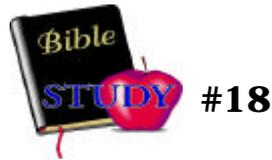


Journey Into God's Word



1Samuel 1-15

Isaiah 1-22

Mark 1-8

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At times it seems so hard serving God and others. However, the alternative of living only for you is deadly. As we read I Samuel 1-15 we see how it destroyed Eli and his sons as well as King Saul. In Isaiah 1-22 we see God's judgment pronounced on the nation of Israel and other nations as they refused to serve the Living God and misused the poor and needy. In Mark 1-8 we read over and over how Jesus, filled with compassion, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and reached out to those in need. Yes, Jesus' life was one of serving, sacrificing and saving and now He is calling us to follow Him and be a part of the dynamic work He is doing at this time.

Hannah wanted a child more than anything else did in the world. "In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow saying, 'O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life!'"(I Sam. 1:10, 11) Up to this time Hannah had been unable to have a child. Instead of giving up hope, she prayed. All of us have times of barrenness when it seems that we can never give birth to anything of significance in our lives. At such times it is difficult to pray in faith when we feel so ineffective. Yet Hannah prayed and what does I Samuel 1:19, 20 tell us was the result? When we pray and a promise is made, it is critical that we follow through on that promise. Hannah did just that. "They brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, 'As surely as you live my Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the Lord!'"(I Samuel 1:25-28) Hannah, by giving her only son to the Lord, was dedicating her total life to God. As a result of this one mother's dedication, the nation of Israel was turned from a nation where, "everyone did as he saw fit," (Judges 21:25) to become a nation where God was able to once again speak and know that He would be heard. (I Samuel 3:1-14) When Samuel said, "Speak for your servant is listening"(I Samuel 3:10) what did God tell him in verses 11-14? The last three verses in I

Samuel 3 in the Message Bible read this way, “Samuel grew up. God was with him, and Samuel’s prophetic record was flawless. Everyone in Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, recognized that Samuel was the real thing—a true prophet of God. God continued to show up at Shiloh, revealed through His word to Samuel at Shiloh.”(I Sam. 3:19-21)

Prophets, along with priests, were God’s special representatives. The position of prophet came during the time of Samuel. The prophet’s job was to confront the community and its leaders with the commands of the Lord God. Prophets were not very popular. The book of Isaiah is the first of the writings of the prophets. At first Isaiah’s ministry was well liked but as time went on the powers that be resented him more and more. Isaiah called people to turn from their sins and return to the Living God. “The Lord takes His place in court; He rises to judge the people. The Lord enters into judgement against the elders and leaders of his people: ‘it is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?’ declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 3:13-15) The prophet cannot remain silent. He or she knows God cares about the poor and the oppressed. When nothing is done to help the oppressed, those who remain silent join the oppressor. Because God is just, His people are also just. That is why the people of God must confront mayors, governors and presidents who destroy the housing, health care and basic services for the poor as they give tax abatements and more and more assistance to the rich. “And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress.”(Isaiah 5:7) What six sins does God condemn that are listed in verses 8-25 that begin with the word woe? “Therefore the Lord’s anger burns against His people; His hand is raised and He strikes them down.”(Isaiah 5:25) God’s judgment is coming; a savior is needed. “In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious.”(Isaiah 4:2) “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”(Isaiah 9:2)

In the gospel of Mark we see that light has come in the person of Jesus Christ. “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are My Son, Whom I love; with You I am well pleased.”(Mark 1:9-11) “John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”(John 1:29) What good news does Jesus proclaim in Mark 1:14,15? The Savior has come. Return, repent and be renewed for redemption has been provided through Jesus Christ and now we can rejoice in

the newness of life He provides. Yet many did not accept Jesus; as a result He quotes Isaiah 29:13 in Mark 7:6,7. How is the truth of these words reflected today in the lives of so many that give mental assent to Jesus being the Savior but their lives do not reflect the radical action resulting from being His followers? Jesus “filled with compassion” heals a man with leprosy. (Mark 1:41) Jesus “said to His disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid?’”(Mark 4:40) He tells the ruler of the synagogue, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”(Mark 5:36) Jesus feeds the multitudes in Mark 6 and Mark 8. We read, we hear and yet we are immobilized by fear. What insight from Isaiah 6:9,10 does Jesus quote in Mark 4:12 as to why precise acts of faith are not more prevalent? What does Jesus say in Mark 4:21-25 is necessary if we are going to perceive, understand, turn and be forgiven? Why is acting on the knowledge that Christ has given so essential if faith is really alive within us?

“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice; encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. ‘Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”(Isaiah 1:16-20) How do the verses prior to that (verses 11-16) make it clear that if we do not obey God and do what verses 16-20 say, our prayers will not be answered and our religious activities will be useless?

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.”(I Samuel 15:22, 23) What acts of disobedience did Saul take as king that are described in I Samuel 8-15? What was the result of such disobedience? It isn’t easy being a prophet. Most of the messages given are unpleasant to hear. Prophets are often labeled as mavericks. They preach of the need for justice, repentance and how displeased God is over the greed that results in the oppression of the poor and elderly. True prophets don’t care about popularity. Their real concern is about being obedient to God and faithfully proclaiming His message in word and deed. Samuel is a good example of what a faithful prophet is. Please look up the following references and write out what message Samuel proclaimed.

