

# ORDINARY *Women*

A black and white photograph of three women sitting together, looking down at an open book. The woman on the left is smiling and looking at the book. The woman in the middle is also smiling and looking at the book. The woman on the right is looking at the book. They are all wearing casual clothing. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Women Caught in the Crossfire of Faith

DR. PERRY J. HUBBARD

Ordinary Women  
Women  
Caught in  
the Crossfire  
of Faith

Written by Dr. Perry J Hubbard

Copyright ©2016 Dr. Perry J Hubbard

All Rights Reserved.

Cover design by Ricardo Moisa

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except as may be expressly permitted by the applicable copyright statutes or prior permission by the author.

Photographs and images are protected by copyright law.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	4
1. Abigail – wife of Nabal	5
2. Abigail – mother of Amasa	9
3. Abishag	13
4. Ahlai	17
5. Anna	23
6. Apphia	27
7. Asenath	32
8. Azubah	36
9. Candace	42
10. Daughters of Shallum	45
11. Diblaim	49
12. Eunice	53
13. Eudia and Synthe	58
14. Hephzibah	63
15. Huldah	69
16. Jael	75
17. Jehosheba	81
18. Joanna	86
19. Jochebed	92
20. Lydia	97
21. Mother-in-law Peter	
101	
22. Penniah	
105	
23. Phoebe	
110	
24. Puah and Shiprah	
114	
25. Queen of Babylon	
119	
26. Rizpah	
125	
27. Salome	
129	

- 28. Shemiah (slave girl of Naaman)  
133
- 29. Tamar  
139
- 30. Wife of Noah  
143

## Introduction

I have always been fascinated by the people mentioned in the Bible. Even more so by the names of those who are not in the center of the action. They represent to me a special piece of information and encouragement. God takes note of everyone. He knows who we are and where we are. Even more important He does not forget this information and shares it with us.

It is not always clear why a person's name is included as part of a bigger story. It is not always clear what part they may have played in what was happening. What is clear is they were present and God remembered them. They were witnesses and participants in God's activity. They have a story to tell us about what it means to be where God wants us even when what is happening is hard to understand and emotionally stressful.

These stories are about some of the women who are mentioned and were involved in one way or another in what was happening. There is little personal information about them and why they were present. So I have taken the liberty to create a story. One that may represent what was happening. To be clear these stories are fictional but focus on what was happening and how the woman may have been involved.

Following each story is a short Bible study to explore further a key characteristic or behavior of the person in the story. Hopefully the story and the study will be helpful in opening our hearts to hearing God speak and at the same time

strengthen our faith and relationship with him and those around us.

## *Abigail – (Wife of David)*

***Wisdom and discernment at a moment's notice.***

### ***1 Samuel 25:3-39***

Hello, my name is Abigail and I was once married to a rich fool. He was a smart businessman but horrible when it came to deal with people. Some of you ladies understand exactly what it is like to have such a man for a husband! And men, you really need to pause and hear my story.

I am considered to be a very attractive woman. I say that not trying to be proud or arrogant. Others have told me that over and over. It was a key factor in how I became married to Nabal.

As with all marriages in our culture, ours was arranged by our parents. And so, when parents have only daughters (like my family did) they hope that they are attractive or intelligent, and able to manage all that is involved in caring for a household. When a girl is both intelligent and beautiful that attracts a lot of attention, especially from families who have reached a certain level of wealth.

These families are looking for the best for their sons. They are willing to pay extra in order to find such a wife. Because I was both beautiful (so they said) and intelligent, my parents had many who came seeking to arrange a marriage. Thankfully my parents did not just look at the wealth of the family. They too were looking for a spouse who would not just care for me, but a spouse who could build on and expand

what he had. They had seen many young men who had no real concept of how to manage anything and were clearly dependent on their parents.

That being said, when Nabal's family came to talk with my parents, they had many questions. Some were related to the bride price but many were designed to gain insight into their son's abilities and plans. As they talked it became clear that Nabal was a shrewd businessman and capable of providing for me without depending on the wealth of his family. When my parents met him he was respectful and careful with his comments and behaved appropriately. I too, was impressed by all that I was told and the possibility of having a good husband and a good life.

So, we were married.

The honeymoon did not last long. I am not sure why, but his behavior towards me and to those who worked for him became rude and self-centered. He showed little concern for others. His focus was on how we could benefit him and help to increase his wealth. He was his happiest when he outmaneuvered others in business; even when it caused them harm. He had little concern for how his actions might hurt others, as long as he won.

We lived in a dangerous part of the country. That meant we could be attacked by raiders, have sheep stolen, and workers injured if they tried to resist the thieves. This was normal until David and his men moved into the region. We had heard much about him, some good, some that suggested he was treacherous. The truth is that when he came to the area, the raiding stopped. There were no more problems with

thieves. Our workers often commented on how well David's men treated them whenever they met. This made me curious and I sought to learn more about the man and why he was fleeing King Saul. I came to respect him. I also was greatly relieved that such a man was nearby and that his presence provided us with protection and safety.

All was going as usual. My husband was celebrating his profit while shearing sheep. But when David's men came asking him for help, he insulted them and drove them off. As was often the case, my husband was offensive and inconsiderate. Our workers came to me and reported what Nabal had done and the insults he had hurled at David's men. Our workers were afraid. They knew David was a warrior and that his presence was the reason we were safe. They rightfully believed that such ungratefulness on Nabal's part could be disastrous. Based on what I had learned about David I agreed with them.

So without consulting my husband, (he would not have listened - he never listened to sound advice about how he treated others), I gathered up what I thought would be a sufficient gift to gain David's attention, and if he was angry, to convince him not to attack us. It was a good thing I did. Not far from our house, I encountered David. He was furious. He had gathered all his men and was bent on taking vengeance on such an ungrateful man. I think that being met by a beautiful woman caught his attention, at least long enough to hear my apology and receive the gifts I brought. His response was that of a man who truly understood human nature, the guidance of God, and the importance of wise counsel.

When I got home, my foolish husband, was celebrating his harvest, how he had stood up to David, (as if he could have lasted even a minute in combat), and praising himself. He acted like, well - I will let you decide. He was so drunk that I chose to let him be. His mind could barely understand the impact of his behavior when he was sober, but when drunk the only words he tolerated were those in praise of his accomplishments. You know how the story ended. When I finally told him how close he had come to death, he collapsed. I think he had a stroke from the shock of my words, the impact of the level of alcohol in his body, and his experience with a new emotion called fear. Ten days later he died.

Not long after that David heard of the death of my husband. He sent for me with a very simple message: he would be honored if I would be his wife. What a contrast between these two men! David is a man who makes me feel worthwhile, valuable, that I have something to contribute. Ladies, isn't that what we are looking for? And so, of course I said yes, and have been with David through everything. The wars, the family struggles, the successes, and the failures.

I am at peace. I am married to a man who knows he is not perfect. A man that loves and honors me. A man who wants me, not just because I may be beautiful, but for what I can contribute to his life - the wisdom and perspective I can bring as a woman.

### **Study Guide**

Those who are wise reveal certain key qualities. Read the following Scriptures and develop a description of a person who is wise and discerning

Psalms 1:5

Proverbs 9:9

Proverbs 13:14

Proverbs 14:16

Proverbs 15:7

Proverbs 16:23

Read the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25:1-11. Compare the 5 wise to the 5 foolish virgins.

Look at your own life. Are there areas where you need to learn to be wise and discerning?

How will this help you, your family, and your friends?

As you read about the life of David you will discover that neither Abigail nor her children became involved in the conflicts and battles that plagued David in regard to his children. Her wisdom and discernment protected them and guided their actions

*Abigail (mother of Amasa, sister of David)*

*A tale of jealousy*

*1 Chronicles 2:17*

We all know how jealousy and competition can affect siblings. If we, as parents, are not careful we will cause our children a great deal of pain and suffering when we compare the achievements of one with the other. We risk turning them into enemies in their efforts to gain our approval and blessing. I have read the stories of how this turned brothers against each other in the 'bible'; like Esau and Jacob, or Joseph and his brothers.

But it is not the only problem that we as parents must deal with. Jealousy and competition are a part of the world we live in. They can destroy families and friendships. Even when we do our best to prevent it, things happen. It happened to my family and in the end my son was killed because of jealousy and hunger for power.

As you know I am the sister of David. There is much debate as to whether my relationship as his half-sister or my marriage might have contributed to what happened to my son Amasa. I doubt it was either. The situation is much more complicated than that.

First, it is important to remember that my son was the nephew of King David and cousin to Joab and Abishai, the sons of Zeruiah my sister, and to all the sons of David including Absalom. You may recall that Absalom was an evil son of the king who killed his cousin for raping his sister. Joab diligently worked to restore Absalom's relationship with his father David.

I can't tell you why it happened, but when Absalom decided to launch his rebellion against his father, he rejected Joab to serve as his general and chose Amasa. Why he did this is

unclear. Maybe he was afraid Joab would try to stop him. Maybe he feared that Joab would exert too much control over him. For me it didn't matter. As soon as I heard about it I became frightened for my son.

I called Amasa home so that I could talk to him. I warned him that following a person like Absalom would only bring trouble. I tried to help him remember the type of person that Absalom was; a person willing to kill a cousin, a person willing to kill his own father to gain power. Following such a person would only bring trouble. Even if Absalom succeeded, Amasa would be under a person clearly willing to kill and sacrifice anyone to gain and maintain control.

I also tried to help Amasa understand the nature of his other cousin Joab. He was a man ready to kill innocent people, in the name of revenge, to gain power and protect his position. He had killed Abner for defending himself and killing Joab's brother Asahel. And, Joab was there when they decided to pick twenty-four men to fight to the death just for sport. It was horrible. I remember seeing the confusion in his eyes. The attraction of power on one side and the horror of using others so callously to satisfy a whim on the other hand.

I tried, as only a mother can, to convince Amasa not to get involved. But he would not listen. Like many a son and daughter, he felt he could take care of himself, that I didn't understand what was happening. That I was only trying to prevent him from getting ahead. He used the excuses of how he would be able to provide so much more for me and dad, how we would benefit from his new status and power. He just couldn't see that having more didn't matter when it

meant violating so many laws and deceiving his uncle, King David. He didn't understand that such a move meant he would have to kill his uncle to fulfill his role as general to a rebel.

I truly believe that it was a miracle. Amasa survived the rebellion of Absalom. Even more surprising was the fact that the king offered him the position of general of the army. Again, I became alarmed and concerned. Not because it was a bad choice on the king's part. It was a great way to reunite a divided kingdom. Unfortunately, I knew it would not work. Especially with Joab still alive and Abishai the leader of the king's guard. Joab was feared and respected by the soldiers. As far as they were concerned Amasa was an underling who had been defeated by Joab.

Amasa couldn't see the risk. Why do children not listen to their parents? We have seen and experienced so much more. We have a perspective they don't. It is a challenge to help them see that listening to their parents does not bring them shame or make them appear feeble and incapable of functioning. It actually is a sign of maturity and wisdom. But once again he didn't listen.

Amasa couldn't see the risk. He thought that because the king appointed him the men would follow. That never works in the long run, especially when danger is involved. Men follow people that have proven themselves in the crucible of trial and testing. They saw nothing in Amasa worthy of following. There had not been enough time for such confidence to develop. In his first assignment, he was indecisive. Instead of gathering those who would follow him

he tried to convince them all. It took too long. Even David saw that and sent Asahel with the guard in pursuit of the rebel Shimei.

Joab heard what was happening and tagged along. As a result, what I had warned Amasa about happened. In an act of treachery Joab killed him.

Now I am mourning the loss of a son. He was a wonderful person, but so foolish. He could only see what he wanted to see, the power, the fame, and the benefits. He didn't want to hear anything that might prevent him from getting what he wanted, even knowing there was a person willing to kill him if he got in the way.

Parents - you will all face the day when your children decide if they will listen to you or reject your counsel and wisdom. I have no simple answers other than to be sure you build a good relationship with them that allows them the right to make decisions and still feel good about asking you for advice. It is not easy to do. It means trusting them and teaching them well about how to make decisions.

