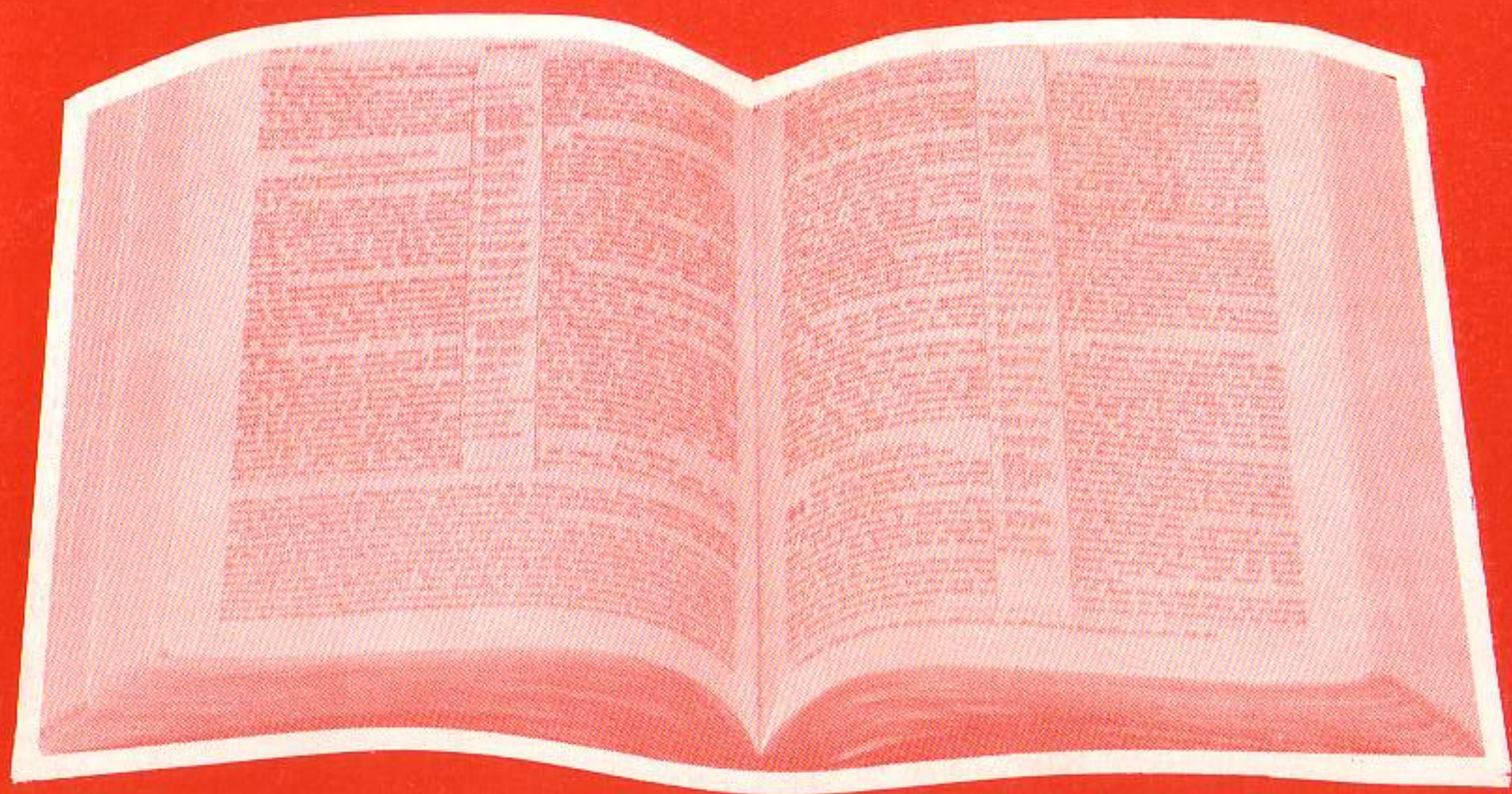


FACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE



BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

FACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

IPS Archives

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Written by Jaston Binala
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BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

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for Bible Study

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. What If the Worst Comes?	5
2. Coping with Change	7
3. Keeping the Faith	9
4. Sustained by Hope	12
5. Our Need to Be Reconciled.	14
6. Reconciled Through Jesus Christ.	16
7. Alive in Christ.	18
8. Freedom in Christ.	20
9. Secure in God's Love	22
10. Together Under God	24
11. The Reconciled Life.	26
12. Walking in Love.	29
13. Our Ministry of Reconciliation	31

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IF THE WORST COMES?

AIM: This lesson will help me know that as a Christian I will face some hard times, but God is always there to help me.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Habakkuk 1-3

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Habakkuk 1:2-5, 12-13; 2:1-4

MEMORY VERSE: "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told" (Habakkuk 1:5).

For the next few weeks, we will be learning about the history of Israel before and after her exile from her country. The Hebrew people had a firm spiritual background that helped them to live through their nation's death.

By studying these lessons, we will discover Israel's spiritual qualities. The way these spiritual qualities helped the Israelites to live through hard times is the same way these spiritual qualities can help us to live through hard times.

What if the worst should come to you? The worst does come to some people. All people struggle with life. When the worst comes, some people give up. There is a great need to be tolerant, to be firm and strong when greater problems come upon you with a rush to push you off balance in the Christian life.

Believe it or not, there are people who are experiencing the same fate as well as Joel today. Imagine, a man like Joel, professing to love Christ, having his wife and children killed in a car accident! He could not understand it! But it could be that Joel was being given a "high quality test." When such times come we really need to be strong and depend only on God.

Nations also have bad times. Habakkuk saw his nation get weaker and weaker. He suffered while Judah fell, but he did not give up. He kept right on trusting God in such intolerable situations. The story of Habakkuk's faith is told in the book of Habakkuk. Read about him in your Bible. How did his faith help him in hard times? Read Habakkuk 1:2-5, 12-13; 2:1-4.

SOME TROUBLING QUESTIONS

We will have the same questions that faced Habakkuk and his people. Conditions were very bad in Judah when Habakkuk had a vision from God. Read in 2 Kings 23:32 about the evil things the kings did. They paid no attention to what the prophets proclaimed. (See Jeremiah 7.)

Habakkuk asked questions when the worst came to Judah. He could not understand how God could let the "colonizers," the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, continue their evil reign over Judah. (See verse 2.) He

thought that God did not judge the wicked kings.

The prophet wondered When God would save Judah from violence, wrong, harm or actions that resulted in violence. This included lies, worshipping idols, stealing and treating people wickedly and unjustly. Habakkuk wondered why God did not stop all the violence in his land. He did not complain against God, but to God. He wanted to know how long the bad times would continue (verses 3-4). Habakkuk thought evil men should not cause his people to suffer.