#1. I Samuel 3:11-14_____

#2. I Samuel 7: 1-4_____

- #3. I Samuel 8:10-22 _____
- #4. I Samuel 12:25 _____
- #5. I Samuel 13:13, 14 _____
- #6. I Samuel 15:17-31 _____

The theme “to obey is better than sacrifice” (I Samuel 15:22) is stated in the following Bible verses. Please look up each verse and write out how this theme is expressed. (Psalms 40:6-8; 51:16, 17; Proverbs 21; 3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matt. 12:7; Mark 12:33 and Hebrews 10:8,9)

Rebellion against God and arrogance is far more than being independent and strong-willed. The Scriptures declare that “rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft) and “arrogance like the evil of idolatry.”(I Sam. 15:23) Please look up the following verses and note how these sins are worthy of death. (Exodus 22:18; Lev. 20:6; Deut. 13:12-15; 18:10; Micah 5:10-14). Rebellion against God and arrogance result in spiritual death. “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”(Isaiah 7:9) Standing firm in one’s faith involves coming into the presence of God. When I behold the glory of the Incarnate Lord, I am initially struck with a sense of unworthiness. Isaiah had the same response. “Woe to me!” I (Isaiah) cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’” (Isaiah 6:5) In verse 7 of Isaiah 6, how does God solve the guilt Isaiah was feeling? As the Lord asks “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”(Is. 6:8) how will you respond? When Isaiah declared, “Here I am. Send me, “(Isaiah 6:8) what kind of response did God say Isaiah would get? (Isaiah 6:9,10) As we go forth in obedience to the calling God has given us, we should not be surprised nor should we give up if we get a similar response. Developers and special interest groups are raping and robbing the land. Babies are being aborted. The poor are given legal lynching in the name of the death penalty. The oil industry has bought off the politicians. The people are psychologically enslaved to believe they cannot survive unless they are on the electric grid depending on the big utility companies. The homes of the poor are being condemned and the homeless are being driven out of the downtown areas. The time has come for the prophets to arise. “Rouse the war cry...prepare for battle and be shattered! Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.”(Isaiah 8:9,10) The true prophets of the Living God will arise with lives entrenched in God’s word and God’s works and declare “Let My people go”. As instruments of God they are concerned with social conditions and see them in the light of a

spiritual crisis. They are specific and startling in their indictments. Ecclesiastical worship, consisting of words, is meaningless as the actual human conditions and moral issues are ignored. God responds by saying, “They have become a burden to me; I am weary of hearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight!”(Isaiah 1:14-16) Making it harder for the poor to get health care, creating laws which further victimize the most vulnerable in society, to these and other oppressive conditions the prophet Isaiah declares, “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.”(Isaiah 10:1,2) It is not enough to live in a land that claims to be founded on equality and justice. Each follower of Christ must work to see that the poor and powerless have these rights. When people are oppressed, it is difficult for them to praise God and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Christ has come. The re-creation process is in action. When Jesus returns again, how does Isaiah 11 describe the implementation of justice and righteousness that will take place? “In love, a throne will be established; in faithfulness, a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.”(Isaiah 16:5) What humiliating command does God give Isaiah in chapter 20:2? Sometimes it is difficult to be obedient. However, God is faithful. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”(Romans 8:28)

John’s call to “Prepare the way for the Lord, making straight paths for Him!” (Mark 1:3) is a call for each of us to give up our selfish ways of life, renounce sin, and seek God’s forgiveness and establish a relationship with Him by believing and obeying Him. What further direction to “make straight paths for Him” does Isaiah 1:18-20 give? Although John was the first real prophet Israel had in 400 years, he wanted to make it clear that Jesus was much greater than he was. How does he do this in Mark 1:7,8? Although Jesus is greater than any prophet, we see Him associating with “societal rejects”. How does Jesus respond when criticized for such? (Mark 1:17) Describe the different reactions to the planting of the word in the hearts and minds as shared by Jesus in Mark 4:15-20? What does Jesus say to us when we panic in the middle of the storms of life? (Mark 4:40) Next time you feel hopeless and afraid, look at life from Jesus’ perspective. After all, are you not His follower? Then believe Him as He says to

you, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”(Mark 5:36) To recognize Christ’s presence in the middle of the storms of life is the antidote for fear. Once again He tells His disciples as they panic in the middle of the lake during a storm, ““Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid,’ Then He climbed in the boat with them, and the wind died down.”(Mark 6:50,51) Let Jesus come into “the boat” of your life today and calm your storms. How does Mark 8:22-25 show you that sometimes healing may not be instantaneous but gradual? Now Jesus is calling you in your relationship with Him to move from curiosity to commitment and from admiration to adoration. How will you respond as He asks you, “who do you say I am?”(Mark 8:29) If you declare that He is the Christ and you truly desire to follow Him completely, what does Mark 8:34-38 say that such a commitment involves?

I want to invite you this week to continue to join me as we read I Samuel 16-31, Isaiah 23-44, and Mark 9-16. Following Jesus means dying to ourselves and becoming alive in His Word and Spirit. Such a life means following the Living Christ and becoming His disciple in word and deed. A life of discipleship involves hard work, frequent persecution, deprivation and even at times deep suffering. However, don’t be discouraged. Listen as Jesus tells you, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”(Mark 6:31) Rest in the reality of His everlasting love for you. (Jer. 31:3) “Bring every thought captive unto Christ.”(2 Cor. 10:5) Ask the Holy Spirit to make Scripture come alive to you by inspiring your imagination as you read it to the point that you can visualize God speaking to you in each passage and every biblical narrative, suddenly you are there with Samuel, Isaiah and Jesus as you read the scriptures. This week may you strive to fix your eyes on Jesus and set your mind on things that are above in order that you may break free from the pattern of this world and be transformed into the revolutionary of faith that Jesus Christ is calling you to be. (Col. 3:2-3; Heb. 12:1-2)

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice