are constantly pointing out that the incumbents have not kept their promises. Much of the time, politicians' promises are not worth much. However, the promises Peter calls precious "you can take to the bank" because God made them. There is no "yes, no, and maybe" about the promises of God. In Jesus, they are "yes." All we can do is add the "Amen" ("let them be so"), to the glory of God (2 Cor. 1:18-20). We can confidently expect that God will fulfill His promises because He cannot lie (Ti. 1:2). We can trust Him because of His power. Like Abraham, an old man with a barren wife, we can be fully assured that what God has promised He is able also to perform (Rom. 4:19-21).

2) **WHAT HE PROMISED.** The promises of God are almost innumerable. We could not hope to even list them in a one-page article. (Making a list could be a faith-building exercise for you to do on your own). But, Paul gives us a bird's-eye view of God's promises in God's own words: "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and

daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:16-18). A luxury car to drive, \$40,000. A mansion to live in, \$1,000,000. Being called a child of God, "priceless" (1 Jn. 3:1). For everything money can buy, there's Mastercard. But money could not buy the precious promises. Only by the precious blood of the Lamb could God purchase us to be His own (1 Pet. 1:18-19) so that we could receive all that He has promised to His family, both in time and for eternity (Mk. 10:29-30).

3) **WHY HE PROMISED.** When I was a boy, my Dad worked second shift. So, during the school year, many times my brothers and I did not see him from Sunday night until he came home on Friday night late. Mom promised us that, if we were good, then we could stay up to see Dad. She called Friday night "privilege night." Motivated by the expectation of seeing Dad, we usually behaved pretty well during the week and enjoyed what Mom promised. God's promises are precious to us because by them we become partakers of the divine nature. We put away sin and we develop the character of Jesus Christ so that one day we may enjoy the privilege of seeing Him (2 Pet. 1:4-11; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Jn. 3:2-3).

Are God's promises "precious" to you? Do you trust Him who promised? Do you appreciate the value of what He promised? Are His promises affecting your life as He intended when He made them?

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THINGS WE OUGHT TO DO

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Man is created by God with the ability to make decisions about what he “ought” and “ought not” to do in life. We learn how we should live from the word of God. When a man turns away from God, he forsakes the truth on how he ought to live. If we keep our attention directed toward the teachings of our Father in heaven, then we will know what we ought to do.

1) WE OUGHT TO OBEY ALL OF GOD’S COMMANDMENTS. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for failing to obey all of God’s commandments. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Mt. 23:23). The Pharisees were condemned for leaving some of God’s commandments undone. We cannot pick and choose which commandments we will obey. Being obedient to all of God’s commands takes devoted hearing and doing (Mt. 7:24-25). Obeying all of God’s commands is what we ought to do (1 Th. 4:1; 1 Jn. 2:6).

2) WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. We are to submit to the governing authorities of men (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), but when human authority conflicts with God’s authority, we must make the right choice to obey God. The Jewish governing authorities had commanded the apostles to cease preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:28). They wanted to know why the apostles had disobeyed their command. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29). God and His will must always come first.

3) HUSBANDS OUGHT TO LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEMSELVES. The love between a husband and wife should be genuine. Sometimes a husband will show more interest in other things (job, house, hobbies, sports) than in his wife. This should not be. “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28). If husbands would show as much attention to the needs of their wives as they do themselves and their own interests, more marriages would be happy and fulfilling.

4) WE OUGHT TO CONDUCT OURSELVES IN A HOLY MANNER. After teaching that the “day of the Lord” will come, Peter asks us to consider “what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...?” (2 Pet. 3:11). We are to be holy in our conduct because “He who called you is holy” (1 Pet. 1:15). This is even more significant when we realize that we are members of the household of God. Just as children learn to conduct themselves properly at home, a Christian must know how he “ought to conduct [himself] in the house of God...” (1 Tim. 3:15).