The Lord God had revealed to Habakkuk that the Chaldeans, a wicked nation, would be used to punish Judah. But Habakkuk did not understand this. "How can God use a wicked nation to punish a less wicked nation?" thought Habakkuk. He also wondered if it was necessary to be silent as the wicked nation destroyed his people.

LISTENING FOR GOD'S ANSWER

Habakkuk kept asking questions. (See verses 14-17.) He tried to find answers. He climbed a watch tower and waited for God's answers. He would not give up.

Then God gave an answer. (See verse 2.) God does answer all his people. "Write the answer in large letters either on stone or wood tablets for all your people to read as they flee from the invaders, the Chaldeans," the Lord said. He also told Habakkuk that those things

would not happen right away. (See verse 3.) God would help his people at the right time. God asked Habakkuk to be patient. "Do not give up," he said. "Things will happen just like I planned."

God revealed to Habakkuk what he planned for the Chaldeans. They were proud. They trusted themselves and lifted themselves up. But they would fall just as God said. Read God's woes of judgement on the Chaldeans (Habakkuk 2:6-10). Note in verse 4 that the forces of evil would destroy themselves. God called Habakkuk to live a faithful life. He was not to question God's actions. He was to trust God. The prophet wondered why Judah sinned so much, and how God could use the Chaldeans. But these were not his problems. God could manage the world. Even today, God continues to manage the world.

Habakkuk came down from the tower with a vision and a message. He no longer feared the Chaldeans. He trusted God even though the worst would come. God had answered Habakkuk.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

You, too, may face hard times. You may have questions about evil in your area. Do you want to give up? State again your faith in God's goodness and God's purpose in your life. Learn to say "The Lord God is my strength, and he will bring me safely over the mountains."

CHAPTER TWO

COPING WITH CHANGE

AIM: This lesson will help me to understand that faith in God will help me cope with the changes that come constantly in my life.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Psalms 137:1-6; Jeremiah 29

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Jeremiah 29:1-11

MEMORY VERSE: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

My grandfather died a long time ago. He never saw a bicycle. He never saw a radio and never expected a man to walk on the moon. Most of all he would be disgusted to learn that life has become so costly.

Many things change every year. We find it hard to keep up with the changes. Every change causes fear. Life seems blurred when change comes so fast. We cannot keep things from changing. But can we learn to live with the changes? God's people met many changes when their enemies moved them from Jerusalem to Babylon. How did they face the changes? Read Jeremiah 29:1, 4-11 to help you answer that question.

A STRANGE NEW WORLD

A time came when a king named Josiah tried to lead the Hebrew

people back to God. Josiah was a good king, but the people were not loyal to him, especially where godly requirements were to be followed. Because of their disobedience and unbelief God let them be captured.

During Josiah's reign, God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. He prophesied that God would let war come to them. (See Jeremiah 4:19.) But the people did not listen. The kings that came after Josiah did not listen either. This angered God.

Thus, when Jehoiakim was king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded and captured Jerusalem. He came back later and took ten thousand captives from Jerusalem, including all the princes and the best soldiers, craftsmen and smiths. Only the least skilled people were left in the land.

The Jews were in their captors' hands. They were now living in a strange new world. They could not understand why God let a wicked nation destroy Judah.

Even so they had to leave the beautiful temple which was meant for worshipping God. They also left some of their family members in Judah. They saw Jerusalem destroyed. When they left, driven away by their captors, they did not know if they would ever return.

"By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalms 137:1-4).

"These changes are too much and the environment is cruel," the Jews thought. The Jews did not feel like singing or making music. Yes, they knew the songs of Zion. But they felt like crying when their captors told them to sing. They could see no hope in their present lives nor for their future lives, since they were in the hands of their oppressing captors.

They could not have freedom, neither could they change the place where they were staying by crying. That is what everybody knew. King Nebuchadnezzar would not let them go home. What could they do to stop their grief?

HOW COULD THEY TAKE THE CHANGES?

Jeremiah, the prophet, did not go to Babylon with the rest from Judah. He remained in Jerusalem.

He knew that the captives, his people, were in a time of deep sorrow and suffering. God told him that the captives could not return home for many years. So Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives in Babylon. He told them that God had not forgotten them.

FACE THE CHANGING WORLD

Wanting the best for those in captivity, Jeremiah, also wanted them to know the plain truth. Babylon would be their home for many years. They had to serve and face the changes. He also wanted them to accept the fact that they were captives, and the Babylonians were their masters. They would not return to Jerusalem. He wanted them to make the best of their new world.

Jeremiah told them to feel at home. He told them to do the same things they did in Judah, their real home. "Build homes, marry and have children." This was not Jeremiah's decision, but God's. God told them to start calling Babylon their home. He required them to be peaceful in Babylon. The only way they would find this peace was through prayer.

Immediately, false prophets found a very good way to spread their lies. They preached that freedom was near. This was the opposite to what the God-sent prophets said.

This preaching of nearness of independence was aimed at having the captives rebel against King Nebuchadnezzar. God insisted they not trust the false prophets. God promised better things for his people. One day their lives would change.

While the captives waited, God was with them. God was present in Babylon and in Judah. He blessed them while they experienced changes in their new and strange world. They were not to lose hope. They dreamed

of returning home someday. One day their dream would come true. God knew the plans he had for them. They were plans for good, not for evil. He gave them a future and a hope.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

How do life's changes affect you? Does your trust in God's power and plan give you hope and help you to

meet changes? Can you accept changes and make the most of them? Will you listen for God's Word and not be led astray by false leaders? Do you have hope, trusting God to carry out his will in the world?

Pray for God's help in these matters.

CHAPTER THREE

KEEPING THE FAITH

AIM: I will learn that I need to keep my faith strong and true.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Daniel 1, 6

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON;
Daniel 1:3-5, 9-10, 18-19; 6:10, 21-22

MEMORY VERSE: "...Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set at nought the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God" (Daniel 3:28).

A few years back, John and his family moved to a new country. They found very few Baptist churches there. This was not enough to stop them from attending church. They kept their faith and finally found themselves starting a Baptist church in their new city.

Nebuchadnezzar captured Judah. He carried the strongest Hebrews to Babylon. They lived in a strange country. Jeremiah, the prophet, told them to make Babylon their home. Could they keep their faith in God?

YOUNG HEBREWS CHOSEN FOR TRAINING

Read Daniel 1:3-5, 9-10, 18-19; 6:10, 21-22. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted some Hebrew boys to be trained so that they would serve in his court. "I want some young Hebrew men. They must be strong, healthy, well-educated, smart, quick to learn, and they must also be good looking," the king told his main steward, Ashpenaz.

The young Hebrews were to be taught the civilization of the captors. For three years they were to learn how to read and write the Chaldean way. The boys were privileged to live and eat in the king's palace. King Nebuchadnezzar would test the boys.

He would choose the best men to serve on his palace staff.

Daniel and his friends were chosen for training. They were given new Chaldean names. (See verses 6-7.) Daniel was to be called Belteshazzar, Hananiah would be Shadrach, Mishael was to be Meshach and Azariah would be called Abednego.

DANIEL'S REQUEST

Because of Moses' special food law Daniel decided that he and his friends would not eat the king's food and wine. (Read verse 8.) They would not compromise their faith in God. Daniel asked the king's steward to let them eat vegetables and drink water. They wanted to keep God's laws.

This was Daniel's first test of faith. He took a chance on losing the favour of the king. "It is more important to obey God than to obey the king," Daniel decided.

In verses 9-10, we see that the steward in charge of the young Hebrews liked Daniel. He was ready to accept Daniel's request, but he was afraid. He thought the young men, those in Daniel's request category, would not look as good as the rest. God had put a tender feeling in the steward's heart. But he was afraid he would get his head chopped off if the boys did not look good.

Daniel, however, told the steward to give them vegetables and water for only ten days, and he could then judge if the boys were healthy. If not,

they would take the king's food and wine. After ten days the four boys were stronger and healthier and looked better than the others. So the steward let them keep on eating only vegetables and water.

THE FOUR MEN CHOSEN

The young Hebrews lived on simple food and water for three years. They grew stronger, learnt all that was taught them and then came before King Nebuchadnezzar who tested them.

Daniel and his three friends were chosen over all the others. They looked healthier and stronger. They were ten times wiser than all the wise men in Chaldea. God gave them the ability to learn and remember what they learnt. God also gave Daniel the ability to tell the meaning of visions and dreams.

Daniel got a high pass mark in his first test of his faith. His plan to stand for truth made him stronger.

HE DID NOT COMPROMISE

Daniel's tests were not over. It was only the beginning. Read Daniel 6:1-9 again. It tells of another test of faith for Daniel.

Daniel prayed daily to God. When Darius, the Mede, became king he chose Daniel to be head prince, which is similar to Prime Minister today. The other princes, cabinet ministers, did not like Daniel. They tried to find something wrong, so they could get him removed. They were defeated. Finally they decided

that they would have to find something wrong in his religion. They could not find anything wrong. Daniel was faithful to God and to King Darius.

Having found nothing with which to accuse Daniel they decided to plan a law that had to do with worshipping the king for thirty days. So they talked the king into passing this new law. All people had to ask the king for whatever they wanted. If they asked anyone else, even God, for anything they would be thrown into the lion's den! How happy the other princes were with the trap they had laid for Daniel. Would he be true to God?

Daniel knew about the new law of King Darius, but he refused to compromise his faith in God. Daniel continued to kneel by his window which faced toward Jerusalem, and there he prayed to God three times each day.

THE LAWS OF THE MEDES AND PERSIANS

The laws of the Medes and Persians could not be done away with once they were written. The princes went to King Darius and told him

about Daniel praying to his God. King Darius realized he had fallen into a trap himself, for he loved Daniel very much and could trust him. The king knew the others were filled with jealousy. He did not want to put Daniel in the lion's den, but he had to.

GOD SAVED DANIEL

Darius worried about Daniel all night. Early morning, Darius went to the lions' den and called out to Daniel. Daniel told the king that God's angel shut the mouths of the lions so they did not hurt him. Daniel did not sin against God or against the king.

Daniel passed another test. He kept his faith in God. He did right when many persons around him sinned.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

What will you lose if you compromise your faith in God? How much will you think of yourself? Will you gain true friends? Will you help more people follow God? Will God approve what you do? Ask God to help you stay true to him.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUSTAINED BY HOPE

AIM: This lesson teaches that I need never lose hope.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Jeremiah 32; Ezra 1

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Jeremiah 32:6-11; Ezra 1:1-4

MEMORY VERSE: "and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever toward Israel...'" (Ezra 3:11).

Peter faced the darkest time of his life. He had tuberculosis, and the doctor told him he had three months to live since his lungs were in bad shape. Unlike most people, Peter could see his life's destination.

As a strong believer what did he do when the doctor talked to him? Do you think he gave up?

No! His strong faith and hope in the Lord kept him alive. The three months went by, and he was still alive. And he lived for more than three years. All of us face hard times. World problems and our own problems cause us to lose courage. What can we do when others lose hope and want to quit? We can prove we still have hope.

Jeremiah proved his hope when others wanted to quit. What did he do? Read Jeremiah 32:6-11 to find how Jeremiah proved his hope.

JUDAH'S DARK HOUR

Jeremiah lived during Judah's darkest hour. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Jerusalem. He took gold from the temple. He took ten thousand of Judah's best people as captives. He asked Zedekiah to rule in Jerusalem. Zedekiah put Jeremiah in jail for telling the truth!

The prophet said Jerusalem would fall to Babylon, Zedekiah would be captured and taken to Jerusalem where he would be kept until the Lord visited him. The Hebrews could fight Babylon, but they would not win. At that time Jeremiah had a message. "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar" (Jeremiah 32:1).

GOD'S MESSAGE

Jeremiah received a message from God to buy a piece of land when he was in prison. People usually did not buy land in such bad times. They would buy land when they believed they could pay for it. They wanted to be able to use the land to help themselves. But Jeremiah was in prison, and Judah was controlled by Babylon. Why should he buy land?

God told Jeremiah that his cousin, Hanamel, would come to him and ask him to buy his land in Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town. Jeremiah was

next in line in the family to buy the land. How did God's message help Jeremiah and the other Hebrews? Did Jeremiah obey God?

Jeremiah believed God. He trusted him to do what he said he would do. God's message encouraged Jeremiah. God showed Jeremiah that he still had a purpose for Judah. The prophet bought the land from his cousin.

GOD GAVE REASONS FOR HOPE

The years passed, Jeremiah died and God's people stayed in Babylon. They built homes, went into business and raised their families. But they did not forget Judah and Jerusalem. Many of them still wanted to go home. God kept their hope alive.

JEREMIAH'S HOPE REALIZED

Read Ezra 1:1-4 again. Cyrus of Persia took Babylon. Cyrus, a heathen king, let God use him. God stirred up the spirit of Persia's king. He made a rule. He put it in writing. He also had it proclaimed all over his kingdom.

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem,

which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel - he is the God who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2-3).

Cyrus said that all Jews who did not go should give a money offering to help the others. The Jews in Babylon should pay the cost of travel, food, clothes and other things needed for the trip. They should also give an offering for the temple.

The happy people returned to Judah. They carried no idols or gods with them. They went home to rebuild the temple of their God. They wanted to worship God in Jerusalem. And God blessed them for not losing hope.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

You, too, live in a dark hour. Many people have no jobs. Many are sick, lonely and hungry. You find people near you with many other needs. What can you do to help? You can be friendly and cheerful. Offer to help anyone you can help. Do what you can to find help for the others. Above all, show that your hope is in Jesus Christ. Tell them about Jesus, too, so they may have hope.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUR NEED TO BE RECONCILED

AIM: I will learn through studying this lesson that God holds me responsible for my sins.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 1:16-2:11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 1:28-32; 2:1-11

MEMORY VERSE: "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

What does salvation really mean? Perhaps you have been asked this question many times. As a Christian, it is important to know in a way you can explain easily. These next lessons will help you, as a Christian, to truly know what salvation means. These lessons will also help you know how a saved person should live and act.

Each of us has become angry with someone in the past. We stopped talking to them. We stopped being friends with them. We needed to be reconciled. When we talked together and came to a new understanding, we were friends again. We were reconciled.

Reconciled means to forgive those who do us wrong. We forgive that person, then we can be friends again. Reconciliation has taken place.

Paul told the Christians in Rome about reconciliation. He told them that people need to be reconciled to

God. They have wronged God, and they need to make things right again between themselves and God.

How have people wronged God? How can people become friends with God? Why do people need to be friends with God again? Paul answered all of these questions when he wrote to the Christians in Rome while he was in Corinth, Greece. He had heard of their problems of faith and questions about salvation. Since he could not go himself, he wrote them a letter, so they could read it to the whole church.

Paul told them the good news of Jesus and how the gospel (good news of Jesus) tells exactly how man is put right with God.

MAN REBELLING AGAINST GOD

Read Romans 1:28-32; 2:1-11. In Romans 1:1-27, we see how man moves away from God. Verse 28 shows what happens to him at those times. Man sins when he does this, Paul said.

What is sin? Sin is missing God's plan for our lives. Sin means more than doing wrong. It is forgetting God. Paul said in verse 28 that evil people forget God and think only evil thoughts. They stop thinking about God. Sin leads people to act foolishly like animals. They live wrong and love wrong things and wrong actions.

Man sinned when he moved away from God. He was not God's friend any more. God let him do as he pleased. When man turned away from God and started doing what he pleased, he stopped loving God.

In verses 29-31, Paul lists some sins, but he did not list all of them. Man still sins in these ways when he turns away from God.

Greed is one of the mentioned sins. Greed means always grabbing for more. No one likes greedy people. It separates us from others. Greedy people make God unhappy. There are other examples of sin that cut persons from their friends and families. Some examples are disobedience to parents, envy and not wanting other people to get something good.

ENEMIES OF GOD

Read verse 32 again. Paul said that man becomes so bad he should die. Man should die because of the law. The law requires that a sinner should die. Sinners know this law, but they sin anyway. They become enemies of God.

Evil people try to make other people become enemies of God. An evil person enjoys seeing other people sin, too. Evil people are not worried about sin. They know God's punishment, but they sin anyway.

GOD'S REWARDS

God cannot accept sin. Read Romans 2:1-3 again. Paul told the Romans Christians to be careful

about judging others. God cannot accept evil people. He hates their sin. God will not accept sin in those he loves. Man must be free from sin to be friends with God.

Sin keeps man from God. Sinners hate God. God loves the sinner even when he hates the sin. Verses 4-5 show that God is kind to man even when man sins. God tries to show man's sin to him. God wants to be friends with man.

God rewards man according to what he does. If man sins, he is punished. If man believes in Jesus, he becomes God's friend. God's promise to man is new life in Jesus Christ. Read Romans 1:16. This verse tells how we can be friends with God. When we have faith in Jesus, we become friends with God.

When man sins and hates God, he suffers. Sin brings its own punishment. Read Romans 6:23 in your Bible. This verse says the results of sin is death.

Evil people who sin will suffer. They will suffer from their own sin. They will not be friends with God.

FRIENDS WITH GOD

God wants everyone to be his friend. God gave everyone his promise. All men can trust Jesus. Verses 10-11 tell us who makes God happy. Those who serve him make him happy.

God will give peace to all who believe in Jesus and accept him. Verse 10 means God blesses those

who obey him. We obey God first by trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. When we trust Jesus, we become friends with God. We are reconciled to God. Then we can truly know his love for us.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

God wants you for his friend. God's friends do not want to keep on sinning. They try to stop sinning. Are you God's friend? If you are, will you help another person become God's friend, too?

CHAPTER SIX

RECONCILED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

AIM: I will learn what being reconciled with God means in this lesson.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 5:1-21

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 5:1-11

MEMORY VERSE: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

James became a believing Christian. His wife was not a believer. He stopped drinking beer and going to bars. He stopped fighting. His wife liked going to bars. She decided to leave him. He was unhappy, but he continued to pray for his wife. One day she returned, and knelt before him so he could beat her, as their custom demanded. James said, "I cannot beat you. I forgive you. Jesus forgave me. So I forgive you." His wife became reconciled with her husband and their home was happy again.

God wants to be friends with man. But he cannot accept sin. So God did something to reconcile man to himself. Read these Scriptures to find out what God did.

LIFE OF PEACE

Read Romans 5:1-11. In verse 1, Paul said that God saves men who put their faith in Jesus. Man sinned. He went away from God. But man can have peace within his heart when he puts his faith in Jesus Christ. He becomes reconciled to God. Do you remember the meaning of "reconciled" from the last chapter?

When man is reconciled to God, he has peace with God, too. He has peace with others. God's love helps us to love other people.

LET US REJOICE

Christ goes to God for us, when God reconciles us to himself. God gives us grace. Grace is God's free gift of love. God's grace makes us rejoice. We are happy about the future. When God loves us, we have hope. We know that God saved us.

We must believe that God loves us. We must have faith in Jesus. Then we get God's free love and share his glory (verse 2).

WHEN TROUBLE COMES

Trouble comes to everyone. Life is never easy. But when we belong to God, we do not face trouble alone. God's grace helps us when trouble comes. We can rejoice because God's grace helps us within. We have hope that he will help us to face trouble.

Verses 3-5 say that we should be happy in times of trouble. Should we be happy just because we have trouble? No. Suffering is not good. We should be happy because of what we learn from trouble. Trouble brings out the best in Christians. Trouble brings out the worst in sinners. We should rejoice that God's grace is with us. He gives us power to win over our trouble. We become stronger friends with God when we work through our trouble (See verse 4.), experiencing God's help and power.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God gave a gift to those who believe in his Son. The gift God gave was the Holy Spirit. When we fully believe and trust in Jesus, God fills us with his Holy Spirit. He fills us with his love through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps us become what God expects us to be.

THE GIFT OF JESUS CHRIST

All people sin. No one is without sin nor without fault. Because people

sin, they need to be made right with God. They need to make peace with God. They need to be reconciled with God. Man cannot change himself.

Some men have said, "When I get better and live a better life, I will become a Christian!" This is impossible. But God did not wait for man to become better. God did not wait for men to stop sinning. Even while men were sinning, God gave his Son, Jesus, to die for us. Imagine that! Jesus died in our place. Jesus died - that we might have eternal life.

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

Would you have died to save someone you had never seen before? It is not easy to choose to die so someone else might live. Jesus did!

