

Lessons from Devoted Old Testament Servants

“These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

—*Hebrews 11:39,40*

THE BIBLE SPEAKS ABOUT a great “cloud of witnesses,” which we often refer to as heroes of faith, or by the term “Ancient Worthies.” (Heb. 12:1) These, also described in the words of our opening text, lived prior to the opening of the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus” which commenced at

Pentecost and will continue until the body of Christ is complete.—Phil. 3:14

In Numbers 19:1-10 is recorded one of Israel’s laws of purification, which involved the slaying of a red heifer and its subsequent burning with fire.

Following its burning, these instructions were to be observed: “A man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.” (vs. 9) These ashes may well refer to the remembrance and acknowledgement as to the faithfulness, even unto death, of worthy individuals from past ages, pictured by the red heifer. These symbolic ashes will be used during God’s kingdom to help cleanse the world of mankind from the defiling effects of Adamic sin which will have to be overcome as they progress up the “highway” of holiness.—Isa. 35:8

These Ancient Worthies had the testimony that they pleased God during their lifetime as they dealt with various types of adversity. Thus, the Scriptures state that they will be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) Their collective experiences and how they were able to prove faithful to God will be given as examples to the human family to help them be successful in overcoming the various debasements related to sin which will be required of everyone before they can qualify to receive everlasting life.

The examples of these Old Testament holy ones also should have a sanctifying effect upon spirit begotten believers today. We should be stimulated to persevere in our pilgrim journey as we consider what they endured as members of the house of servants even though the High Calling was not yet open for them during the time they sojourned here on Earth. (Heb. 3:5,6) They were faithful in pleasing God, and no matter what age they lived in, there can be no higher commendation than this.

Let us consider various aspects in the lives of three such individuals, namely, Daniel, Ruth and King David, mindful that the faithful from the distant past included both men and women who revered God despite being surrounded by nations who were not in a covenant relationship with Jehovah. Let us glean lessons from their experiences that we might apply in our own lives as we desire to be approved of the Heavenly Father.

DANIEL'S INTEGRITY

Although living in idolatrous Babylon for most of his life, Daniel never forgot the need to worship Jehovah as the one true God of Israel. He was continually sustained by the strength received because of his communing with the Heavenly Father. We recall the events that led up to his being cast into the den of lions and his ultimate safe delivery. These stemmed from the fact that Darius, the Median ruler, elevated Daniel above all the presidents and princes in the kingdom because of his integrity. Daniel would certainly stand in the way of those who might attempt to steal from the king's treasury.—Dan. 6:1-3

The other leaders were jealous of Daniel but agreed they could find no fault against him unless it was because of his religion. They plotted privately to have the king establish a decree that for thirty days anyone who prayed to any god but King Darius as the head of the empire should be cast in the lion's den. (vss. 4-9) Those conspirators well knew that Daniel would pray to Jehovah no matter what. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open

in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.” (vs. 10) Nevertheless, Daniel was cast into the den of lions but was subsequently delivered, and those who conspired against him were destroyed by these same beasts.—vss. 16-24

DANIEL PRAYS FOR ISRAEL

A notable example of Daniel’s great concern for his people commends itself to our attention. It deals with the seventy years’ prophecy concerning the desolation of Judea. (Jer. 29:10; II Chron. 36:20-23) Convinced that the time for the return of God’s favor to Israel was near at hand, he uttered a compassionate prayer to the Heavenly Father on her behalf.

“We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ... O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.” (Dan. 9:5,6,18,19) In humility, Daniel used the collective “we” in speaking about the evils Israel had committed, and although conceived in

sin and shapen in iniquity as part of the human race, he was a faithful servant who loved and strove for righteousness.

NEW TESTAMENT PRAYER LESSONS

As a member of the cloud of witnesses, Daniel's prayer life is certainly an example to the church. Let us consider some further Biblical passages in this connection as we seek to render effective prayer to the Heavenly Father. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5) Concerning our petitions, the Lord expects us to apply ourselves with diligence, as well as watch for the answers to these prayers. Thus, if we desire wisdom under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should engage in activities of study, meditation, devotion and discussions with others of the brotherhood, realizing the importance of assembling with one another that we might be instructed aright from the very oracles of God.—Heb.10:24,25

Paul provides this important exhortation. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds." (Col. 4:2,3) We should pray for our brethren in their efforts of spreading the Gospel, and of prospering their activities in their capacity as ministers of God. Surely, petitions which seek only self-interests could not be acceptable to the Heavenly Father, for we are all part of the one body and are "members one of another."—Eph. 4:25

One evidence of deep spirituality is contained in the following words of the Master. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44) When we progress to this level and continue to do so heartily, without rancor, bitterness, vindictiveness or railing in our being, we surely will have reached the highest form of Godlike love. When the church is complete these faithful overcomers, under Christ's direction, will help inaugurate a great educational program so that the entire human family will learn what constitutes acceptable prayer. As this is learned by mankind, the work of restoring that which was lost in Adam will take place in each individual making such petitions.

RUTH'S DEVOTION TO GOD

During a famine in Bethlehem, an Israelite named Elimelech unwisely took his wife, Naomi, and their two sons to live in Moab, a land of idolatry. Shortly after arriving in Moab, Elimelech died, and the two sons married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Subsequently these sons died as well. Hearing the famine in Bethlehem was over, after ten years, Naomi decided to return to her land and told her daughters-in-law they should remain in Moab, perhaps, with the thought of remarrying. (Ruth 1:1-9) Although Orpah finally heeded Naomi's counsel, here is how Ruth responded: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest,

will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”—Ruth 1:16,17

When Naomi observed that Ruth was determined to go with her, she protested no more. Ruth had made her decision; she was no longer a Moabite at heart. She chose to travel to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. Apparently, Naomi was penniless and, in returning, virtually had to throw herself upon the mercy of her people. (vss. 18-22) Ruth knew this, yet had enough faith in Naomi’s God to believe that they would be taken care of. From a material standpoint she might have been better off to have stayed in Moab where Elimelech had brought his family years ago to flee from the famine in his native land, but the bond of love with Naomi and the favor of Jehovah meant more to her than material good things. Ultimately, following Naomi’s advice as to how she should conduct herself while in Bethlehem, Ruth married Boaz, and a son was born to them named Obed. Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David, and it was David’s family which God chose as the line through which the Messiah would come.—Ruth, chapters 2-4

GOSPEL AND MILLENNIAL AGE LESSONS

With regard to how Ruth as a member of the cloud of witnesses might impact our Christian life, her actions remind us of Paul’s new attitude of devotion to Christ following his Damascus Road experience. “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in

Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13,14) Additionally, Ruth seems to picture the Gentiles, who by a full consecration of their all, leave behind their earthly hopes, ambitions, interests and are taken into the family of God as “Israelites indeed,” having been “grafted in” to the Abrahamic Covenant of promise. (John 1:47; Rom. 11:13,16-24) If we continue faithfully in our endeavors, we may truly entertain the hope of receiving the “exceeding and eternal weight of glory” that will surpass anything we may have enjoyed previously.—II Cor. 4:17

Concerning the human family during the Millennial reign of Christ, it would seem that Ruth’s experience of leaving the idolatry of Moab and cleaving to the God of Israel will be a wonderful witness to the world of mankind. This is especially so since they will learn how honored she was to become an ancestor of David through whose line our Lord was born on the human plane.

When individuals return from the tomb, they probably will possess the same ideas they had when they went into the grave as suggested by the passages that declare “where the tree falleth, there shall it be,” and that “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave.” (Eccles. 11:3; 9:10) Upon their awakening, mankind in general will not know the one true God at the start of the kingdom. Furthermore, it will be explained by the Ancient Worthies that Christ is God’s son and that through him life will be attained. As part of her future testimony to the human family, Ruth might well express how she took a leap of faith by identifying herself with the God of Israel in leaving Moab and was rewarded by becoming an instrument

to help bless the world. (Heb. 11:39,40) What an incentive that will be for those awakened from the tomb to walk up the highway of holiness and learn to reverence the same Heavenly Father as she did after learning about him through Naomi so long ago.

MERCY THROUGH BOAZ

Boaz was a wealthy relative of Naomi's husband who remained in Bethlehem while Elimelech took his family into Moab. The Mosaic Law indicated farmers should not fully harvest their fields but leave some grain behind so the poor and needy could glean in order to obtain food. (Lev. 19:9,10) Ruth took advantage of this provision and entered a portion of the field owned by Boaz in order to gather barley for Naomi and herself. (Ruth 2:1-7) When Boaz arrived from Bethlehem he inquired of Ruth and was told she was Naomi's daughter-in-law. The following inquiry and exchange between Boaz and Ruth provide further insights as to the lessons that might prove edifying to us.

“Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all

that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.”—Ruth 2:8-13

During God’s Kingdom, just as Ruth would recall the kindness of Boaz in making provision for her in his field, she then would be able to declare to mankind that she felt unworthy of the mercy he extended to her as a foreigner. As he told her if she were athirst, she could drink of the vessels that had been drawn, we are reminded of the following passage of Scripture. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) What a precious promise this is. In this instance, Ruth would surely be able to express to the human family that the greater Boaz, Christ and his church, will satisfy their needs just as her needs were satisfied in the past.