It is certain they will rebel at some point. It is part of growing up. The goal is to not give them reason to completely reject us as a source of counsel and advice. I wish there was an easy way to accomplish that, but so far I don't know what it is. I do know that it is key in the process of moving from being our children, to being our equals as adults. I hope my story will help some parents do a better job, and maybe some children will reevaluate how they treat their parent's advice and knowledge.

## **Study Guide**

We have a responsibility to counsel our children. Read the following stories and review what happened in each story. Did the child listen? What happened as a result of their response to their parents.

Samson – Judges 14, 15

Gideon – Judges 6:24-29

Ester – Ester 4

Read Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:2-10

Explain your responsibility and what happens when you do or do not advise your children.

*Abishag – (last wife of David)*

*Trusted Confidant*

*1 Kings 1:3, 15; 2:13-22*

As a young woman I had a unique life and relationship with the ruler of our country. Officially I was known as his concubine. But in reality, I filled the role of caregiver. In all the time I was with him we never had sexual relations and I was always treated with the greatest respect.

There is so much I could tell you about the events surrounding King David's last years. I could share with you how he struggled with his past decisions and how they had

impacted his family. I could also share with you much about the depth of his love for God and his confidence in his relationship with God. His love was absolute.

I could tell you so much because I was there for all of the last years of his life. I was always present because, physically, my presence was essential. I was the one who kept the king warm as he slept. Yes, David had been a mighty warrior but the years of fighting and living in the field had taken their toll on his body. Mentally he was alert and as active as ever. As a matter of fact, it was during these physically frail years that he developed the plans for the temple. We spent hours together reviewing those plans and making the preparations for its construction. God didn't want King David to build it but he did all he could to be sure that everything would be ready for the day his son Solomon could begin the work.

Yes, there is much I could tell you about King David, but instead I want to tell you about something that happened after the king died. I watched all that happened as his successor (Solomon) was chosen and installed. I watched as the kingdom began to respond to his leadership. I saw how careful he was in thinking through each decision he made and how he built on the foundations his father had prepared for him.

My life was good. As a member of the king's harem I was cared for and had everything I needed. The world was filled with great opportunities for me. I was respected and I believed that I had a great future ahead.

But one day news came that shook my world and terrified me. I overheard Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, talking with Adonijah (Solomon's older brother). I could not believe what I heard. He was asking her to help him receive permission from King Solomon to marry me. I am not sure why she even listened to him. After all he had tried to steal the throne once before! Why would she even consider presenting such a request to her son, the king? I knew immediately the purpose behind this request.

Adonijah was not thinking about me or my happiness. He didn't love me or have any interest in me as a person. He wanted access to my position and, more importantly, to what I knew. Remember I had listened to all the conversations between David and his counselors and had had many with him in private. I had watched all the events unfold related to the succession, from beginning to end. I knew the secrets and dreams of many key people.

Yes, Adonijah's thinking was clear. If he married me he would gain access to all of this information. Even if I told him nothing he would pretend that he knew the king's secrets and use that as a threat. It didn't matter if I told him everything or nothing, he would use me to advance his status and plans.

I already knew his character. I learned about him through the comments of his father and others. I saw his behavior when he tried to crown himself as king and usurp the throne from his brother without his father's blessing. He was always working the system, trying to advance his rights as the older brother and, in his mind, as the rightful heir. I saw all this

and feared for myself and for those who would be threatened and attacked by him.

It is hard to express my relief when I heard that his request was denied. His execution sometime later caused mixed feelings because I knew how much his father had loved him and was saddened by his behavior. I knew that his father was disappointed at the directions Adonijah had chosen. The judgment was correct, but it could have been avoided, if he had understood, as his father did, the meaning of love, trust, and faithfulness.

I was a trusted member of the family. Everyone knew that my presence did not represent a threat or risk. My late husband, King David trusted me and so the family trusted me. Is there trust in your home, marriage, or relationships? Do you have a place where you share in confidence?

Some have asked if I will remarry? Maybe. But if I do, I will consider what is best for me and the family because we have learned to care for and trust each other.

### **Study Guide**

How does being trustworthy affect our relations with those around us? Read the following texts, and based on what you read, write a definition for the word “trustworthy.”

Proverbs 13:13

Proverbs 13:17

Proverbs 25:13

Daniel 6:4

1 Timothy 3:4

Do your children and spouse believe you are trustworthy?  
Are you a source of healing and refreshment to those around  
you?

## *Athlai (Daughter of Sheshan, mother of Attai)*

### *Finding one's true status*

#### *1 Chronicles 2:31-35*

I was married to my father's slave Jarha. My father had no male heirs and so gave me, his daughter, to a trusted slave. He was following Abraham's pattern who was ready to make his slave his heir. But God said no and promised him a son. Abraham later had that son and named him Isaac. My father, unfortunately, did not.

My father was a unique man. He was also a very frustrated man. But he cared greatly about stability, family, and our future.

Let me try to explain.

One of the most important things for a man in our culture is to have a son who will be his heir and maintain his name and the line of his family. Unfortunately, father was never blessed with sons, only daughters. This was a source of great frustration and much pain and suffering. He felt that he had failed in his duty to produce offspring. While none of his friends said anything, he sensed that they saw him as a failure in this key area.

This is not to say that he did not love me and my sisters. He did and that also contributed to his frustration. He was concerned that we would be treated as inferior. Some might think that if the parents could only produce daughters then, perhaps the daughters would not be able to produce sons as

well. The treatment we received was respectful but there was a subtle difference in the way we were looked upon.

My father spent much time in prayer seeking God's guidance and asking for direction in how to provide for his family and maintain his lineage. This was a serious issue because without sons the land would revert to the other members of the family and that would impact negatively our ability to marry. We would be seen as too poor, unable to contribute to the marriage, and without a dowry. Having no dowry is a serious problem for a young lady and a source of great shame. It is hard to explain what that means to those who have not grown up in our culture.

My father often talked to various religious leaders. He asked them if there were any options for him to resolve the internal struggle he was dealing with and to prevent us from dealing with the shame we knew would be ours. One day he came home excited because he had learned about the story of Zelophehad and his daughters and how Moses had declared that they would inherit their father's land. Also, that anyone who married them had to maintain their line so that the land would stay in their family. All my father had to do was find at least one young man who was willing to abandon his inheritance and family name in order to maintain ours.

Our father began his search in high hopes of finding a husband for at least one of us. But as the weeks passed it became painfully evident that there was no one who was willing to help him or us. It is one thing to be a friend when the sacrifices are small. But when the costs are high very few are willing to make such sacrifices. After a few months, he

gave up and became even more frustrated and despondent. We became very concerned about him and his emotional state and that began to affect us as well.

The only bright spot in all of this was his personal servant Jarha. In the years when life was hopeful and there were no worries about a future heir, my father was a respected and prosperous man. He was able to afford servants to help in the house. One day he had obtained a young Egyptian to help him in watching over the affairs of our family. He was an exceptional person and my father treated him well. As more daughters were born this young man became my father's confidant and the son he did not have. It was Jarha that watched over our father and spoke encouraging words to him. In those moments when my father despaired Jarha always had the right words to brighten his heart and lighten his life.

The truth is over time we had stopped thinking of him as a servant and more as a trusted family member. He treated us all with great respect and care. For the most part, my sisters and I behaved around him as if he was a cousin. Although I did note that at times he was embarrassed by our behavior, even more so when he was around me. At least that is what my sisters told me. I thought nothing of it. He was Jarha, our father's servant. Or at least that is what I told myself.

Then came the day that would completely change my world. Jarha had learned much about our God and worshipped him as we did. He began to study the law and encouraged my father to again trust God for an answer to his dilemma. So

once again my father prayed for guidance. He searched the words of God and that is when it happened.

Father was reading the story of Abraham. We all knew how God had provided a son to fulfill His promise to make Abraham a great nation. We knew that we were the result of that blessing. But most of us did not take time to read the whole story. That day our father decided to read it from start to finish. It was there that he found his answer. He read about Abraham's servant Eliezer and how Abraham expected to make him his heir because he had no children. This caused my father to quickly consult with the wisest people, those who understood such issues of culture and law. He asked them if in fact it was possible for a servant to become the master's heir. They listened to his question, spoke among themselves, and then said it was possible but very rare.

First, he would have to declare the servant free. That servant then would need to declare that he did not want to go free. To seal this he would have to allow them to place his ear on the doorpost of the house and then pound an awl through the ear into the doorpost. This would bind them to one another. (At first, I thought they had made up this part. But I did learn later that there is such a procedure for when a freed slave declares that he loves his master too much to leave and by that act makes himself a permanent slave.)

With that answer, he called Jarha. He told Jarha he had an important question to discuss with him. As is the custom with men they left us and went for a long walk. It was hours before they returned. When they did I noticed that Jarha's ear was bleeding but that he was filled with joy and, at the same

time, a level of humility and calm I had not seen before. My father had made him his heir. Our father was a different man.

The way people treated us began to change. Our attitude toward Jarha changed. At least for my sisters. They laughed and joked with him as a brother. Me, I was confused. Of course, I was confused. I was a young lady and I was attracted to Jarha. When my father's friends came around to speak about their daughters marrying Jarha I became moody, frustrated. I knew he needed to get married for our family line to continue. Yet, if he or my father showed any interest in one of the young ladies, I was the first one to point out why it would not be a good match. The strange thing is, they listened to me and I was usually correct. I knew these girls, I knew their skills and behaviors. In my opinion, none of them would be good enough.

My father was a wise man. He saw what Jarha and I couldn't or wouldn't admit was happening. So, one more time he told Jarha he had an important question to discuss. And once again they went on one of those long walks men take. ( It would be years before I was able to learn all that was discussed in that conversation.) When they came back my father called us together and made the announcement about the future bride for Jarha. I was so busy thinking about who it would be that I did hear him call my name, then when he repeated my name I was stunned into silence. Then I began to object, but fortunately, at that moment, my mother stepped in. She took me by the arm and we had one of those walks and talks that women have. She helped me see what I had refused to admit about my feelings for Jarha.

As we talked I began to understand my behavior around Jarha and why I had found fault with all the potential brides. I realized that I loved Jarha. I also saw how much my father loved and trusted him. And I began to understand how deeply my father loved me. He had seen all of this and instead of choosing a bride that would advance his status, he chose me, a bride that would strengthen the family and bring joy to his new son. I learned so much that day about faith, obedience, love and family. I also learned to trust my parents like never before.

Well Jarha and I were married and we have had a son. My sisters have found wonderful husbands and our family is respected. Even more, we have learned that God provides for those who place their trust in Him. Not always in the way we think He should, but always in the way that is best.

### **Study Guide**

What causes shame? Make your own list of causes.

Which of the things that cause shame are a result of who you are and which are a result of what you do?

Is there a difference?

Explain the following:

Shame caused by relationships

Shame caused by action

Shame caused by things beyond our control

Do a word search of the Bible of the word shame and find scriptures that help you understand each of these categories.

Here are a few to begin with 2 Kings 2:17; Psalms 25:2; 35:26; 119:78 Proverbs 6:32-35; 13:5, 18; Jeremiah 6:15; Mark 8:38

Read 2 Timothy 2:8, 15; 1 Peter 4:16. Do we have power over shame?

Are there times when we should be ashamed?

## *Anna – (widow living in the temple)*

### *The reward of being faithful*

#### *Luke 2:36-38.*

Daughter of Phanuel of tribe of Asher

I was very old. I was married only 7 years when my husband died and I remained a widow until I died.

I never left the temple but worshipped there night and day. I was allowed to live in one of the chambers of the women's court and was present at Jesus' dedication. I heard Simeon's words regarding Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Timeline: I am providing this so you can see the key events surrounding my life.