In Romans 5:10, we read that we were enemies of God, yet God loved us. Because God loved us, he let Jesus die on the cross for our sins. This shows how much God loves us. Paul tells us that we can be reconciled to God - only through Jesus' death in our place. If Jesus had refused to die for us, we would still be lost and without hope. But Jesus gave his life that we might live.

NEW LIFE FOR BELIEVERS

Was that the end, when Jesus died? Was he dead? Yes, Jesus died. His physical body died, but JESUS ROSE AGAIN. Jesus did not remain dead. Jesus is alive. He is still living! Because Jesus lives, we are saved from our sins. Because he lives, God saves us from a life of sin, and from

eternal punishment. As believers, we have a new life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

As Jesus lived, so should we live. Jesus' life shows us how we should live. We trusted Jesus to save us from our sin. Now we should trust him with our daily lives. Jesus will help us grow in his love day by day. He helps

us become more like him. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent to live in our hearts, teaches us how to love others. Now we are friends of God. We have been reconciled to God.

Christians should be happy, joyful people. Why? Because Jesus died for our sins. We are friends of God. We have hope and joy because Jesus died for us, and we belong to him now.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALIVE IN CHRIST

AIM: I need to grow constantly in my Christian life. This lesson will help me decide if I am growing or not.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 6

SCRIPTURES FOR TODAY'S LESSON: Romans 6:12-23

MEMORY VERSE: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Miriam was cooking. The baby was playing just inside the door of their house. She heard water splashing and knew the baby was playing in a bucket of water. "He will be all right", she thought to herself.

The noises in the house stopped. All became quiet. She quickly went to see about the baby. Terrible! The baby had fallen into the bucket of water and could not get out. Miriam

grabbed up the baby. He was not breathing.

She began running towards town. As she ran, she met a friend with a bicycle. He turned around and took her to the hospital. On the way, she heard the baby gasp for air. At the hospital, the nurses and doctor treated the baby. They told the mother, Miriam, "He is alive. He will live!" What good news!

Each of us needs to come alive. We are dead in sin, if we have not believed in Jesus. We cannot become right with God, if we do not trust in Jesus to help us. Only Jesus can make us right with God.

Before we became Christians, believing in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we were slaves to sin and slaves of Satan. We thought we were free, but we were controlled by sin and Satan. But, when we trust in Jesus, sin can no longer control us. Paul wrote the church in Rome, telling

them how they were free from sin. Read Romans 6:12-23 to learn how a Christian can be truly free.

FREE IN CHRIST

When we sin, we obey a master. Sin is our master. It controls us. Man was not created to sin. God made man able to choose right or wrong. God meant for man to choose right, but man's nature chooses sin. (See verse 12.) When we become Christians, we stop obeying sin.

Sometimes we Christians are tempted to sin. Something or someone may try to get us to sin. We may want to sin. We should not surrender nor give in to sin. When we were in sin we were like dead persons. Now we serve God, and we are alive in Christ. Sin keeps us from serving God. When we put away sin, God can use us and live in us.

FREE FROM THE LAW

Grace is God's free gift of love. Jesus Christ brought grace to man. Grace took the place of the law of Moses. The law demanded justice, Jesus brought grace in place of the law. We do not live under the law. We live under grace.

How free is a Christian? Our faith in Jesus sets us free from the law. Does this mean we are free to do anything we want to do? What did Paul say? He said we should not sin because we are free. Read verse 15 again.

WHO IS YOUR MASTER?

In verse 16, Paul told the Roman Christians they had a choice. They could choose sin, or they could choose God. You have the same choice to make. Each person must choose for himself.

Sin leads the way to death. Obedience to God leads to eternal life.

When we choose God, we change masters. Satan stops being our master. God becomes our Master, when we put our faith in Jesus. Christians are set free to live right. Jesus' life shows us the right way to live. Paul said we should become slaves of righteousness. In Jesus, God showed us the way of right living. Read verse 18 again. Write beside this verse in your Bible: Who is your master, God or the devil?

SAVED TO SERVE GOD

Paul told the Roman Christians that they were not strong spiritually. God forgave their sins. They were free because they put their trust in Jesus. They were no longer slaves to sin. But new Christians need help to understand spiritual things. Paul made it clear that Christians are not perfect. They do sin. Paul wrote to tell how a Christian can grow. A weak Christian needs to grow to understand spiritual things. A Christian wants to do right. If he grows more like Christ, he must give all of himself to Christ. Then he can live the life that God wants him to live (verse 19).

SIN'S WAGES

When a person was an enemy of God, God could not control him. He was free from God. He was free from right living, but he was a slave to sin. What does sin give us in life? Christians can remember what their lives were like before they accepted Christ. Paul asked the Roman Christians what sin gave to them. Sin resulted in death. When we are slaves to sin, we work for pay. That pay is death.

GOD'S GIFT

A gift cannot be earned; it is free. What is God's gift to us and to all persons? God's gift is eternal life (verses 22:23). When does God give us his free gift? Read verse 23 again. God gave us his free gift when we trusted in Jesus.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

When you accept Christ, you begin a new life. This new life means you should grow. Are you growing? Are you becoming more like Jesus? Pray that God will show you how to grow and become alive in Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

AIM: This lesson will help me to understand that I depend on God for my strength in growing like Jesus.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 7:1-8:17

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 7:14-25; 8:1-2

MEMORY VERSE: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

There is a story about a man who got his freedom too late. He spent fifty years in prison for a bad crime. He served his time and was set free.

This old man had no family or friends. He did not know what to do

with his new life of freedom. At last he went back to prison.

Some new Christians are like the old man. They were slaves to sin before they trusted in Jesus Christ. They gained freedom, but did not know what to do with it. They needed to learn to trust God for help. Instead, they did things that hurt God. Some of them almost went back into sin's prison.

A Christian can win over sin. God promised Christians victory. Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome to tell them about these things. Read Romans 7:14-25; 8:1-2 to find out what Paul wrote.

Paul wrote that the law was spiritual. "Carnal" means being human, of the world, not spiritual. Paul said he was carnal. He belonged to the flesh. He still sinned, even though he put his faith in Jesus Christ.

We will sin, too, because we are not perfect. We cannot be perfect like the law. The law tells us to obey God. Sin leads us to forget God. Sin and the law are at war.

Man will give in to sin often, because he is not perfect. But he will forget God if he lives under the law. Man will begin to let the law rule him. He forgets that the law is to teach him how to live. It does not save.

A BATTLE INSIDE

Read verses 15-16 again. Did Paul understand his actions? He told about a battle inside himself. He knew what God wanted him to do, but he did not always do it. Paul knew sin's way, but he still sinned. Why?

What made Paul feel the way he felt? What does verse 17 say? Paul knew Jesus. He loved God. But his human nature was not perfect. Sin lived in his nature. Paul was free from slavery to sin. But he was not perfect or without sin.