KING DAVID

Our third example from the cloud of witnesses relates to David and the lessons which focus upon sin, repentance and reinstatement as featured in his life. David is spoken of as a man after God’s

own heart. (Acts 13:22) This does not mean that he had no faults, but rather, that his heart was right before Jehovah. David perpetrated a grievous sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and then arranging for the death of her husband Uriah. The Prophet Nathan confronted David and pronounced God's judgment in the matter. David would suffer violence within his household, his wives would be taken and publicly violated in a similar fashion as his taking of Bathsheba, and their firstborn child from that adulterous union would die.—II Sam. 12:1-19

David took Nathan's words to heart. He properly confessed that he had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and against God and his laws. He responded in genuine repentance and humility. (vs. 13) God granted him forgiveness, although he did not change the consequences. David's punishment came as predicted. However, because of his sincere repentance, his relationship with God was restored.

This account shows us that no position or place of privilege puts one above divine law. Furthermore, confronting our sins honestly, and in humility, is crucial towards being restored to the Heavenly Father's favor. Thus, this lesson shows us that God is rich in mercy and forgives those who truly repent, but there also are consequences for sinful conduct that will not change. Psalm 32 seems to be an expression of David's feelings toward Jehovah in connection with his sin and subsequent forgiveness. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."—Ps. 32:1-3

REPENTANCE PRECEDES FORGIVENESS

Is there a lesson for the church in this matter? In our initial approach towards the Heavenly Father, we were required to acknowledge our own unworthiness, repent from sin, accept the blood of Jesus as being efficacious towards our being forgiven and then make a full consecration to do God's will. (Acts 2:37,38) A lovely hymn notes, "The past is under the blood," and how thankful we should be to have a new and living relationship with the Master and our dear Heavenly Father.

After having been accepted in the Beloved, we need to appreciate the following divinely inspired exhortation. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."—I Cor. 6:9-11

In addition, sins such as "evil speaking" or "evil surmisings" will not make us acceptable to God. (Eph. 4:31; I Tim. 6:4) Thus, we must search our hearts and keep a watch over our tongues, that we rectify whatever missteps we may have made, especially with our brethren. This includes the steps of repenting and asking forgiveness where necessary, which often seems to be so difficult to do. The following words are very sobering as to what is required in such instances. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled

to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” (Matt. 5:23,24) If we hope to be of the body of Christ, we cannot harbor ill will against any of our brethren nor any other individuals for that matter.

KINGDOM APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the world, we know that much evil has been done against many members of the human family at large. In the light of the coming kingdom, when all wrongs hidden or known will come to light, how ashamed so many members of mankind will be. Nevertheless, there must be acknowledgement of the evils committed, sincere repentance and an appreciation as to what is meant by loving one’s neighbor as himself before progress can be attained.

Undoubtedly, as one of the princes in the earth, David will be instrumental towards helping sinners walk up the highway of holiness, using his own past experiences to help teach the joy of restoration into God’s favor after acknowledgment of serious wrongs committed, followed by sincere repentance. What a marvelous method the Heavenly Father has arranged for the recovery of all who desire to receive his blessings and everlasting life here on Earth.

In summary, a portion of Numbers chapter 19 describes the red heifer class, or Ancient Worthies. They lived before the greater atonement day sacrifices that pertain to this Gospel Age and, therefore, they could not be a part of the body of Christ. Hebrews 12:1 refers to these Old Testament heroes of faith as a cloud of witnesses to the church, despite the fact that they were not spirit begotten. The ashes of the heifer will symbolically be utilized in the kingdom as mankind learns righteousness

from the example and leadership of these princes, who will be the visible earthly representatives of God's kingdom.

The holy ones of old desired to understand the meaning of various prophecies concerning the opportunity for a greater heavenly salvation. However, the application of these was not meant for them, but rather to God's people of a future time. These Ancient Worthies, like the remainder of perfect humanity, will doubtless be more than satisfied with their ultimate reward upon the earth. The Scriptures give us no definite information concerning arrangements for them beyond the Millennial kingdom. We know, however, that mankind will need visible human representatives to carry out the divine program during the "times of restitution." (Acts 3:20,21) Who could better fill positions of this kind than the Ancient Worthies?

We who are striving at the present time to be part of the Christ class are also mindful of the steadfast faithfulness under trial of these servants of old. Let us, then, consider their example and note how they demonstrated their loyalty, and how they proved their dedication to the Heavenly Father, for this will help us also to endure our trials now with obedience and devotion.

Thus, we also will receive our reward and will rejoice in the privilege of having these human princes as instruments of blessing during God's kingdom. May we continue in our walk of sacrifice and righteous pursuits that will result in the commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant; ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord."—Matt. 25:23