88 BC – Year of Anna's birth

78 BC – Birth of Herod

76 BC – John Hyrcanus 2 becomes high priest until 66 BC

66 BC – John Hyrcanus 2 becomes king of Judea

63 BC – Pompey the Great sent to settle war between factions over control of kingdom

63 BC – Pompey conquers Jerusalem and brings end to Hasmonean Kingdom

48 BC - John Hyrcanus 2 reappointed king and high priest by Caesar

47 BC – Herod appointed governor of Galilee

40 BC – Parthians invade Judea and seize power

40 BC – Herod appointed king by Rome

37 BC – Herod conquers Jerusalem

32 BC – Temple reconstruction begins – finishes 14 BC

27 BC – Herod rebuilds Samaria renames it Sebastoia

25-13 BC – Herod Builds Caesarea

4 BC – Birth of Messiah

I, Anna, was born in Jerusalem at the end of the reign of the Maccabees. It was a tumultuous time with their family divided and fighting each other for power. Herod was also born about the same time that I was so my life would become entwined in the lives and fates of the Maccabees and Herod. And the decisions of the Roman Empire affected all of us.

When I was about 12 the Maccabean family was led by John Hyrcanus II who proclaimed himself both king and high priest. This decision caused much jealousy and fighting. Three years later the Romans used this infighting as an excuse to invade and conquer our country. It was at this time that my family arranged my ill-fated marriage. I say ill-fated because it would only last seven years.

Shortly after our marriage my husband unwisely chose to join the fight against the Romans and was severely wounded in one of the battles. He survived but would never be able to provide me with children. Later, as a result of the injuries, he died and left me a widow. As the only male child in his family there was no brother who could fulfill the Levirate Law and give me a child.

My husband was a member of the family of Levi and, before his injury, had served in the temple. Because of his service in the war, and as a member of the tribe of Levi, I was provided

a place as a servant in the temple courts. This also meant I would have a room in the temple and a share in the tithes the people brought.

For many years life was peaceful and I had the opportunity to listen to the teachings of the priests and the privilege of hearing them read aloud the words of the Law and the Prophets. I was especially drawn to the words and teachings of the prophets. Some of my favorite passages had to do with the coming of the Messiah. My spirit hungered to learn more and I spent much time in the temple courts listening and learning.

Then life entered another period of turmoil. We were invaded by a group called the Parthians. It was at this same time that Herod was declared king of Israel. Many were not happy with this because he was not a Jew. But their attitude changed a little when he successfully drove out the Parthians and freed the country. These were difficult years and yet opened the way to incredible developments. Herod, in an effort to further appease his opponents and ease the tension, decided to rebuild the temple. My days became filled with caring for the workers and watching firsthand the work on the temple.

It was an incredible time. Herod was a shrewd and adept leader. The country prospered and so the people tolerated him. He was actually more dangerous to his family than the people. His megalomania and suspicious nature led him to kill a number of his own family in order to protect his control of the throne. Any threat to his power was squashed,

violently if necessary, even to the point of killing all the children under 2 years of age in the town of Bethlehem.

Before that happened, I saw the fulfillment of the prophecies. It was a day like any other day. I took my usual place near the entrance to teach people about the law and the prophecies of the Messiah. Yes, God had granted me not only a place to live but a chance to minister. After years of listening and learning I was allowed to share what I had learned with all that were willing to listen.

I and a very dear friend, Simeon, often spent our days sitting at the entrance encouraging people to prepare for the arrival of the Messiah. Simeon had shared with me that God had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. Many mocked him but I knew he was a devout man. I was convinced that he truly had heard from God.

On one particular day, as we were talking and teaching others, Simeon abruptly rose to his feet and without hesitation walked into the temple courts. I followed him and saw him approach a young couple. As I drew near them I heard him declare in a strong clear voice that this child was the one sent by God. As I gazed at the child I too realized the truth of his declaration and thanked God for the fulfillment of the prophecies. I told everyone I could about what Simeon and I had seen.

That day I learned the true value of a life committed to fasting and prayer; a life committed to the study of God's word, the value of trusting God. God honors our faith, He hears our cry, He sent His Son to save us. I knew I would never live to see what this child would do, what he would tell

us, or how he would give his life. But I knew this, God loved me and had fulfilled His promise to save me and provided for my salvation and eternal life with Him.

### **Study Guide**

Read the following Scriptures and learn what it means to be faithful.

2 Samuel 22:26; 1 Kings 3:6; Psalms 31:23; 37:28; 96:10; 101:6; 145:13

What does it cost to be faithful? Matthew 24:45-47

*Apphia (wife of Philemon)**Forgiving your enemy**Philemon 2*

It seems like it was only yesterday. We had planned a wonderful event and invited many of our friends to come and share in our anniversary celebration. We also hoped to share about a special aspect of our life. We wanted to tell them about our Savior Jesus Christ.

I had made one final round to check with all the servants to be sure all was well. Philemon arrived with the last of the supplies and he told me it was time for me to go and get ready. He was right, the servants did not need me hovering over them. So, I went to my room to get ready, but when I got there I discovered my room was a shamble. I was shocked, confused, and a little scared. I raced back to the hall to call Philemon.

He too was dumbstruck when he saw the mess. Then it hit us both. We had been robbed! But what was the person or persons looking for? That is when we realized that some very expensive pieces of jewelry were gone. We checked more thoroughly and discovered that a bag of money was missing as well. Our first thought was it must have been the servants who were responsible to clean this room, but they were all in the hall dealing with the preparations.

After some questioning we realized one of the new slaves was missing. Onesimus. He had only been with us a short

time. We recently had bought him at an auction for a reasonable price. We recalled that at the auction, one of the sellers warned us to be very careful about Onesimus. He had been a thief and so his punishment was to be sold as a slave. The seller told us to be sure not to let him work in the house. We politely thanked him, finalized the payment, and sent Onesimus home with our slave master.

This was not the first time we had purchased a known criminal or person with a suspicious past. We had done so before with the goal of helping them. This had become our pattern since we became Christians. We had a successful business and needed workers. It was normal and expected of us to buy slaves. But when we became Christians we saw this as an opportunity to help those in need and maybe even help them buy their freedom. While this was a bit unusual it was not unheard of. It was possible for a slave, who served well, to earn the chance to buy their freedom. We also used this opportunity to teach them about Christ with the hope that they would receive Christ even as we had.

We have a wonderful household. Those who serve us are happy and lack for nothing. So, we were truly unprepared for what happened that day. We had been so busy with the preparations that we had not paid any attention to what Onesimus was doing. The last we saw him he had been sent on an errand to buy something we needed at the market. So, his absence was not unusual and that he had not returned yet was unremarkable. Unfortunately, the errand gave him an opportunity to take the items and leave.

By the time we discovered what had happened we knew that he was long gone and it would be impossible to catch up with him. Besides we had all of our guests coming and what was more important... a few jewels and money, or the possibility that some of our guests might hear the truth and commit their lives to Christ?

Maintaining the right attitude was not as easy to accomplish as I make it sound right now. We had to deal with some unpleasant responses and thoughts in our own hearts. This event really tested our relationship with God and where our treasures lay. Our servants knew what had happened and they were watching. Our friends would hear about it and they would be listening and watching. It was one of the more difficult times in our life as we examined ourselves and stood before everyone to share with them what we had learned. As we talked with the others we began to let go of the anger and realize that we had stolen much more from God and had been forgiven. This event helped us understand, at a new level, what forgiveness truly meant. Especially as we recalled the line from the Lord's prayer, forgive us as we forgive others.

In the end, it was an incredible evening. Our friends listened and responded, not just out of politeness but with genuine interest. We had built a foundation that would later produce a harvest.

In the meantime, we continued to go about life and sharing our faith with all who would listen. This did not mean life was simple. Suddenly we had a rash of runaways. It was to be expected. Our response to the theft and departure of

Onesimus opened the door. We had not responded in anger, not sought revenge, nor made the usual threatening gestures and comments that they had seen from other slave holders. (The usual response was severe. Warnings and threats, severe beatings, and on some occasions a beating so severe it caused their death.) So, some felt that they could risk running away.

But, things finally settled down and life moved on. All was back to normal until the day the courier came with a letter from Paul. The letter contained some information that was almost impossible to grasp. Onesimus had been found by Paul, or rather, in desperation Onesimus had sought out Paul. How this was even possible is beyond imagining. But life had not gone well for him and he became scared. He then remembered how we had talked about Paul, and his ministry of sharing the good news.

Onesimus had begun attending Paul's seminars and meetings. During this time, he accepted Christ as his Savior and became a part of Paul's ministry. That decision changed his life. He realized that he needed to deal with the fact that he was a runaway slave and a thief. Paul encouraged him to return to us. So Onesimus began saving his money in order to buy his boat passage back to us. He also discussed with Paul the debt he owed to us for the jewelry and money he had stolen. Paul told him he would write a letter explaining all that had happened and how Onesimus had changed and become a member of his ministry.

While preparations continued for Onesimus to return, Paul sent the letter ahead to prepare us for his arrival. This letter

reopened the wound but also allowed us to review our reaction to his theft, departure, and what we had said to our other slaves and friends. We realized that we were about to have all that we had said tested. It was not going to be easy. Even more so since Paul strongly encouraged us not to simply treat him as a returned slave but as a restored brother in Christ.

We spent many hours in prayer. We were very concerned about how receiving back a runaway slave and thief would affect our lives. How it would affect the behavior of our other slaves and workers? How it would affect our relationships with our friends and business associates? It would not be easy, but as we prayed we knew we would do as Paul asked. His letter was such an encouragement. It helped us prepare for how we would respond and to make some important changes in our lives as well.

The day Onesimus returned was incredible. His attitude was clearly different. The workers saw it right away. His testimony helped pave the way for so many to understand why we responded the way we did. Our friends and associates watched and saw all this. They saw the repentant attitude. They saw our love and forgiveness and more importantly they saw how our other workers and slaves responded. Through all of this God opened their hearts and many became followers of Christ.

The anniversary we had celebrated had indeed bore the fruit we had hoped for but we could never have predicted how God would use the events of that day to reach far beyond what we had planned, for now the thief is not only a highly

trusted slave but a dearly loved brother in Christ. He has become an instrument to reach into the lives of the unreachable with the love of God and we have had the privilege of being used of God to make this possible.

### **Study Guide**

When should we forgive? Romans 5:8-11

Who should we forgive? Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 6:14-15; Romans 12:20-21

How should we forgive? Matthew 18:21-22

Do you need to forgive yourself? If God has forgiven you, are you forgiven?

## *Asenath (wife of Joseph)*

### *Marriage to a believer*

#### *Genesis 41:45, 50; 46:20*

My name is Asenath. I am the Daughter of Potiphera the Priest of ON. I was born into royalty and luxury, fully expecting to marry one of the sons of a great and wealthy family of Egypt. In my mind, I envisioned that I would lead my people in the worship of the gods and help them maintain that worship. Perhaps, I might also become the mother of one of the lesser gods (if chosen to marry one of the sons of the great Pharaoh, the living god.)

All those dreams changed one day when a slave who had been imprisoned was brought before the great Pharaoh. He was from an unknown people. He, it was said, had been betrayed by his own family and sold into slavery. I was amazed that such a man, a man with no history, no ancestry, was allowed to come into the court. This was a place reserved for only those who were of the royal lines or those who served in the temples of our gods.

Yet these days had been stressful and the royal court was filled with an air of foreboding. Pharaoh had had sleepless nights filled with dreams that distressed him; dreams that caused him to be afraid. I had never seen this happen before and was greatly disturbed by the fact that anything could cause fear in our living god. Dreams were important to us and often we went to the magicians to have them interpreted. But it was clear that these dreams were unusual.

Pharaoh entered the court that morning and shared the dreams that had disturbed him. He asked us if we had any idea what they meant but none of us could make any sense of them. He then began to send messengers to the temples and religious centers. He called for all those known to have ability in understanding dreams and interpreting them. Days passed but no one could provide a clear idea of what they meant. Some tried but it was clear to all that they really had no idea of the meaning and intent of these dreams.

Pharaoh became more and more angry with the inability of the magicians and priests to interpret his dreams. As he became angrier we became more and more frightened of what he might do to the next person who failed to interpret the dreams. It was not wise to disappoint Pharaoh. Many had landed in prison and had died because they did not do as he asked or failed to carry out the task given.

I well remember the events surrounding two key servants who had been sent to prison for failing to do as Pharaoh wished. They were the baker and the cupbearer. They had displeased Pharaoh so he sent them to prison. The baker was later beheaded while the cupbearer was restored to his position in the court. It was the cupbearer who finally, hesitantly, asked permission to speak. He told the key leaders that he knew someone who could interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. When asked why he had not spoken sooner he said that the person he knew was not of the royal line, was not a member of the priestly families, and in fact, was not even an Egyptian.

It was only now that the cupbearer told the story of his time in prison and of the dreams he and the baker had had during their time in prison. Both of their dreams were perplexing and they could not understand what they meant. However, in prison with them was a young man who had gained the respect of all, even the warden. In fact, he had been placed in charge of all the activities of the prison. The cupbearer told us that this young man was able to interpret their dreams, and his interpretation was exactly what happened.

Pharaoh immediately sent for the young man. He was bathed and clothed appropriately and brought before us. The Pharaoh told him about the dreams and the inability of all the wise men, magicians and priests to interpret them. He then asked if he could. . This young man said something that amazed me. He said he could not, but that he served a God (I had never heard of) who could provide the answer. He politely requested that the Pharaoh repeat the dreams.

He paused only a moment after hearing the dreams and declared that the two different dreams represented the same thing. There were two dreams, however, to make it clear that what was about to happen could not be avoided. His God had declared it and had warned Pharaoh so that he could prepare for what was coming. He then told us that the dreams meant that there would be 7 years of incredible plenty and abundance to be followed by seven years of the worst famine ever seen in the world. He also suggested that Pharaoh assign someone to prepare Egypt for the plenty and for the famine to come.

Pharaoh did not hesitate. He, declared that this young man, whose name was Joseph, would be the one to guide the country. He would have all the authority of Pharaoh in leading the people. He then turned to me and declared that I should become his wife, one who could help this man understand the people of Egypt and our culture.

I was shocked and overwhelmed. Never would I have considered marriage to anyone outside of the royal line or priesthood. But in a moment, all of that changed. I was to be married to one who would have greater power, greater respect, and greater position than I had ever hoped to obtain. Yet, I was also very concerned. He clearly declared that he served a God who appeared to be more powerful than any of our gods; One who controlled all and could subjugate all the gods of Egypt, living and dead, to his plan and authority.

Over the years I learned much about his God and saw how the famine was only a small part in a much larger plan to reveal Himself to the world and bring it to an understanding that he was the one true God, the creator of the universe. He was the only one worthy of worship. This was quite a revelation to me as the daughter of a priest and one dedicated to the service of an Egyptian god.

In the end, I could not deny all that I had seen and the fulfillment of what Joseph had told us that day before Pharaoh. I could see no other explanation to all that had happened to Joseph and how he had been especially prepared by his God to save Egypt, his family, and the future blessing of all who would believe in the one true God. I became a believer in this one true God, the God that had promised

Joseph and his ancestors that they would be the source of blessing to all the nations.

I, Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, have chosen to believe. My life has become so much more than simply serving in the temple of a lesser god and hoping to enjoy the riches of whoever might have become my husband. I am the wife of Joseph, one called to serve the true God. I have the opportunity to share in the promised blessing and also to help others to experience the blessing of knowing the one true God.

### **Study Guide**

It can happen. A person marries a spouse who is not a believer. And, after some time, the spouse becomes a follower of Jesus.

What is your responsibility to your unbelieving spouse? Read the following Scriptures to help you understand your responsibility. 1 Corinthians 7:7-14; 1 Peter 3:1-2

Will this be easy to do?

What are the issues that may cause stress in your marriage?

Once you identify an issue take time to search the Bible for help in dealing with that issue.

***Azubah – (Wife of Caleb)***

***Following your heart***

**1 Ch 2:19**

I am the wife of Caleb. Do you know what that means? Well I want to share with you a little of what it means to me.

We were married in Egypt before the great exodus. There was little joy in our lives. Marriage in those days was about survival. Having a child was risky. Many of us who were newlyweds had heard the stories of how the previous Pharaoh had ordered the deaths of all babies. Our parents were among those born soon after that event and they often told us how their parents lived in fear every day that Pharaoh would find out about their births. Their parents were supposed to turn every newborn over to Pharaoh's soldiers to be killed. At times they were able to save many, our parents were among those saved, and at other times, well, ... let's just say they did their best to save as many as possible. We were the children of those who had been saved.

By the time we were married the threat of death had passed. Pharaoh was more concerned about having enough slaves for his construction projects than the threat of a revolt. Still we were never allowed to forget that our parents had survived and that there must be a reason. Our parents believed that something was going to happen in our lifetime; something that would restore joy to our people.

But as the years passed there was little to be joyful about, except our marriage. It was about the only thing we were allowed to celebrate. The rest of life was filled with suffering and fear. We began to wonder if our parent's escape from

death was truly a blessing. For a while we even wondered if we should have any children.

About the time we were ready to give up, Moses appeared. Our parents were quick to remember the stories of a Jewish baby who had been rescued by Pharaoh's wife and who had later defied a soldier to protect one of us. But then he had simply disappeared. However, when Moses returned to our world things began to change. He challenged Pharaoh and told him that God required that he release his people. Pharaoh refused. And then we saw the power of God displayed as He systematically destroyed the greatest kingdom on the earth.

By the time the plagues were done the Egyptians gave us an incredible amount of wealth to encourage us to leave and not come back. But not having people to serve them soon change their minds. They came after us. One more time we saw the great power of God as He parted the sea. We crossed over and saw the destruction of the entire army of Egypt behind us. From there we went to Mt Sinai and heard God speak. We received the law and, day after day, were given manna to eat in the desert.

I could go on and on about the miracles and the provision of God. I could talk about God's protection from our enemies. But what discouraged me was how the people complained and complained. They complained about anything and everything. It was incredible. People who had just been saved from slavery, who had witnessed incredible miracles, and were being fed every day with manna, and water, and quail on demand, found every opportunity to complain. Even

when God punished them for their foolish complaining they kept on. To me it was a miracle that God even allowed us to get to Kadesh Barnea and prepare to enter and take possession of the land we had been promised.

I saw it as a special honor that my husband Caleb was chosen as one of the spies to go and evaluate the people and the land and what we were about to receive. My husband Caleb is a wise man. Over and over when others complained, he would help us see how foolish such behavior was. I, like him, began to understand how God had been working, not just in the last few years, but over the decades and centuries to prepare us and our inheritance for the day we would enter and take possession. We talked often about the challenges ahead but always remembered what God had accomplished to bring us out of Egypt and get us to where we were going.

Those 40 days of waiting for the return of the spies were a mix of fear and excitement. Their return was not as I expected. They appeared angry and divided. There was no joy among the group. When Caleb arrived, it was evident he was furious, but would not speak. He only said I would have to wait until the official report. All he would say is that he was amazed at how quickly people could forget and let their fears take control of their lives.

At the meeting, it became clear why he was so angry. The group was divided into two camps. There was Joshua and my husband Caleb on one side and the other 10 were clearly against them. They all reported that the country was wonderful and productive. But the 10 could only talk about how impossible it would be to defeat the inhabitants. They

constantly referred to the fact that there were giants in the land. In fact they were so adamant about the impossibility of conquering the land that Joshua and Caleb almost didn't get to speak. Even then they had to shout over the objections of the others. It almost became violent as the 10 began to incite the people against them and even their families. I think if it hadn't been for the respect of the people for Moses, they might have killed us.

The days that followed were difficult ones. Everyone shunned us as if we had leprosy. They couldn't believe that anyone would support Joshua and Caleb. We became isolated. But soon the mood changed to fear. Fear because Moses had just brought a warning that God was not pleased with the response of the 10 and all who chose to follow their report. He told us that we would have to wander for 40 years, a year for every day the spies were in the land. He also informed us that only Joshua, Caleb and their families would be permitted to enter the land at the end of those 40 years. Even as he announced God's verdict, the 10 spies who brought the bad report were struck dead! Now people avoided us for fear that being near us might bring judgment. Later, as people began to die from God's promised punishments, they began to treat us better. Not because they had changed their minds but because they hoped that somehow, we might protect them from the judgment and punishment that was coming.

Those were difficult years. It was tempting to berate them all for the suffering we had to go through because of their lack of faith. Yet we realized that though our enjoyment of God's blessing was delayed we were not under judgment. We were

protected because of our faith. So, we tried to help others recover their faith and help their children learn from their error. Some listened and things improved over time. Those who listened, instilled in their children a more profound respect for God. While they still died, they had the peace of knowing their children would receive the blessing. Others just did not learn. It was painful to watch as God fulfilled his promise of punishment. The sad part is that while their children did learn to fear and obey God, they did not learn the lessons of respect, faith, and obedience based on love.

What a day it was when we entered the land. Caleb was like a boy reborn. No one could keep up with him. Not even the young men. Nothing stood in his way, not even the giants of Anat. When a task appeared difficult he simply challenged others to follow his example. Othniel did. I was so pleased that he was the one to defeat the people at Kiriath Sepher and won the hand of our daughter. It is good to see our children grow and more importantly to see them learn to put their faith in God.

There is so much I could tell you about our lives and what we learned about trusting God; about helping people who have failed to learn this lesson; about not becoming bitter over other people's decisions. I am so happy that we learned to understand and appreciate our God, not just for what we received but also for what he could do through us when we obeyed him, trusted him, and put our faith in his promises. We left Egypt in triumph. We not only survived the 40 years of wandering but grew and were blessed and saw what happened when people learned to obey and trust God. We entered the land without fear and as a family conquered

some of the most difficult lands. We watched our family grow in God and follow our example. We learned not to be bitter about the past but trust God for the future.

I am Azubah, the wife of Caleb. You will only find my name mentioned once in the genealogies. That is not important. What is important is that I was part of God's great plan and I was there to support my husband and family as we chose to obey God and trust His word and promises.

### **Study Guide**

True obedience is based on love not fear.

Read John 14:21-25; 15:9-15 reflect on the reasons we chose to obey. Now write an explanation why the following reasons do or don't work in deciding if you will obey.

Fear

Personal gain

Social status

Power

Love

*Candace (Queen of Ethiopia)*

*The meaning of Insight*

*Acts 8:27*

I am the queen (Candace) of a region south of Egypt. It has been called Meroe by some and Ethiopia by others. We have a rich heritage and a long history. Candace is not my name but rather my title. My true name is Lacasa, but that is of no real importance.

Our people have had a long history of interest in the affairs and beliefs of the Jewish people. Many believe that the Queen of Sheba, who went to visit Solomon, was one of my predecessors. Whether this is true or not. What does matter is that we have long realized that the God of the Jews is worthy of our interest and so we have often sent people to study their faith and bring back this information to us so that we may consider being followers of their God.

As a result, we have learned much about the teachings of God and of his people. We have sent our people to participate in the great feasts to honor Him. These activities continue to develop our knowledge and give guidance to our faith. It was to this end that my trusted treasurer and highly respected eunuch, Judich, gained my permission to attend one of the festivals in Jerusalem. He was a student of the writings of the Hebrews and was hoping to obtain a copy of the writings of the prophet Isaiah to add to those that we already had obtained.

It was during this trip that Judich encountered the follower of Jesus named Philip. At the time of their encounter He was engrossed in reading the passage in Isaiah 53 about the death and sacrifice of the Messiah. He was greatly disturbed by the foreboding nature of this passage and why the Messiah, a

person sent to save his people, should be treated so horribly and have to die.

Judich said that Philip appeared from nowhere on a very lonely part of the road toward home. He offered to explain the meaning of the passage and how it was critical in bringing true hope to all those seeking God. Philip explained how the death of the sinless Messiah made possible the forgiveness of sin. He told the story of the crucifixion and resurrection, a story that Judich had heard from several of his friends, a story he considered impossible to believe, until he met Philip on the road. As Philip shared the story and led Judich to other passages in Isaiah, he was convinced of the truth that Philip had told him and he insisted on being baptized when they arrived at a small oasis along the road. It was clear that this encounter between Judich and Philip was pre-arranged by the sovereign God.

Judich has tried on numerous occasions to describe all that he experienced in the moment he rose up from the water. He talked about an incredible peace, a powerful sense of God's presence, release from a heavy burden, and other such physical reactions. He described how his eyes flowed with tears, not of sorrow or pain, but of overwhelming joy. In the following moments Philip shared other passages and writings to help strengthen his new-found faith and relationship with God and his Son Jesus Christ. Philip wrote it all down. (Remember, he is our treasurer and always has at hand the materials necessary to write and record).

With this recorded information Judich bade Philip farewell and climbed into his chariot. As he turned to wave goodbye

Philip had disappeared. Judich was once again convinced that God had prepared all of these events to open the way for him to hear the truth.

When Judich returned to us, we heard the incredible story of his trip to Jerusalem and his encounter on the dusty isolated road in the Sinai. He showed me and my court the passages he had been reading. He reviewed all the Scriptures that Philip had shared with him and then called for the other scrolls so that we could read them together and see if, in fact, all that he had heard and been told was true. As each passage was read and discussed we became more and more convinced that Judich had indeed had an encounter with the God we had been seeking. There was no doubt that this God loved us and that He had sent His son, who willingly sacrificed His life and been resurrected so that we could be restored.

We agreed that we needed to learn more about this truth; that we needed to learn more about the life and teaching of Jesus. But, in the meantime we committed our lives to the true God and changed how we lived. I, Lacasa, Candace of Ethiopia, would do all in my power to establish this truth among my people. The word of God, the truth, had reached us and we would live by it. We would do all we could to tell others of my kingdom this truth.

We began to share our newfound faith but soon realized that we would need help. We had so much to learn. So, we sent a letter to those Judich told us may be able to help us. He called them the apostles of Jesus. Within a few years Matthew arrived. I cannot tell you how we celebrated! With

Matthew's help, and later one of the other apostles, we established the church of Jesus in our country.

Yes, I am Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. But I am also Lacasa, a follower of Jesus, the Messiah, my Lord and Savior. I rejoice that I had the wisdom to see and hear the truth sent to me through Philip and Judich. I rejoice that I have heard the truth and been given the chance to choose it for my life, I rejoice that my people have the opportunity to hear the truth as well. Though we were far away, God saw us and sent us his message.

I pray that others will have this same privilege; that others will listen to those God sends to them. My heart is often heavy and burdened when I think of what would have happened if Judich had not gone to Jerusalem, if Philip had not been sent to meet him on the road, and if Judich had decided not to share all that he had learned with me. I am even more burdened for those who have not yet had such a privilege and I pray that more will hear, that more will be sent, like Philip and Matthew. There are so many more people, like ours, that need a messenger and I, Lacasa, Candace of Ethiopia, pledge all that I have to make that possible. I will be a servant of the King of all creation, and serve him with all that I am and possess.

### **Study Guide**

What is the source of true insight? Psalms 119:95

What does insight provide? Proverbs 1:2-7

How does one obtain insight? Proverbs 2:3-5

Read the following scriptures: Ephesians 3:1-6; Philippians 1:7-11; 2 Timothy 2:1-9

What do you learn about insight from these passages?

*Daughters of Shallum – (helped rebuild wall of Jerusalem)*

*A Woman's Worth*

*Nehemiah 3:12*

We are the daughters of Shallum and we have something to say. We want you to know that women can and will do what needs to be done, even when there are no men present. We want to tell you our story so that women will learn to believe in themselves and men will give us the respect and honor we deserve.

This is our story.

We lived in Jerusalem. Our father was the leader of a half district of the city. Life was difficult. Actually, life was horrible. The walls of the city lay in ruins and our situation was desperate at best. Every day was a struggle to find the resources we needed to feed ourselves. Now that may sound strange but it is true. There were not many living in Jerusalem at that time and though we had plenty of land for crops, it was difficult to work the land. Even when we did we were in constant fear that our enemies might enter the city and steal what we had carefully gathered. All of this

because the wall that should have given our town its security lay in ruins.

Occasionally a leader would suggest we rebuild the wall but he soon gave up because, unless everyone did the work, his time and energy made no difference. Plus, the neighboring people would not supply us the tools and materials that we needed. They wanted to reinforce our shame and maintain their control. And so, we lived with the visible shame that we were a defeated people; slaves and servants of another kingdom and king. This was all to change with the arrival of Nehemiah. He was a Jew. But more than that, a Jew who served in the court of the king who had conquered us. Nehemiah brought us news of the world and then shocked us all by announcing that he had gained the permission of the king to rebuild the wall. Not only that, he had letters from the king that would give us access to all the supplies and tools we would need. The key would be organizing the people to do the work.

Nehemiah called all the leaders together, including our father, and challenged them to select a section of the wall and begin the work. Leader after leader came forward and either selected a section of wall near them or accepted the section assigned to them by Nehemiah. Our father saw all the men and their sons receiving their portions and became nervous. What could he do?

You see our father had no sons and our family was not large. We talked briefly among ourselves and then sent our elder sister to him to suggest that we could do the work. We were strong and understood what needed to be done. She

reminded him that we had helped build our house when we had returned to Jerusalem. At first, he objected. He was a proud man. But as our sister continued to talk to him he began to waver and finally agreed to accept a portion of the wall to rebuild.

Many laughed when he approached Nehemiah and requested that we be given a section. They knew he had no boys and few others to help. But Nehemiah did not laugh. In fact, I believe he smiled at us. And he didn't even hesitate as he assigned us a section of the wall to rebuild. With that action, he silenced all the scoffers. Later he came by and expressed his appreciation for our willingness to share in the work. There was no expression of concern, no warnings about what might happen if we failed. He looked at us and knew we would not fail. And we did not.

Day after day we worked. It was hard work but we were excited about what we were doing. The fact that Nehemiah had treated us with respect and confidence fueled our desire to succeed. The days passed and we completed clearing the rubble away and began organizing the materials to start rebuilding. Our father saw that all was going well and we could see his pride grow and his stature increase among the other leaders. We did not fall behind. Step by step the wall began to grow.

There was only one point at which we became concerned about whether we would be able to finish the work. It was when the threats of attack began to increase and everyone was required to post guards to protect themselves and the work they were doing. We had never held a sword or spear

before and became very concerned about how we would be able to provide for our protection. But we did not have to worry long. Nehemiah had foreseen this issue and each day sent a few men over to stand guard for us. Actually, some of his men began to request this appointment because they knew they would be fed better than in their normal station!

We worked hard and the wall continued to rise. Even those assigned to inspect the work were pleased with what we were doing. I must admit that it was hard and tiring. But we learned how to work together and so could move even the heaviest of blocks into place.

The day finally came when we set the last block in place and saw that we had completed our section on time and at the same time as everyone else. What a celebration we had! Then another interesting thing happened. Our father was inundated with requests for marriage! Every eligible son wanted to marry one of us. They had seen our determination, our confidence, our perseverance, and our ability to serve, and as a result we became very desirable as future brides. In fact, most parents were willing to forgo the dowry for the honor of having their son marry one of us. Our father had often worried about the cost of a dowry. What a relief he felt! Some even offered to help with the cost of the wedding!

Before, father was having difficulty finding grooms for his daughters. Now there were options! And because of all that had happened we had learned much about the character of the available men and our father could make wise choices in selecting our future husbands. We, too, learned much about

ourselves and what could be done when we believed in our abilities and accepted the challenges that came our way.

God helped all of us work together to rebuild the wall, reestablish our city, and provide greater freedom so that we could worship the God who had made all of this possible. Life is still hard but we are stronger because of all that we have accomplished and our faith is stronger because of all that God made possible.

### **Study Guide**

Many a sermon has been preached on Proverbs 31 and the abilities and value of a woman. And the Bible is filled with stories of women who played key roles in God's plan. Find one and read about her.

Here are a few but there are many more. Rahab, Ruth, Esther, Mary, and Deborah. These are some of the obvious ones. Search for one that is less obvious. What can you learn about being ready to do what God asks you to do?

*Dibblaim (Mother of Gomer)*

*Parenting Gone Wrong*

*Hosea 1:3*

Hello my name is Dibblaim. My claim to fame is that I am the mother of Gomer. This fact has caused me a fair amount of distress. So many declare that I must be a horrible mother because my daughter chose to be a whore; or rather, a

prostitute in the local temple to one of the many idols worshipped in Israel (this was after the establishment of the false religion of calf worship by Jeroboam.)

The day I gave birth to Gomer was a happy day. I had given birth to a daughter. A child that I could raise and who I could teach to be a good wife and mother. One who I could share my life with. There is always a special relation between a daughter and her mother. It is unlike any other relationship. I remember well the hours of talking with my mom about life, cooking, marriage, and having children. I looked forward to having this relationship with Gomer.

To this day I do not know what happened. I followed all the traditions and teachings. I did everything a good mother would do to raise an obedient and wise child. But Gomer fought me at every turn. She didn't want to learn to cook. She wanted more jewelry and makeup than is normal; at least what I believed to be normal. She was attractive and saw how the boys looked at her. Her life began to focus on gaining their attention and ... I lost my little girl. The attention of men became her life and, the rest is too painful for me to talk about.

Then one day a man came to my house asking if my daughter was married. I was surprised by the question because I thought all the men knew she was not married. I was even more shocked when I finally realized that this man was Hosea, the prophet. I had heard much about him and his teaching of the old truth and of our need to follow God. Actually, I had been sensing a need in my life to change, to find the answer to my questions. About this same time,

Gomer was becoming disillusioned with her life as well. It was no longer fun!!

So as Hosea talked with me and then asked if he could marry my daughter I thought, why not? Maybe this God of his could rescue my daughter from her lifestyle and even make possible my dream of that special mother/daughter relationship. So, when Gomer came home the next morning we talked. I was pleased and surprised that she was willing to consider his proposal. The mother in me hoped for the best.

Again, I became the source of much conversation and gossip.

The next years would be a mixture of joy and pain. Hosea was a kind and loving man. At times Gomer responded well and there were periods of happiness. For me there was the joy of becoming a grandmother. There was also the real fear that it would not last. It was not long and I began to see the signs of Gomer's past in her eyes and attitude. I tried to warn Hosea. His response was a surprise to me. He did not deny my warnings, instead he tried harder to be the best husband he could be. He listened, he watched, he forgave.

I tried my best to support him and reach out to her. Yet, again, she chose to seek out the attention of other men. Finally, she left Hosea and me. She simply disappeared one night and we had no idea where she had gone. I did my best to help Hosea in caring for the children. It was a difficult time. People were mean, even cruel to him for marrying a person like Gomer and were derisive as he sought to find her. They said, why bother? Focus on the children and find a good woman. But Hosea talked about the children of Israel

and compared them to Gomer. They had abandoned God like their mother and sought the pleasures of other gods. He reminded his children how God searched after them and wanted them to come home. These words stirred my heart and I joined him in the search for my wayward daughter.

Finally, one day we found her. Her lover had not kept his promise to make her his wife or even his concubine. He has made her a slave and sold her services to anyone willing to pay. She was bereft of life and joy. It was heartbreaking to look at her and realize what her selfish indulgence in pleasure had cost her. I was ready to turn away, to admit that there was nothing left in her worth loving and rescuing. As I turned to go I was stunned by the words I heard from Hosea. He was asking the owner, "how much?" Not how much for a few moments of pleasure, but how much to buy her and take her away as his slave (wife)

I spun around to look at this man and I was dumbfounded by what I saw in his face. He was not angry, he was not dismayed. There was no desire to see her suffer or abandon her. He wanted her back. She was his wife and he cared. He honestly loved her. At the same time there was a calm determination in his manner. He wanted her back, but there would be consequences. There would be a time of isolation and restoration before she would be fully accepted and restored as his wife.

She looked at him with incredulity and for the first time, in humility. His action, his willingness to pay the price of her freedom had penetrated her being and she knew that here was a man who cared about her, not her appearance, not the

pleasure she could give. Here was a man who loved her and who wanted to bring peace and joy into her life.