5) WE OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. “Beloved if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn. 4:11). Brethren should love one another in the family of God, even if one should fall into error (Gal. 6:1, 10). God demonstrated His love in Christ (Rom. 5:6-8). We should love our fellow man, and especially those who are part of the family of God.

Are you doing what you ought to do?

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How We Got The Bible

Bob Waldron

The account of how we got the Bible is exceedingly complex, and involves much controversy. Much of that controversy, however, centers around whether one believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God or not. In this article, I would like to give a summary of the processes by which the Bible came to exist in its present form.

1) WRITING OF THE AUTOGRAPHS. Autograph means the original document written by the original writer. Paul writes, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore Moses, Samuel, David, Paul, and others would have written the original documents. Not one of these autographs has ever been found. We should not be surprised. These originals were written on very perishable materials, and they would have been worn out with use and with copying. And one reason for the lack of really old manuscripts of the Old Testament is that when a document was fairly well worn out the Jews would destroy the manuscript rather than see it used in a profane or irreverent way.

2) COPIES. The writings of inspired men would have been revered by those who possessed them. Passionate belief in their value guaranteed that the autographs would be shared with others. One of the best ways to do that would be through copying. Copying was done by hand, and it was a formidable task because the autographs written up to 3500 years ago were not as legible and readable as modern printed books. Also, Hebrew, during the time of the writing of the Old Testament books, was a language written almost without any vowels, and it required a good working knowledge of the spoken language to use the manuscripts, certainly to copy them. With all the difficulties, it is astounding how accurate the copying was. As the centuries went by, very exacting procedures were developed to keep check on accuracy. In the Old Testament, we have few copies in Hebrew that predate Christ. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, we had virtually no copies of the Hebrew scriptures older than the ninth century B.C. The discovery of these scrolls pushed the date of our oldest Hebrew manuscripts back a

thousand years. One of the things that amazed scholars was the similarities between the Dead Sea scrolls and the Hebrew manuscripts of a thousand years later. For example, I have had occasion to compare fairly intimately the Hebrew text of the Leningrad Codex (1008 A.D.) and the Dead Sea scrolls containing 1 and 2 Samuel. Though the Dead Sea scrolls containing these books are somewhat fragmentary, there is a remarkable agreement between them, showing that discrepancies arising between copies were relatively insignificant.

3) DETERMINING THE TEXT. Although the writing of the original documents was inspired, the copying of them was not, no more than preachers today are inspired. When a preacher uses a passage, only his integrity and his diligence to be accurate will protect against misuse of the scriptures. Similarly, the accuracy of copies depended upon the skill, integrity, and diligence of the scribes to reproduce the originals. It was therefore inevitable that there would be some differences between the many copies that were made. The question that

arose therefore, was: when copies disagree on the text, which copy do we take? In the Old Testament, the process of arriving at a standard Hebrew text really began about the time of Christ, and continued until the end of the Middle Ages, although, substantially, a standard text was arrived at by the time of the Leningrad Codex (1008 A.D.), or even the Aleppo Codex (925 A.D.). In the New Testament, there were literally thousands of copies of Greek manuscripts, and the task of arriving at a standard text involved the comparison of an abundance of manuscripts. When Erasmus prepared his Greek New Testament in 1516, he only had about five or six Greek manuscripts, none of which went back before the twelfth century A.D. He had to do some patching together, and some improvising. His copy of the Greek New Testament became the basis both of Luther's translation and of the King James Version. Since Erasmus' day, thousands of Greek manuscripts have been examined. These manuscripts are still available to scholars today. In other words, the impression is often left that out of the murky depths of the past, somebody came up with the New Testament from who knows where, and we have no way to check their work or to verify it. This is simply not true, and for anyone

to affirm such a thing is a sign of either abysmal ignorance, or blatant dishonesty. A fairly good method of evaluating the various families of manuscripts is to read the King James Version and compare it to the American Standard. Though there are some differences, they are not very significant.

4) **TRANSLATIONS.** The same faith that moved men to make copies of the scriptures also produced translations. One can easily think of four reasons for translations. One is that any people may find themselves in circumstances where they are forced to learn and speak a new language, such as the Jews when they were carried away to Babylon, or the Jewish colonists in Alexandria, Egypt. The former learned Aramaic, and the latter Greek. A second reason was the competition between common languages, such as Greek and Latin, in the centuries following Christ that resulted gradually in Latin supplanting Greek, so that scriptures of the New Testament, originally written in Greek, had to be translated into Latin. A third reason for translations is that the same faith in the value of the scriptures that caused them to be copied so carefully and diligently also encouraged the sharing of the scriptures with people of other languages. Translations aided greatly in evangelizing people

of other languages, nationalities, and cultures. A fourth reason is that in the passing of time, a language evolves and has to be updated. In the time of King Alfred (870-901) a well-known line of scripture in English was "Sic gehalyed dhin noma." In 1611 these words were rendered, "Hallowed be thy name." Beginning with the third century before Christ, there is a sequence of translations in various languages down to the present day. Although there are some translations that we do not actually have, most of them we still possess. Again, this means that we can examine these translations; we can compare them with manuscripts in the original languages. Some religious groups like to talk about mysterious "corruptions" in translation, but we are perfectly capable of examining the various translations and if there is a mistranslation, we have the means of discovering it and correcting it.

Sir Frederick Kenyon writes, "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries" (*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 23).

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THE PATRIARCHS: ABRAHAM (PART 2)

Joe R. Price

Abram was wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold. His nephew, Lot, was also rich. So great were their possessions they eventually separated in order to sustain their flocks and avoid strife. Years later, their lives intersected in a dramatic hostage rescue mission. Invading forces from the north plundered the southern region of Canaan, capturing Lot. Abram's heroic pursuit and defeat of the enemy liberated Lot. Recorded in Genesis 13-14, these events culminate with Abram giving a tithe to Melchizedek (king of Salem and priest of God), who had blessed him. From Abram, Lot, and Melchizedek, we learn powerful lessons about unwavering faith, foolish selfishness, and the grace of God.

1) **ABRAM: THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME.** Abram was a man of faith. He is the prototype for those today that live by faith (Rom. 4:11-12, 16; Gal. 3:7-9). Abram's faith in Genesis 13-14 sets a worthy example for Christians, teaching us this world is not our home. *Abram the pilgrim.* Although the text says that Abram "dwelt" in Canaan, it is clear that he was a sojourner in that land (Gen. 13:12). Three times in Genesis 13 it is said that Abram "went" (13:1, 3, 18). He was a traveler. God commanded him, and he willingly obeyed, "Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Gen. 13:17). Christians are "sojourners and pilgrims" who are expected to live by faith, not by sight (1 Pet. 2:11; 2 Cor. 5:7). Abram kept his eyes on the promises of God, obeyed God, and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness (Gen. 13:14-18; 15:1-6). Our faith must be like his. *Abram the humble.* When strife broke out between their herdsmen, Abram's brotherly affection prompted him to defer to Lot (Gen. 13:5-9).

This was not unity at the expense of truth; it was unity at the expense of personal ego and pride. It takes humility to be united in Christ (Eph. 4:2-3; Rom. 15:3-7). *Abram the soldier.* Living by faith includes fighting against the forces of evil (1 Tim. 6:12; Eph. 6:10-13). It is worth noting that when Abram learned that Lot was in danger, he rallied and armed his men, pursued and defeated the enemy (Gen. 14:12-17). Abram did not say, "Let someone else go to battle," or, "Lot is now getting what he deserves." Instead, he was "valiant in battle" and "turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. 11:34). Christians are soldiers of Jesus Christ, and victory is assured against sin and death through faith (2 Tim. 1:3; 4:7-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; 1 Jn. 5:4). *Abram the worshiper.* Abram worshiped God when he traveled (Gen. 13:3-4, 18; 14:18-20). Ironically, many Christians view travel as a good reason not to worship God. Abram was a giver, not a taker (Gen. 14:20-24). Likewise, Christians are to be ready to give with purpose of heart, cheerfully, as God has prospered us (1 Tim. 6:18; 2 Cor. 9:6-7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