GROWING LIKE CHRIST

Jesus was perfect. He had no sin in him. Jesus always did what pleased God. Jesus never made God sad. He is our perfect example. We want to

please God. He is our heavenly Father.

Verses 20-21 help us see what is happening to us. We often get into trouble. We sin. We know we should follow Christ, but we still sin. We are not perfect.

One difference between sinners and Christians is desire. A sinner wants, is compelled to sin. A Christian rejoices in God's law. He loves God's law even though he does not always obey it. A sinner does not care. He does not even want to do right or obey the law. A Christian desires to please God. He wants to live right and to do right.

CHRIST IS THE ANSWER

Verses 14-25 showed a big problem all people have to experience. Paul gave the answer to that problem. Read Romans 8:1-2 again.

Verse 1 can be said in another way: Guilt for sin is all taken away from those who have faith in Jesus.

When we are "joined" with Christ we depend on him. Christ's strength is all we need. We do not have to fight sin alone.

When we trust God and live with Christ, God gives us his Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit fills us, and leaves no room for sin. We get strength to fight and to win over sin.

Can a person who is not a Christian live a perfect life? No, he can be a good person. But a good person is not perfect, nor without sin.

Unless a good person is a Christian, he will always lose to sin. Only Christ can defeat sin.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Do you have a friend who is not a Christian? Tell your friend how Jesus

wins over sin. Pray that your friend will accept Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. Then share with him what Jesus did for you.

CHAPTER NINE

SECURE IN GOD'S LOVE

AIM: God can use the hard times to test and strengthen my faith.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 8:18-39

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 8:18-39

MEMORY VERSE: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Many years ago, there was a terrible storm on the sea. A ship sank, with many passengers drowning. A preacher, Horatio G. Spafford, lost all of his children in this terrible tragedy. During Spafford's time of grief, he wrote a hymn. The hymn told how a Christian should feel during a time of deep sorrow. The hymn is called, "It Is Well with My Soul." Perhaps you know this hymn which says that peace is like river. Even when the sea billows are all around us, we can depend upon the river of peace to

keep us steady. We can say that it is well with us in all situations.

Spafford was telling Christians that God will take care of those who belong to him, no matter what comes upon them. The security of God's love is a gift whose value cannot be estimated.

Romans 8:18-39 is the often referred to "Christian's Eternal Security" chapter. As you read the Scriptures today, look for the promises of God for all who truly believe. These promises give all believers eternal security. Do you have this kind of faith in God?

A POSITIVE HOPE

Read Romans 8:22-39. Our world is filled with trouble. People suffer and die. They are hungry and starve. War takes people from families. All of God's creation hopes for a better world. Not only sinners have troubles. Christians have troubles, too. They become entangled in what they want to get security. Their faith is strong only when circumstances are right. That faith sometimes fails when trouble comes.

We know that Christians have troubles. But God's spirit fills our hearts, reminding us of God's love. We know that God will help us.

How should Christians act when trouble comes? Read Romans 8 24-25 again from your Bible. A Christian should have hope. When our hope is in God, we are safe. We have security. We can trust God because he loves us. God never changes.

A STRONG, SECURE HELP

Verses 26-27 tell us that God's Holy Spirit helps us. Are we strong? Do we have patience? Can we pray in the right way? No! But God loves us, and gives his Holy Spirit to help us. God knows how we feel. He sends his Holy Spirit to live in us to give us guidance in our Christian lives. His Spirit will tell us exactly what to pray for and how. And even if we do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit will pray for us when we ask him to do so.

What does verse 28 say about all things being good? It teaches us that God can use all things to help us if we are on his side, that is if we love him. God uses what happens to us to help us grow in the Christian life. Even trouble makes us grow spiritually.

Paul wrote strong, clear words. We can see that God wants us to grow. We are not perfect. But God wants us to become strong Christians. He wants us to become more like

Jesus. God must help us if we grow, or we will stay like babies in Christ.

Have you noticed how babies act? When a baby wants something he smiles and acts in a nice way. He begins to complain when he does not get what he wants quickly. Then he begins to cry, without tears. He then begins to cry real tears, and to kick. If all of this does not help him get what he wants, he begins beating his parents. Usually, in our culture a baby gets what he wants.

For many Christians, this is a picture of their spiritual growth, or lack of it. They pray. They wait. No answer to their prayers. They begin to complain. They begin to grumble. They decide to punish God. They stop going to church. They continue grumbling. These actions show that Christians who act like this are still spiritual babies. They are not growing spiritually. God wants Christians to grow spiritually. He will help us become mature Christians. We must want to grow spiritually. We must trust God completely.

God made plans for us before he created the whole world. (See verses 29-31.) God loved us so much he planned a way for us. We can never know why God loved us so much. But we can know his love. His love will help us if we trust him. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (verse 31) If God is for us, then we have security. We have hope and help.

A SECURE SALVATION

God's love is stronger than anything in the world. God is indeed for us, so nothing can destroy us. Even if we suffer and die, we are not beaten. Satan cannot win against us. God gave his only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay our sin's penalty.

A SURE VICTORY

Victory means winning. Christians will win through Christ's love. Paul wrote that in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us (verse 37). Can anything remove us from God's love? What did Paul say in verses 37-39? Praise God. Nothing can separate us from God! All Christians are secure in

God's love. Nothing can take away God's love from us.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Do hard things and hard times come to you? God's love will help these hard things and hard times make you a better Christian. If you trust God, he will bring good out of the bad things.

We can have security only if we know Jesus. Have you trusted Jesus? This is a good time. Ask Jesus to come into your life. As you ask him to save you and to completely forgive your sins, he will give you a safe feeling also. For God will never fail you if you trust him.

CHAPTER TEN

TOGETHER UNDER GOD

AIM: This lesson will teach me that all people can be saved.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 10:1-13; 11

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 10:5-13; 11:33-36

MEMORY VERSE: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him" (Romans 10:12).

Relationships between different races is an age old problem. It has been debated. It has caused fights, broken homes and even started wars.

Long ago, the Jews thought God did not like Gentiles, because they were not Jews. This was wrong.

Recently, a chorus was being sung by some Christians, "His Banner Over Me Is Love." It was interesting. A Jewish girl singing. There were also Americans (black and white), British, Irish, Africans - Kikuyu, Wakamba, Jalu, Meru, Wanyakyusa, Wasambaa, Zambians, Asians, Arabs, all singing "His Banner Over Me Is Love." It is a miracle of God's love that all people of any race or colour may be together, sheltered under God's great love.

The Jews had a real problem. They did not love Gentiles. Paul

learnt that God loved Gentiles. He still does. Paul wrote the church at Rome. He wanted them to know that God loves all people, without partiality. Paul also wanted all people to be made right with God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

Read Romans 10:1-13. Paul showed in Romans 10:1-4, how much he wanted his Jewish brothers to be saved. But he said the Jews could not gain "righteousness" by obeying the law. "Righteousness" means right standing with God. The Jews tried to be righteous by being good. Thus they could gain God's righteousness by their own efforts - they thought. Paul said they could not earn their own righteousness.