The days that lay ahead were not easy. Gomer still had much to learn and unlearn about herself and how to relate to others. She had to regain the trust of her children and overcome the way others viewed her. She had to learn what it meant to be worthy of the trust of others. Hosea was a patient man and a great example of God's patience with us. We are so unworthy of His love. I wish more had the chance or even the desire to learn this truth. A few did. But too few.

I wish I could say everything was perfect after that. That is not the way of life. What I can tell you is that I finally got my dream, a daughter who was my confidant and friend. One who I could share my life with. And we received an extra blessing. We learned about God from Hosea and learned together about the amazing love He has for us. I prayed that more people would learn this truth and return to God. I prayed that our lives would help them avoid the pain Gomer and I experienced before we would listen to the teachings we received from Hosea.

In my time, it did not happen. My people refused to listen to our testimony or follow the example of Hosea's life. Each day we watched our friends and even our family stray farther and farther from the truth and from God's love. It was sad and painful. Yet we keep trying to tell them, hoping that some would hear and respond.

### **Study Guide**

Our children don't always do what is right. Yet Scripture tells us to train a child in the right way and when they are old they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6)

First read the whole book of Hosea and then read the following Scriptures: Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7-9; Psalms 78:2-6, Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:15.

What can you learn from these texts about the right and wrong way to train a child?

*Funice (mother of Timothy)*

*The challenge of Culture*

*2 Timothy 1:5*

I am a Jewess, a descendant of a people called by God to be His own. This also defines something about my religion and my culture but only a little. I believe what all Jews believe. There is only one true God. There is only one true Scripture. We are a people specially chosen by God as His own. Beyond those beliefs there is much that is different about us in the way we live and how we relate to the people around us.

There are Jews that are very strict. They avoid contact with Gentiles except when necessary in business or government requirements. Beyond that they maintain a clear separation when related to their family and life in general. They would never permit a son or daughter to marry a non-Jew.

At the other extreme are those called Hellenistic or secular Jews. They maintain the core beliefs of our faith but have adapted to the culture and philosophy of the people around them. They dress like everyone else, participate in social events in the homes of non-believers, and even invite Gentiles to their homes to celebrate special events. It would not be a serious issue for a Hellenistic son or daughter to marry a Gentile as long as it was clear that the marriage not undermine or limit their freedom to worship, and they would continue to study the word of God and attend the synagogue. The parents would insist

My family is of the latter. We became part of the world around us in dress, lifestyle, and culture. But not in our faith. My mother made it a point to take me to the synagogue so that I would know why we are Jews and what God expects us to do. Not only that but my mother paid someone to make a copy of the writings of Moses so that we could read them at home. Not many people had such a copy, so often people came to our house to listen as we read and talked about what Moses wrote. Mother also managed to get a copy of Isaiah's writings. We were fascinated by the passages about the Messiah.

As I mentioned we were Hellenist Jews, or like them in many ways. As a result, we had a lot of contact with people from other countries and cultures. We did a lot of business with people from Greece. There were many who settled here because of the education centers that were present in the city of Lystra. Because of this, I often met and played with their children and fell in love with one of them. In the negotiation before our marriage, it was made clear that I should be free

to continue in my worship of God and attendance at the synagogue. The family agreed as long as we didn't require any boys that were born to us to be circumcised. And so, we were married.

In general, we had a happy marriage. Two young people in love and enjoying each other's company. But, we had our moments. He struggled to understand why I believed in only one God. I struggled to understand why he didn't. The greatest challenges were related to the time I spent at the synagogue and at my mother's house reading the Scriptures. He thought it was a waste of time. At first, he was mainly concerned that it would affect my ability to get my work done and take care of him. That is how men think, need I say more? At first it did pose a challenge for me, sometimes I failed to complete a task when he expected it to be completed. Then we would have a fight and he would threaten to ban me from attending the synagogue. It is interesting that he never threatened to ban me from visiting my mother. In many cultures, like ours, that is a dangerous threat. Mothers-in-laws have a lot of influence and power.

Some days, after a bad fight, I would run to my mother and cry. She was always sympathetic, yet she was also penetrating in her comments and questions. She would ask me why I didn't get the work done as expected. She would ask how I scheduled my work and activity. She was sympathetic because she remembered the struggles she dealt with when she was first married: the changes that had to be made, the adjustments in planning, and how she had to rethink her priorities about what needed to be done and when it needed to be done. She patiently helped me understand that

often the reason I had not completed a task on time was more about how I organized my day, and how I set my priorities.

She also told me very clearly that I was expected to honor my husband. If I could not honor him then how could I go to the synagogue and honor God? One day she brought home a portion of the book of Proverbs. It included the last section about a good wife. That day it became clear that I was to take responsibility for my marriage and relationship with my husband. And, as he saw me change in all aspects of our life together, I earned his respect. He saw how my life brought him honor. This helped him understand the value of my relationship with God and the importance of attending the synagogue and studying His word.

By the time Timothy was born I had done much to change my life and had become a good wife. We no longer had fights about my ability to manage the house and get my work done. Oh, we still had disagreements but they never resulted in threats to ban me from being involved in my faith. Actually, it was quite the opposite. He actually encouraged me to take Timothy to the synagogue with me and teach him as well. He still refused to go along, but he had come to see the value of my relationship with God and how it made me a better wife and mother. And so, with my mother Lois' help, we taught Timothy everything we knew.

We did face one difficult challenge. My husband insisted that Timothy not be circumcised. He reminded me and my parents that this was something that we had agreed on. Timothy was to be a Greek. We could teach him our faith but he would be treated as a Greek. My husband believed very

strongly that this was critical for Timothy's future acceptance and success in the business world and in the community where we lived. We could not change his mind and so Timothy was not circumcised. This was especially challenging because as an uncircumcised male he was not allowed to enter the synagogue. Nothing we could say to the leaders would change their minds.

This meant that we needed to be even more diligent in teaching him the word of God. Fortunately, we found a leader who would come to my house or my mother's house to provide Timothy private tutoring at least once a week. There was a cost but we readily agreed to pay and reorganized our lives and schedules to earn the money without affecting our household finances.

And so, our small group was bound together by God's word and we hungered to learn more. When Paul and Barnabas arrived, we were like dry sponges ready to soak up every word and teaching. From the moment Paul began to teach we knew the truth of what he said. The three of us, my mother, Timothy, and myself, were among the first converts in Lystra. We were horrified when the people stoned and left Paul for dead. But we were also among the group that prayed for him and watched him return to those who had just stoned him and continue to teach and preach all that God had done through Jesus Christ His Son.

Paul and Barnabas's last act before leaving was to organize the believers into a fellowship. They knew that we would not be able to return to the synagogue and so showed us how to come together and help each other to grow in our new faith.

Paul appointed leaders to supervise our group and promised that he would return if God allowed him.

While we waited for Paul's return our group grew and we shared what we learned with others in our community. Many responded, even some of those who had stoned Paul and left him for dead. Timothy became more and more involved and began to share that he felt God was calling him to serve in a new way. The leaders saw it, as did his grandmother and I, and together we encouraged Timothy in his study of the Word and his involvement in sharing the truth with others. When Paul finally returned the leaders quickly met with Paul and suggested that he should take Timothy with him, which he did.

As I mentioned before, I am a Jewess. More importantly I am a follower of Christ. I have learned much about what it means to believe in God, believe in His promises, and be a source of honor to God. I also have learned the importance of studying His Word and teaching it to my children. It is the pattern that my mother used for me, that I used for Timothy, and now Timothy is teaching it to others.

### **Study Guide**

One of the challenges we face is knowing the culture we live in and how to know what is acceptable/unacceptable. Then we need to help our children understand those issues.

This includes how we live and what we do as well. Are we an example of the best way to live?

Take time to study Timothy's life and how the mixed culture of his parents affected him. Note that in Acts 16:1-5 Timothy was circumcised. Do you think that was necessary?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. What can you gain from this passage that will help you and your children navigate the culture that you live in?

*Fuodia and Syntyche (friends and coworkers of Paul)*

*The price of having it my way. Division.*

*Philippians 4:2*

Euodia – I want to tell you about my friend Syntyche and something that almost destroyed our relationship.

Syntyche – Yes and I want to share what brought us back together and helped us overcome our difference.

Euodia – First we need to begin with a little of the history. We were among the first of the converts to faith in Christ when Paul came to Philippi. It was an incredible time as we watched God work through Paul and reveal to us God's love and power.

Syntyche – Yes, and Paul did not have any problem with the presence of women in the worship service! This was not allowed in the synagogue. And in the pagan services women

were merely objects to satisfy the hunger of men or be used as menial workers in the temples.

Euodia – Paul showed us the depth of God’s love for everyone and we responded and joined with Lydia and the others as they gathered by the river and then later in her house to celebrate and be taught from God’s word.

Syntyche – We were there when he drove out the demon from the slave girl and ruined the fortunetelling business of some prominent businessmen. Those who benefited from her information became quite upset and attacked Paul. He was carried to prison against our protests.

Euodia – That night was incredible as Paul and Silas prayed. God responded and the jailor and his family became followers of Christ. Then Paul forced the leaders to admit their error and officially release them.

Syntyche – Paul’s decision at that point provided us with a freedom to proclaim the truth that we may not have had if he had quietly left the city. But it did not end all the opposition. As we cared for Paul after his release he encouraged us to be faithful. He told us that the persecution was not over, just diminished. The people who had lost their income would most likely continue to oppress us.

Euodia – It was this pressure that began to unravel our friendship and affect our business. We had worked together for many years selling vegetables. We would buy from the farmers and then sell what we purchased. We were a great team. Syntyche did a great job of finding the best vegetables for our stall.

Syntyche – And Euodia was an incredible marketer. She had an uncanny sense about how much to charge and how to build a faithful client base. Together we prospered.

Euodia – Months later, the tension began to grow because of those disgruntled businessmen. The government had been protecting us because of their shame in mistreating Paul. However, that protection began to relax and the businessmen started to cause problems. They had influence and slowly began to test and see how they could recover some of their power and get a little revenge against those who were associated with Paul.

Syntyche - It started simply enough. We would find our normal stall occupied by others. When we complained to the authorities they said they would look into it. They did once or twice but then became lax. This meant we had to find another place for our stall. And that meant our regular clients could not always find us.

Euodia - Then they began to hire thugs who would knock over our stall and scatter the food. This made it hard to sell it because it became soiled or damaged. Again, we complained and for a little while the authorities posted people to provide a little security. But, after a while they quit doing that. We understood. They could not provide that kind of security for us all the time. And so, it would begin again.

Syntyche - It was at this time we began to argue about what to do. Should we give up our business? Should we move to another place? In the end, we separated. Euodia stayed and struggled where we were, believing she should remain there

and be a witness to those causing us trouble. I, on the other hand, decided to leave and set up my own stall elsewhere

When we joined with the others for worship or study we filled the air with the tension of our disagreement. Each of us tried to convince the others that we were right. In time people began to avoid us and some stopped doing business with us because we were always attacking and belittling each other.

Euodia - What is interesting is the fact that once we split the oppression came to an end. Apart, our ability to be successful failed. We both owed people money and complained all the more about the behavior of the other. Our witness was being ruined by our desire to be right and to have control. It was dividing the church and, in fact, it became apparent that we were not welcome there because of the strife we were causing.

Syntyche – This went on for too long until one day we heard that Paul had sent a letter to the church. We desperately wanted to hear how Paul was doing and learn more about how to live as Christians. His letter was so filled with hope and encouragement. He was so thankful for all that our church was doing to share the gospel with others and for the gifts we had sent to him. Especially now that he was in prison.

Euodia - We drank in the words as he talked about humility and being a true brother, coworker, and soldier in the work of God. His words about keeping one's eyes on Christ, leaving all behind, and learning to be satisfied in every situation were incredible. But our hearts broke when we

heard his plea in the letter that we settle our differences and that the church find a way to help us be reconciled. Then we heard the next words and we looked at each other.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Syntyche - We both began to cry. We had let our desire for control, our desire to be right, our desire to dominate ruin any chance for joy to be expressed. We realized that we had failed to pray and seek God in our decision and had let fear control our decision. Instead of asking God to guide, guard and give us peace we had let hate enter into our lives.