2) **LOT: THIS WORLD IS MY HOME.** When we are introduced to Lot in Genesis 13, his eyes are set on himself instead of the promises of God. "And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere...then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan...and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain..." (Gen. 13:10-12). The course of Lot's life well demonstrates that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Lk. 12:15). Lot's choice placed him squarely in the midst of wicked men. It is true that we live in this world, but we must not be of this world (Jn. 17:14-17). Lot was "oppressed"

and his righteous soul “tormented” daily as he witnessed the filthy and vile conduct of the men of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7-8). His shortsighted choice to “pitch his tent even as far as Sodom” weakened his godly influence and no doubt contributed to the spiritual demise of his family (Gen. 19:4-9, 14, 26, 30-38). Because he lived in Sodom he was captured by enemy kings and led away (Gen. 14:12). We cannot fail to learn this lesson: Where we choose to live, how we choose to make our living, and those with whom we choose to associate will have a temporal and an eternal impact upon us (1 Cor. 15:33-34; Mt. 6:24, 33).

3) **MELCHIZEDEK: KING OF PEACE, PRIEST OF GOD.** Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, appears on the patriarchal landscape of Genesis 14 and just as abruptly recedes into its shadows. Yet, he is a shadow or figure of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our King and the High Priest of our confession (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 3:1; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 11-28). Jesus Christ is a priest “in the likeness of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:15, 3). That is to say, Christ’s priesthood is like that of Melchizedek, whose priesthood, according to Hebrews 7:3:

Did not depend on his parentage (“without father, without mother, without genealogy”);

Had no predecessor or successor (“having neither beginning of days or end of life”);

Was unchangeable (remains a priest continually”).

Melchizedek’s greatness is seen as he blesses Abram and receives tithes from him (Heb. 7:6-7). From this event it is necessarily inferred that the priesthood of Christ is “better” than the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:4-19). Like Melchizedek, Christ is simultaneously King and Priest (Heb. 7:1-2; Ps. 110:1-4; Zech. 6:12-13). Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (Heb. 7:25; 4:14-16).

4) **WHAT WILL YOUR ANSWER BE?** Abram “dwelt in the land of Canaan,” but this world was not his home. Lot “dwelt in the cities of the plain” and by so doing, this world became his home (Gen. 13:12). Melchizedek, foreshadowing our great King and High Priest, dwelt in “righteousness” and “peace,” thus signaling a king and a kingdom that is not of this world (Heb. 7:2; Jn. 18:36). Where is your home? Where do you pitch your tent? Are you serving God, or yourself? Walk by faith, not by sight.

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THE PATRIARCHS: ABRAHAM (PART 3)

David Eldridge

The life of the patriarch Abraham is one worthy of examination. In his life and the events surrounding it, we see both his faith and the faithfulness of God. Let us consider more of this patriarch of old.

1) **GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM.** After Abram was blessed by Melchizedek, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). It seems Abram wanted to know more of the reward as he asks God, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless...behold, to me thou hast given no seed" (Gen. 15:2-3). It is then that God promises Abram a son "that shall come forth out of thine own bowels" (Gen. 15:4). Furthermore, Abram is promised by God that his seed would be as the stars of heaven in number. Though his wife Sarai was past her child-bearing years, Abram "believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). In addition, God also renewed the land promise to Abram saying, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen. 15:7). God does not forget His promises, but is faithful to fulfill every one.