Read verse 5 again. What it really means is to keep or obey every part of the law. If a person becomes righteous by obeying the law, he had to obey it all, and no one could do that. The Jews failed to become right with God. They depended on the law to save them.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

Read verses 6-7 again. People did not need to try to bring Christ down from heaven. He lived on earth. They did not need to look for him in the resting place of the dead. God raised him from the dead. If they based their salvation on trusting Christ, they did not have to search for it. It was as near as their mouths and hearts.

CONFESS AND BELIEVE

Many people believe verse 9 was a statement of faith in the early church. A person had to make this statement to become a church member.

A person confessed that Jesus Christ was his Lord, and this would show that he trusted God. He had faith in God then, when he confessed that God raised Jesus from death. Then he would be saved.

A person shows that his faith is in his heart when he confesses Jesus as Saviour. His confession says that he was saved from that time. It tells that he is on the Lord's side. He is not ashamed to tell anyone that he is a believer in Christ.

If this is true, then why do you see so many Christians today who are ashamed to tell anyone they are believers? Could it be that these people are not Christians at all?

JEWS AND GENTILES

God loved the Jews. He still loves them today. The Jews were God's chosen people long ago. God gave them special promises. But we are not saved because of what we are. Our salvation depends only on what we believe and do about Jesus. Man cannot be saved in any other way. We can be saved only by putting our faith in Jesus.

The Lord will give his riches to all, and he will save anyone who calls upon his name. Who can have faith? Anyone who calls upon the Lord to save them can be saved.

A SONG OF PRAISE

As Paul wrote about God's love and wisdom, his heart was full. The verses of Romans 11:33-36 are like a song. Paul praised God for who he was - wonderful, wise and rich. He praised God for his gifts to man.

Man was a sinner. Man was God's enemy. But God gave man the great gift of his Son, Jesus. Man often acts wrongly to other people. Some people hate others who are different. They often mistreat those who are different.

God never treats people in such a way. Man cannot love like God loves. Can we tell God what he ought to do? No! God made everything and controls everything. When God gives us something, do we have to pay it back? No! It is a gift from God. What did God give us? He gave us life. He

gave us his Son. What can we give to God? Read verses 35-36 again. We cannot give God more than he gave us. But we can give ourselves. We can let God use us. We can let God show love to others through us.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Jesus is always near. We can trust him. He will save us. Jesus will give us strength to live. Are you happy because Jesus loves you? Tell someone else how happy you are. Do you dislike people who are different? Why? God made them also. Do you dislike those who have more (or less) material things than you? Why? God gives all people everything they have. God also holds each one responsible for what he does with what he has. How are you using the things God has given you? Are you using them for his honour and glory?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE RECONCILED LIFE

AIM: This lesson will teach me about the gifts of the Spirit and how they are to be used.

BACKGROUND **SCRIPTURE:**
Romans 12

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 12:1-21

MEMORY VERSE: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Do you know when your church started?

A church in southern Tanzania started in 1970 when two men moved their church membership to their home village. They had been members in a church twelve miles away.

To start the church they distributed a lot of tracts. They witnessed to more than 30 village

youths and elders. These eventually accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The church had started.

The church was meeting every Sunday. One man was the secretary while the other was the church leader. Many other youths gave themselves for service in the church.

Everyone in that church had a job to do, and it was all necessary. Not everyone stood in front of the church and preached but all worked. The girls, for instance, walked a long way down the hill to fetch water from the river. This water was used for sprinkling the floor in the dusty building they were using.

Someone may wonder why just two decided to start a church that would not have trained pastor nor even someone who had gone through any kind of training. They loved God, and they knew God loved them. He wanted them to love him better. They knew they could learn to love God better if they had a church in their own village.

Paul wanted the Christians at Rome to learn how to love God better. He wanted them to get along together. He wanted them to live the reconciled life. Read Romans 12:1-5 to learn the meaning of the reconciled life.

ONE BODY IN CHRIST

Christians, the believers in Christ, live the reconciled life. They become the body of Christ.

Paul wrote that the church is like a human body. A body has many parts. It has hands, ears and feet. A body needs all its parts. Each part helps in a different way.

All Christians are one in Christ. One church has thirty members. A larger church has members exceeding one hundred. Another has several hundred members. Each group of Christians is a part of Christ's body.

Whether a church has a few, or many, members, each member should have a job to do. We must not think too much about ourselves. We need one another. (See verses 3-5.) When we work together, we can do God's work. God gives each Christian a gift or gifts to use in serving him.

USE GOD'S GIFTS

God gives each Christian a gift or gifts. Read Romans 12:6-8. We have these gifts by God's grace (unmerited favour) to build up the church. When we use our gifts, we help the church to grow.

God gave a gift to a blind beggar at the city centre in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. He reaches quite a number of Moslems who would never go to church or listen to anyone testifying. He reads his Bible with his fingers and people on the street are really amazed. The roaming fellows hear the Word like that. This beggar is busy witnessing for God although he is blind. God has used this poor man to let those who would not go to church hear the Word.

What gifts does God give Christians? Paul wrote to the Romans about these gifts.

1. Prophesying (verse 6). This gift enable a person to speak for God. Let us call it preaching.

2. Serving (verse 7). This gift enables Christians to help people in need. Let us call it ministry, serving others.

3. Teaching (verse 7). This gift enables Christians to tell others about the Lord, explaining the Scriptures.

4. Exhorting (verse 8) -encouraging. The preacher or speaker for God was also to encourage others. He was to encourage the people to serve God with their whole hearts.

5. Contributing (verse 8)-sharing. The gift enables a Christian to share what he has with others. He shares money, love and mercy in a happy, loving way.

LOVE IN DAILY LIVING

Read Romans 12:9-21. Verses 9-13 give ideas about how Christians can get along together. Look for ways to live your reconciled life.

Christians should hate the wrong and hold on to the good. They should be honest with one another, especially in love.

We live in days of "make-believe" love on cinema and radio in

magazines. But we need honest love as we relate to one another. We should show the spirit of serving the Lord with great excitement and enthusiasm.

When Christians have times of trouble, they should pray, be patient and even rejoice. This can happen because of their HOPE in Jesus Christ. They should share what they have with others in need. The early Christians were urged to welcome overnight travelers into their homes. It was an opportunity to witness and share the love of Jesus.

LOVE FOR OTHERS

The Christians at Rome were urged to love one another. Christians suffered persecution in many places just as we do today. Paul said to them, "Pray for your persecutors to be saved." I suspect most of them found it hard to do that. But they had to. One of their goals, Paul urged, was to live in peace with all people. Even today this is probably why the United Nations is in existence, with peace as its main subject.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Remember that God gives every Christian a gift or gifts, to use in serving him. Do you know your gift? Ask God to help you find your gift. Also ask God to help you use your gift as you live your reconciled life.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WALKING IN LOVE

AIM: A study of the lesson will help me help weaker Christians.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 14:1-15:6; 1 Corinthians 8

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 14:10-23

MEMORY VERSE: "Then let us no more pass judgement on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Romans 14:13).