Euodia - We came together in a rush and almost knocked each other over. We needed to forgive and be forgiven. To forgive each other; to be forgiven by each other. We also realized that our behavior had done great harm to the testimony of the church and so we came before the church to seek their forgiveness and their help to restore our relationship in the church.

Syntyche - It was a great day. The church rejoiced and we could send a note to Paul telling him that all had been resolved. The greatest thing was our decision to begin working together again. We reclaimed our spot and began to see God working immediately. The reason? Those who had watched us become enemies wanted to know what had happened and how we had overcome our enmity for each

other. The story spread and created a safety net for us. Everyone began to watch out for each other and that meant our business improved as we learned to help one another.

Euodia and Syntyche - God is so good, but it took this difficult experience for us to learn this and learn to look to God instead of our own wisdom.

### **Study Guide**

Paul states in very strong words there should be no division in the body. 1 Corinthians 12:25. Yet at the same time he talks about diversity in the gifts and differences in the body as being acceptable. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

Think through how these three words are related; division, diversity, and difference. How can they be used to bring about the unity Paul talks about in Philippians 2:1-4?

*Hephzibah (mother of Manasseh)*

*Hope in the gloom of despair*

***2 Kings 21:1***

How many times have we mothers heard a father say to his children, "I am doing this for your own good and one day you will understand." This declaration is often used to excuse the father's lack of time to spend with his children, to explain why he never has time to play with his children, to listen to their dreams, to soothe their fears, or share in the successes and failures of his children. Always there is

something more important and when confronted, the answer is something like the phrase above.

My name is Hephzibah. I am one of the wives of King Hezekiah, my story is like many a mother and wife who has heard this type of response and watched it result in pain and sorrow in the lives of children. Watched as it bred defiance and not admiration. Watched as the children learned not to appreciate all that was 'being done' for them but only saw a parent who cared more about what they were doing, and little about their relationship to their children.

My husband's father (King Ahaz) was a weak man. While he worshipped God on one hand, he also led the people into idol worship. Some say that he allowed this to appease the Assyrians and maybe convince them to leave us alone. God warned him and the people that they would be judged for this duplicity.

It was during this time that God sent the prophet Isaiah. He was a bold man who fearlessly stood against the prevarication of both king and people. My husband watched his father and he watched Isaiah. I think the boldness of Isaiah and his unwillingness to compromise drew Hezekiah to the prophet. As a result, they became close friends though Isaiah was 15 years his senior. They spent a great deal of time together discussing politics and the words of the prophets. This special relationship would one day save us from destruction by the Assyrians. And in a way, it set the stage for what was to come.

My husband survived the attack of Assyria, and had saved his people. While he had always been committed to restoring

the worship of God and the removal of idols and their worship before the attack of Assyria, this commitment became a passion for him. That, and his concern that he do all he could to secure the frontiers of the country against further attack. So, he began all manner of construction projects - forts, waterways, wells, and more to strengthen our borders. He also looked into building strategic relations.

All looked good and to many he appeared to be a man of confidence and peace. Except for one thing. He had no offspring from any of his wives. If that was not enough, one day Isaiah arrived with a word from God that Hezekiah was about to die. Hezekiah immediately began a time of prayer and fasting. He sought the Lord and humbly asked for his life to be spared. His focus was on the needs of the people, their continued security, the continuation of the royal line of David, and the continued blessing of the Lord on the people. God responded and promised Hezekiah 15 more years.

It was at this point that we met. Of course, Hezekiah, as king, already had several wives. But those marriages had produced no children. The leaders, of course, blamed the women. No one wanted to be accused of being infertile, especially a king.

In any event a search was made and I was selected to be the new queen. We were married and soon we did, in fact, have a child. Oh, did this cause problems! Mountains of jealousy with the other wives. Isolation and pampering of the new boy. A new and more intense round of construction, political maneuvering and so on. I tried my best to warn Hezekiah that he needed to spend more time with Manasseh. His son

needed a father not another fort built in his honor and for his future protection.

I found myself trapped, isolated by the other wives. I was practically abandoned by my husband, and more and more fearful of what was growing in the head of my son. Isaiah saw what was happening and remembered the history of King Ahaz. It was being recreated, but in a different manner. Ahaz had tried to appease other kings and so brought into our kingdom false gods. Hezekiah was trying to appease the people by building forts, strengthening defenses, and developing treaties with other peoples. Even when confronted by Isaiah, Hezekiah's only response was that there would be peace in the land until he died.

In the meantime, Manasseh became more and more disconnected. Instead of learning from his earthly father to trust in God, he learned to hate God. He saw God as the one who was taking his father from him. And Hezekiah didn't see it. The excuse that he was building a better, safer world for us all fell on deaf ears... no, the ears were not deaf. Instead they fell on ears that heard a different message all together. The message was very clear, my father and HIS GOD, do not love or care about me. They only care about maintaining a world that is safe and secure.

It did little good for me to try and reason with our son. It didn't matter that he was alive because God had rescued us all from destruction by the Assyrians. It didn't matter that his birth was only a result of God's healing in his father's life. All my love and attention didn't make any difference. The anger was growing in his life. And then his father died.

For a few years we had some peace in the house. Manasseh was only twelve and would listen to counsel. But I saw what was happening and I grew more and more fearful. I shared my fears with Isaiah and he tried to talk to Manasseh but to little avail. Isaiah was his father's friend and that meant he was the enemy. He was one of those that had helped steal his father away. I even heard him declare openly that Isaiah had caused all his pain. As Manasseh voiced his anger, others began to respond and encourage him.

It became clear that not everyone had abandoned the worship of idols. They had gone underground, had managed to survive, and deceived everyone. This added further fuel to his anger. After all, he reasoned, the people around his father had not believed in the true God, they were still alive, and actively worshipping idols. Now Manasseh's anger took shape. God had stolen his father, his father had deceived the people, and he was to blame for everything that had gone wrong in his life. His fury exploded on the people who had listened to his father. The blood ran deep in the cities. Even as great a prophet as Isaiah was, he too fell before the fury of Manasseh and was killed.

I knew the truth and found myself helpless, watching in horror as my son methodically destroyed all that was good and true. I cried myself to sleep at night praying for his eyes to be opened and see how wrong he was. I prayed in desperation for the people. I prayed that God would do anything to stop him before all was destroyed. This went on for years. I had begun to lose hope that God would respond and bring peace to the turmoil and fear that filled our nation.

Then one day it happened. The fortresses failed, the treaties failed, and they carried my son away into captivity. I saw it happen. I saw the terror in his eyes. He had refused to believe that anyone could stop him, that anyone could call him to account. I watched them tear off his royal clothes, clamp him in chains and carry him off to prison in another land. I followed them. Why they let me I will never know, but they did. When we arrived at that faraway prison they allowed me to visit him and prepare his food. I continued to pray as only a mother can, and slowly a miracle happened. It didn't happen all at once. In reality it took years, but he began to listen, he began to recall the teaching he had received as a child before he rebelled.

Then one day he broke. Waves of sorrow and remorse rocked his body. He cried as if his eyes were filled with bottomless cisterns of water, water that had been stored and prepared for this day, that would not let him stop until he had suffered all the pain he had inflicted. The guards watched in incredulity as they saw him mourn his sin, mourn the pain he had caused, and mourn how he had denounced God and blamed Him for everything. Then the change came. Instead of an insolent, haughty person, he became a kind and gentle man. He no longer demanded anything but sacrificed everything for others. The change was so incredible that the prison guards reported it to their king. He was so impressed by what he heard that he ordered them to bring Manasseh before the court.

As the court talked with my son they were convinced of the change and decided to give him special quarters in one of the houses of the royal family. Instead of becoming arrogant he

became even more humble and began to share what he had learned. Before long they decided to send him back to Jerusalem and let him rule as a vassal. He was restored as the leader of the people of Judah

The people never really trusted him, but they did see the change. This paved the way for his son Josiah and a new time of renewal and restoration. I did not get to see Josiah's reign but I did get to see my son restored in his relationship with God before I died.

Yes, I have seen much in my life. Some of it horrible, some of it built on false ideas, some of it built on dependence on man and not on God. But most important, I have seen what happens when we truly depend on God.

I am Hephzibah. My name means 'my delight is in her.' I have learned what this means. When we come back to God, when we respond to his word, he will restore us and we will experience his delight in us. It is my goal that you learn what it means for God to delight in you.

### **Study Guide**

What do you do when everything that could go wrong does? Even worse, when someone close to you is part of the problem?

How do you deal with a family member whose lifestyle and choices are destroying those around them?

Read 1 Samuel 18-19 and the story of David, Saul, and Jonathan.

Can you find a guide for dealing with this type of situation? You may have to read more of the story of David and Saul and some of the Psalms identified with these events like: Psalm 7, 27, 31, 34, and 52.

Find a friend

Talk about the situation

Trust another with the truth

Be true to who you are

Obey God's word

*Huldah (prophetess)*

*Honesty at all cost*

***2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28.***

My name is Huldah and I am the wife of Shallum the wardrobe keeper. And now you want to know of whose wardrobe he was the keeper, the king or the high priest? I will not tell you. Such things are of little consequence now. It has been years since it had any meaning or value.

However, when we were younger there was a strong temptation to answer such a question. People wanted to know, with the hope that it might lead to some tidbit of information about life in the palace or the temple. And in those days, there was much that caused interest. The young

king had just come to power after years of oppression by his father Manasseh. When a King is only eight years old, people are curious about what he does all day and who is really making the decisions!

People also wanted to know why there was such a significant change in our country. As a teenager, the king began to purge the country of idolatry and idols. People were sent to Israel to do the same thing. Everyone thought that since my husband might be the one in charge of the king's wardrobe I might have some answers.

Others wanted to know what was happening in the temple. So many had gone there in the past to bring their sacrifices to the false gods. Then the doors were closed. There were many rumors about what happened that caused the priests to allow that. Later they wondered what had happened since the king reopened the doors; especially as the piles of rubble began to grow in the valley where garbage was thrown and burned. Again, many assumed my husband was responsible for the sacred robes used in the temple, and so I must know something.

It was tempting to say something. I actually did know a lot but not for the reasons they assumed. However, there was another issue of greater concern. It was the question they all failed to ask. Why was I sitting at the main gate, in the place normally reserved for the elders and the wise? How had a woman been given such a position and access to such an honor?

Let me start by saying that I am one of a few female prophets in the history of Israel. The first was Miriam, sister of

Moses, who led the people in a triumphant song after the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. The next was Deborah, who was also a judge during a difficult time. She led the celebration of the Canaanites' defeat. The last was Hannah who sang a song foretelling the dynasty of David. Then there was me.

It is not an easy thing for our men to accept a woman in the role of a prophet. It is not easy for a man to accept the counsel of a woman. Men can be so 'all about themselves.' But that really has nothing to do with the role given to me by God. When I began sitting at the gate many of the men threatened to talk to my husband until they learned that he was the keeper of the wardrobe. It did not matter which one he served. In either case they decided it was more prudent to not disturb him and risk the king or the priest becoming involved in such matters. That fact allowed me to stay where I was.

It was God, in fact, who told me to go there and speak his name to all who would listen. One-day Jeremiah came and sat with me awhile. He asked me many questions about God's Word. He asked why I was sitting there and what I hoped to accomplish. My answer was simple. God told me to. And, people needed to be told to return to God. It was a very heady day talking with Jeremiah. Even more so when he got up and left without rebuking me or telling me I had no right to be there. Instead he pronounced God's blessing and left.

That day changed everything. Instead of stares, critical comments, and being avoided by all, men and women began

to come, sit with me, and ask questions about God and His truth. At first it was mainly women. They wanted to believe that women had a place in God's plan and work. They wanted to learn and grow. Then slowly the men began to come. In the beginning, it was mainly the husbands of the women who had already come. They saw the change in their wives' attitudes and wanted to learn more. Then slowly, the elders came.

My message was simple. We needed to return to God. We needed to abandon the idols. We needed to care for each other and become a people of honor again; a people that obeyed God, a people that God would want to bless.