2) **THE BIRTH OF ISHMAEL.** Though the promise was made that Abram would have a son, Sarai seems to try to help God out in the fulfillment of this promise. Sarai had a handmaid named Hagar that she gave to Abram to be his wife that he might have children by her since she was barren (Gen. 16:1-3). Hagar did conceive a child by Abram and he called the child's name Ishmael. Though he had a son in Ishmael, this was not the son that God had promised. Speak-

ing of this, Paul wrote, "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise" (Gal. 4:22-23). Though God would bless Ishmael and his descendents, Ishmael was not the son of promise – that son would come from the womb of Sarai. This is also seen in the fact that Abram's name was changed to Abraham because, God says, "I have made thee the father of many nations." Sarai's name was also changed to Sarah of whom God said, "I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (Gen. 17:16).

3) **THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION.** Abraham was told by the Lord, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you" (Gen. 17:10-11). This token of the covenant was so important that God declared any male that was not circumcised would be "cut off from his people" because he had broken God's covenant (Gen. 17:14). Abraham shows a good example of obedience in that he "took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money...and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him." The same day Abraham received the command, he obeyed it.

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DIVINE COMMUNICATION IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Jeremy Sweets

The book of Joshua is divided into two sections: The first 12 chapters tell of the possession of the land and the second 12 chapters tell of the division of the land. In the first section, a particular pattern is repeated. Six times the text states that the Lord told Joshua, Joshua instructed the people, and the people did as they were instructed.

- o Prepare to cross the Jordan River (1:1-18).
- o Stand still in the Jordan (3:7-17).
- o Take twelve stones from the Jordan (4:1-8).
- o Come up from the Jordan (4:15-19).
- o Destroy Jericho (6:2-21).
- o Set an ambush for Ai (8:1-17).

Five additional times God instructed Joshua, and Joshua obeyed the Lord's voice.

- o Circumcise Israel (5:2-3).
- o Remove evil from the camp (7:10-26).
- o Stretch out your javelin (8:18).
- o Do not fear the five-king coalition (10:8-9).
- o Hamstring the horses of the five-king coalition (11:6-9).

In one particular example, this pattern is noticeably absent. The Gibeonites were under a death sentence as inhabitants of Canaan. However, they deceived Joshua into thinking that they were from a distant country, making a covenant for safety. This time, God did not give instructions on the matter, and Joshua and the Israelites "did not ask for the counsel of the Lord" (9:14).

Notice the following lessons we learn from the pattern of communication in Joshua:

1) GOD GAVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PEOPLE. If God has expectations for His people, He will instruct them. God promised Israel the Land of Canaan, and He guided

them in taking the land. Today, God has revealed His expectations in an understandable way (Eph. 3:3-5; Heb. 1:1-2).

2) JOSHUA SPOKE THE WORD OF THE LORD. When God spoke to Joshua, He expected him to relay His word to the people of Israel. Joshua did not have the prerogative to change God's message. Today, we have a responsibility to spread God's word, and we must speak with a book, chapter and verse, instead of our own opinion (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 4:11).

3) JOSHUA AND THE ISRAELITES OBEYED THE WORD OF THE LORD. As God's leader, Joshua was not only responsible for relaying God's word, he also had to obey it. The people of Israel looked to Joshua to speak and live the word of God. When others see us, they will take notice if we practice what we preach (1 Tim. 4:11-12, 16). The people of Israel should also be commended. When God told them what to do, they simply obeyed. They did not question the Lord and they did not delay. We must imitate their example of obedience (Rom. 6:16-18; 15:4).

4) WITHOUT THE WORD OF THE LORD WE CAN BE DECEIVED. Joshua and the people could have avoided deception if they had inquired of the Lord. There is stability in the truth of God's word, but when we fail to go it, we can be deceived by error (Eph. 4:14-15).

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Kids Activity Page

Aleisha Edwards

The Divided Kingdom



Kings of Israel and Judah

Draw a line from the name of the king to the place where he reigned.

Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:17)

Joash (2 Chronicles 24:1, 5)

Ahab (1 Kings 16:29)

Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:20)

Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41)

Josiah (2 Kings 22:1, 13)

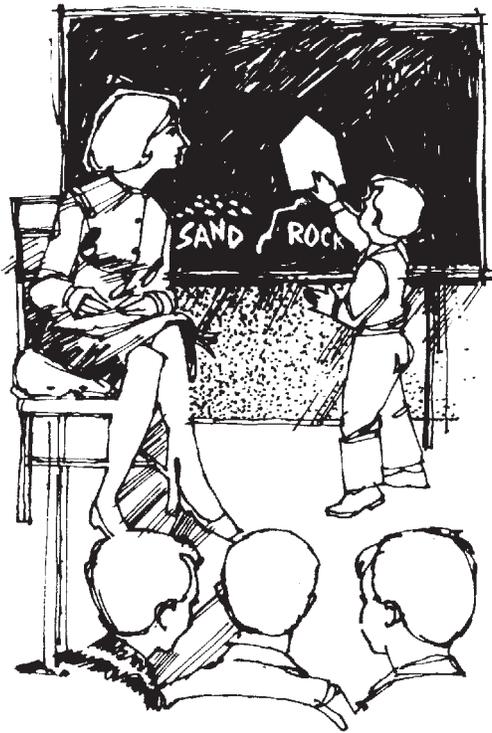
Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1)

Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1)

ISRAEL

JUDAH

**"Suffer the little children to come unto me,
and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).**



Teaching Tips

by
Debbie Edwards

LED BY EXAMPLE

My first grade elementary student had been practicing a book she wanted to read to the class and asked if she could read it. I told her she could and she went up to the front of the class. There were a few children taking awhile to settle down and she was waiting for them to get quiet. She put her hands on her hips, looked out across the circle of classmates sitting on the floor and with a very serious face and voice said, "I'm waiting for everyone to get quiet before I begin." She looked and sounded like a miniature ME talking to my students. Amazingly, everyone got absolutely still and she began to read...

That's when I realized my students at school follow so closely the examples I set and I needed to examine my actions to make sure I was leading them in the way I wanted them to go. I learned a great lesson as a public school teacher that day.

Bible class students learn by our example as well. As Bible class teachers, we need to examine ourselves as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves..."

What kind of an example are you setting for your Bible class students?

*Can they tell you've thoroughly studied your lesson, thus leading them to study their lessons? 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God..."

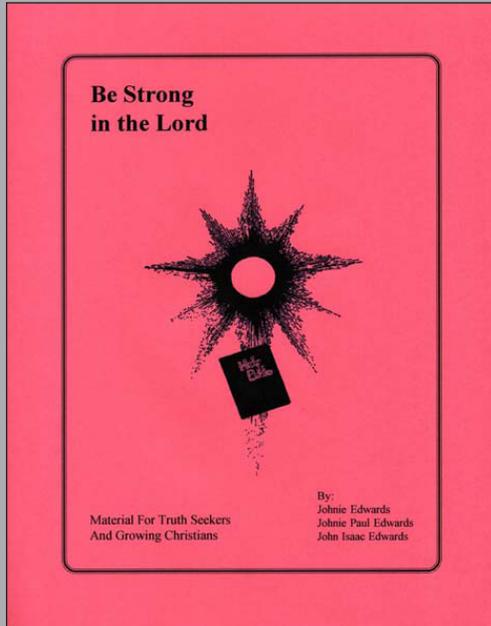
*Do they see you being friendly and hospitable to visitors and members, thus leading them to be friendly and hospitable? Hebrews 13:1-2 reminds us, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

*Do they see you not forsaking services, thus leading them to be at every service? Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..."

Our actions often speak louder than words and the example we set can be such an influence on others, especially our students. What kind of an example are you setting today? Think about it – someone may be mimicking YOU!

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