Some Christians are strong in their beliefs. Others are weak in their beliefs and weak in their practice of their beliefs.

A young man named John, arrived at a secondary school for the first term. He was very small in stature. Some students made fun of him because of his size.

John was a believer. Other Christians in school began to help him. He did not know English, but he tried very hard. The Christians were kind to him. They encouraged him. It caused John to become a strong Christian.

THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS

Read Romans 14:10-23. Some of the church members in Rome were weak Christians. Some were strong Christians. Some of the weak members were Jewish converts. They had been taught not to eat certain kinds of meat. Now they were

Christians. What should they do? They decided it would be a sin for them to begin to eat all kinds of meat. They wanted to feel right in their hearts and in their daily practice of their religion.

The eating of meat, of all kinds, does not save a person. Neither does eating meat make a man sin. But if a person feels something is wrong for him to do, and yet he goes ahead and does it, then it is a sin for him to do it.

What did Paul tell the Christians at Rome about this matter?

DO NOT JUDGE YOUR BROTHER

The church at Rome had two groups. Paul called the first group strong in the faith and the other group weak in the faith. The strong in the faith believed they were free in Christ. They could eat any meat that was good to eat. The weak in the faith still held to some of the old rules. They believed they sinned if they ate meat which had been sacrificed to idols. They had a bad feeling about it because they were weak in their faith. Paul told the Christians at Rome not to find fault with one another. God did not make them judges of one another. God himself would be their judge. "...What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15). Common means unclean here.

DO NOT MAKE YOUR BROTHER FALL

Read verses 14-18 again. Most people today know about football (soccer). There is a referee, and there are two teams. Perhaps one team is a very well trained team, but the other team is much weaker. The weaker team would not dare even to play, if the stronger team began to "play rough" during the first half session. The stronger team would be encouraging the weaker team and establishing good relations. If they had been rough to start with, they would have destroyed the weaker team's confidence and courage. Relationships would have been bad.

So it should be with Christians. Stronger Christians should be very careful what they do. If it causes a weak Christian to stumble and doubt Christ, then do not do that thing. Show the weaker Christian how to live a Christian life. Teach him how to build his faith in Christ. Help him to grow spiritually.

When a person becomes a Christian, he is not mature. He must grow. He is a baby spiritually. We all understand a baby must be "handled with care." Paul said stronger Christians should not make their weaker brothers stumble and fall spiritually.

As Christians, we should not even do a good thing if it hurts our weaker Christian brother. What we do may be talked about. The good thing, to us, may be called evil by others.

Christians should help others have peace and joy. This will please God.

God's kingdom will not come to earth by what we do. The kingdom of God is already here. The kingdom of God is right living, peace and joy given by the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Jesus.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

Paul told the Christians at Rome how to live the Christian life. Read verses 19-23 again. Christians should do things that bring peace. They also should build up one another in their faith. No Christian should eat or drink anything that may cause another to stumble.

If you feel you know what God wants you to do, tell him so. Each Christian must answer to God for what he does. No Christian has the right to force on another Christian what he thinks is right for himself. Christians should walk together in love.

In verse 23, Paul was not talking about sins like envy or greed. Such sins are all bad. Does what people think make an act right or wrong? No. Yet, if the person believes the act is wrong for him he should not do it. If weaker Christians believe the act is wrong, strong Christians should not do it. They may cause the weak Christians to stumble.

Would you be willing not to have your own way if it would help your brother.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OUR MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

AIM: I will study this lesson to help me know that God expects me to minister to others.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
Romans 1:16; 15:7-33

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Romans 15:8-21

MEMORY VERSE: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

A long time ago Moses was living in his own home village. One morning at dawn the familiar horn for bad news was blown. Everybody knew there was something wrong somewhere in the village. It was certainly something to do with death.

Everyone gathered to learn that the chief's son had died at midnight. Young boys were sent to different places to tell the relatives about the death.

Moses was given a bicycle because he was going to report the death to a village quite far away. On his way he got a puncture. He hoped the tyre would hold the air. So he kept pushing the pump, but it was all in vain. The tube would not hold the air. It could not carry him any more. Its contribution to carrying him was all finished, dead.

Sometimes Christians are like a burst tube that cannot take the air

from the pump. They are no longer useful. These Christians do not deliver God's power to the world. God's power is his gospel message. God's power can help us grow more like Jesus. But we must be in "working order." Christians are in working order only when they let God's power go through them.

How can we help God's power get through to the world?

Paul wrote to Christians at Rome to help them understand his plan. Paul said the gospel gives us God's power. The "good news" can change people. Anyone who believes the gospel and trusts in Jesus will receive God's power. God's power will help him grow.

Now read the Scripture for today. Did Paul set a good example for other Christians?

CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

Jesus is our best example. Jesus was the perfect man. We should keep trying to be one more like our Lord.

We follow Christ's example when we try to strengthen the weak. We must accept one another in Christian love. Thus we will bring glory to God.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

Paul's is also a good example. He was not equal with Jesus. But Paul's

life can help us understand how to live for God.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome to help them love their weaker brothers. Paul was strong, but he helped the weak. He followed Christ's example.

Paul knew that many Christians in the church at Rome were strong and could teach others. But they could learn more. He wrote to help those Christians understand God better.

In verses 15-21, Paul wrote about his special call from God. God called him to preach the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.

God used Paul to help the Gentiles learn about right living. They learnt how to become friends with God after Paul preached to them. Paul travelled to many places to preach to Gentiles. They listened. They learnt about God's love. They learnt about right living. They learnt how to love God.

Paul wanted to be a missionary to far places. He wanted to preach the gospel where no other preacher had ever preached before. He wanted to be first to tell those people about Jesus Christ. He did not want to build on another preacher's foundation. (See verse 20.)

Paul knew that many people still did not know about Jesus Christ. He wanted to go to those places and preach. He always looked for people

who did not know the Lord. Paul wanted more and more people to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Paul was an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador speaks for his country to leaders of another country. Paul spoke for God. He brought a powerful message to the world.

Paul set an example for us. He showed us that we should love others too. He showed us that we must share God's love with those who do not know him.

PEACEMAKER

Ambassadors often work for peace. Paul was a peacemaker too. He helped people know God's love in a personal way. When people live in God's love, they will have peace.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO ME

God's power can go to the world through you too. You can tell others what God did for you. You can help the sick. You can teach someone else about the Lord and salvation.

Remember that you, too, are responsible for helping others know about the Lord. You are responsible to help others love one another and live in peace. You are responsible to help others have peace in their hearts.

What will you do today to take the message of reconciliation to someone?