As King Josiah began his reform and the world began to change, more people came. Often Jeremiah would come and sit with me and help me grow in my understanding of the truth and how to truly follow God. This attracted even more people.

Then came a day that is forever etched in my mind. That morning, Jeremiah had stopped by to chat a bit. As we talked he shared that he had to go to his home village of Anathoth for a few days. He hinted that I needed to be ready. He was not specific. Actually, he was a bit cryptic and that left me uneasy and concerned. But, it all became clear that afternoon.

First someone from the temple came to me asking if I had seen Jeremiah. I said yes. He asked me where he had gone. I said he had left town and would be gone for a few days. The man appeared to be, how shall I describe it, fearful and lost.

Abruptly he rushed back into the city. That encounter left me even more perplexed.

Suddenly, my soul became filled with an incredible sense of dread and foreboding. My mind struggled to focus on what it could mean. Could it be that the judgment that had been pronounced by the prophets, like Isaiah, was about to come to pass. This only increased my sense of terror and disorientation.

I was in turmoil, trying desperately to restore calm and balance to my thoughts and emotions. Then quietly another thought intruded and brought peace, “not until the end of the reign of the current king.” Only moments after receiving this thought, Hilkiah and a group of priests arrived. This formal visit was a first for me. Again, the foreboding feeling came. They asked if they could speak with me. To avoid fainting I sat down and motioned for them to speak. The words they spoke were amazing. A copy of the writings of Moses had been found and they had read about God’s anger with the people and their idolatry. Before they could say another word, I heard myself speak out, without hesitation, with a strength I certainly wasn’t feeling inside,

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' Tell the king of Judah, who

sent you to inquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'"(2 Ki 22:15-20)

The priests heard the words and sat down dumbfounded. Without hearing their question, I had answered it before it was asked. They said nothing but sat in silence absorbing the words and recovering the strength to return and tell the king all that they had heard.

The days that followed were challenging. Again, the temptation arose to answer the wrong questions and let my husband's position elevate my role in the eyes of my questioners. I was invited to the temple to see the scrolls. I was invited to speak to the king and the high priest. But when the people came to me, instead of wanting to learn about God and obedience, they still wanted to hear about the court, the temple, and other irrelevant information.

Often Jeremiah would stop by to talk. His visits were the most welcome. He alone understood and could encourage me. He knew what I knew. God was watching. God was judging. Good things were happening but so many were not listening. The king and others had truly changed and were

trying desperately to help others understand. Jeremiah was trying, as was I, to teach the people the truth, but their questions revealed the changes they made were shallow and only confirmed that peace would be temporary.

So, as I said before, I will not tell you who my husband worked for. It does not matter. Instead ask the right questions that have value. That will change your relationship with God.

### **Study Guide**

Can you tell someone the truth even when it may be something they might not want to hear?

We all struggle with knowing how and when to tell someone the truth, especially when it is negative and we will be seen as judgmental.

Read the story of the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings 22.

Read the book of Esther.

What can you learn from these stories about telling the truth even when it is dangerous to do so?

*Jael (assassin of Sisak)*

## *Retribution and revenge on demand*

### *Judges 4:17-22; 5:6, 24*

My name is Jael and I admit without shame that I killed Sisera, the general of our family's enemy. Some have suggested that what I did was in violation of various traditions and against a treaty we Kenites had with the Canaanites. It might appear that way, but I will tell you my story and then you will need to decide.

While we Kenites are not directly related to the people of Israel we have a long history of relationships. One of our own married the great leader Moses, and so we are bound in a very personal way with the fortunes of Israel. Many of us chose to leave our lands and become part of their history. For this we have been given great freedom to move and live among them. This is important because we are a nomadic people. We move when there is need and live in tents. As a result, we have little in the way of possessions and pose little threat to those who seek power, land, and wealth.

Generally, we seek to establish agreements that allow us to live peacefully among our hosts - even the enemies of our hosts. These decisions are taken by our leaders, but not all of us are in agreement with those decisions. This is especially true when they put our children at risk because we have arranged marriages for them with the sons and daughters of Israel. It is difficult at times to watch what is happening to them and not be angry that our leaders have chosen to be neutral while negative things happen. (the Israelites don't have peaceful relations like us and so when they are attacked

by their enemies our children suffer as well.) But so it is with nomadic peoples. We are often small in number and have little with which to defend ourselves.

I will admit that I am one of those who think our leaders are afraid and, dare I say it out loud, are exposing their cowardice. I feel ashamed and embarrassed. It is stressful to do business with the people of Israel and even get together with our family members who are married to Israelites. Our times together are always tense. It is often hard to find anything to talk about that is not affected in some way by how the Israelites are being treated and suffering at the hands of the Canaanites, and the fact that we have chosen to make peace with their enemy.

Year after year the oppression continued. Year after year the shame grew in my heart. Then came Deborah. A strong woman. A woman not afraid of the Canaanites nor limited by the traditions that usually dictate what a woman can do. She began to speak out and challenge the Israelites to take a stand. She told everyone that if they returned to God, sincerely returned to God, He would make sure they defeated their enemy. The people warmed to the idea and began to organize. They chose a man named Barak to lead them. Then he did the incredible, he insisted he would not go into battle unless Deborah was with him. Incredible.

Well - she did go, but warned him that the honor that comes from victory would not be his. It would pass to a woman. Of course, everyone believed that Deborah would be the one to receive this honor. But with this denunciation ringing in his ears he chose to lead the army. The promise of Deborah's

presence was critical to him. His faith was weak and dependent on the faith of another.

The battle began. I know little of the details of all that took place. In fact, until Sisera appeared in our camp I had no idea that Israel was winning. But when he arrived it was very clear that all was not well. In fact, his appearance made it clear that the battle had gone very badly for him. To arrive at our house alone, as he did, meant he had intentionally abandoned his army in the hopes of escaping capture. He knew, if captured, he would be killed. This is always what happens to the enemy general. It is the final proof of a complete victory over the enemy.

Well there he was and he was scared.

The critical question that needs to be asked is why did he come to me? A man, especially a key leader, never approaches a woman, especially when her husband is not present. Yes, our men were gone. Remember we are nomads. This means our men leave early in the morning to take the herds out to feed them. Sometimes they must travel long distances to do so. On this day, they were far enough away not to know about the battle and what was happening. So, they left without any great concern for the safety of the women and children.

So here was Sisera, the great general of the enemy fleeing from his own army and the consequences of being captured. To add to his shame, he asked me to shelter him in my tent. Now, it is correct, we have an agreement with them, something to keep us safe, and if I did this it would surely

confirm our safety in the future. But this request was offensive and a serious break of propriety.

As I mentioned before I did not agree with the decision of our leaders to establish treaties with the enemies of Israel. At times, I could get quite animated in my comments about why this was so wrong. And now this man had the audacity to come and ask me to provide him shelter and hospitality in my tent without my husband's knowledge and consent! I almost refused to let him in, I was so angry inside. But as I stood there, several options came to mind:

I could say no. But then he might attack me, take what he wanted and leave. Not a pleasant idea.

I could let him in and just wait to see what happened. Eventually the Israelite army might come and find him and he would be executed. But he might leave before they came. That was unacceptable.

I could make him comfortable and send someone to find some soldiers from Israel. They would come and take him to his execution. But what if he left before they came? Again, unacceptable.

Or, I could let him in and make him comfortable and deal with him myself. He was no friend of mine. I wasn't exactly sure how I would keep him here, but I would do it. I would prevent him from leaving until the soldiers arrived.

So that is just what I did. I broke several traditions in the process but he didn't seem to mind. He entered my tent. I showed him where he could lay down and rest. I even gave

him something to cover himself. He was restless, tired, and hungry. So I gave him some milk to help him calm down a bit. He didn't really relax until I agreed to stand guard at the tent. I did so. As I stood at the entrance and was thinking about how to bind him I realized that there was no way he would allow that to happen. Even as tired as he was he would awake before I could do anything.

So, I began to look around and consider what I could do. Then I saw them. The tent pegs and the hammer. We always had them handy in case we needed to reset a line to secure the tent. As I saw them I realized I only had one option if I wanted to prevent this terrible man from escaping. So, I quietly gathered up a tent peg and the hammer. I paused at the door and thought through what I needed to do. It would not be hard. I had driven many a tent peg into harder surfaces. They were designed to pierce the hardest ground. When I had the action clear in my head I made sure he was asleep and eased up to him and did it. I pinned him to the ground in one swing. I will not say anything more about this.

It was not long before Barak, the general of the army of Israel came. He asked if I had seen any of the soldiers or leaders of the army of Canaan pass through. I told him to go into my tent. There he would find the general Sisera. And find him he did. He ordered his men to remove the body.

As word of the death of Sisera spread the celebration grew. There was some concern that I had violated the tradition of hospitality. (That once someone enters another's tent they were under that person's protection.) But most were pleased. The Israelites were happy he was dead. Those who had

family married to Israelites were relieved. They could sleep better knowing that their relatives would no longer be threatened by him. And I must say that even the leaders of our group seemed relieved. The treaty they had signed was not beneficial to us. We had to give up too much in order to be left alone.

In the minds of many I was the tool God had chosen to carry out His plan. Deborah included me in her song of victory and I became a hero to the people. A woman had defeated the enemy. This was a day to be remembered. You don't have to be a man to do great deeds and make a difference. You just have to be ready and willing to do what needs to be done when the time comes to act.

### **Study Guide**

War is a terrible reality. Defending ourselves and our rights can come at a very heavy price

Read II Samuel 23 You will find a description of the mighty deeds of David's thirty chiefs. They were praised for defending the people and killing those who threatened them and those around them.

Yet in the New Testament the greatest act of defending the gospel is in how we live and speak, and when necessary, the sacrifice of one's life.

Jael was praised for her act in a time of war. Paul is honored for his sacrifice.

Think about how you would respond in a situation of defending yourself, your family, or your country. Remember

there is no simple answer. Taking a life or wounding another in self-defense never should be an easy choice, although it may necessary and even approved by God as is seen in many places in the Old Testament.

Read the following texts: Ps 35:23; 72:4; 82:3; 119:154; Pr 31:9; Is 1:17; Je 22:16.

Do we believe that God can and will protect us? Is this limited only to the protection of our soul from an eternity in hell?

How do we find the balance between physically defending ourselves - believing God approves of this, and/or trusting God to provide protection?

## *Jehosheba (King Joash's aunt)*

### *The last minute rescue*

#### ***2 Kings 11:2; 2 Chronicles 22:11***

Would you like to hear a story of treachery, murder, assassination betrayal, and revenge? I have seen them all in my lifetime, a life lived in the court of the king and in the court of the temple.

Let me identify myself. I am Jehosheba, wife of Jehoida the high priest, and daughter of Jehoram who was king of Judah after the death of my grandfather Jehoshaphat. Yes, the same Jehoshaphat that led the army to victory singing the praise of God. The same Jehoshaphat that tried to rid our country of idolatry. The same Jehoshaphat that made one key mistake over and over - he put his confidence in Ahab the king of Israel and this resulted in disaster every time.

Why? Because our father failed to understand that it is not just idolatry that is the problem, it is the people who give their allegiance to following idols that is the real source of the problem. He may have thought that creating an alliance and friendship with Ahab and his family (Ahab was king of Israel during life of Jehoshaphat) might convince them to leave behind their idolatry. Instead it caused a multitude of problems, and brought idolatry back to the people of Judah.

It all started with an alliance that they Ahab and Jehoshaphat hoped would reduce the increasing threat from Syria and from the growing power of Assyria. The prophets warned

my grandfather against this alliance but I truly believe he thought he might win Ahab back to God. In fact, my grandfather was almost killed in the battle. Later, he entered into a poorly planned financial venture with Ahab's son Amaziah, that ended in disaster. A whole fleet of ships was lost.

This was followed by an attempt to create peaceful relations through a politically based marriage arrangement. Ahab's daughter Athaliah was pledged in marriage to Jehoram, my father. (I am his daughter by a later marriage and so escaped the ignominy of being linked to the line of Ahab.) This marriage brought great disaster on our people and my family.

As the years passed, the relationship with Ahab's family weakened and my grandfather began to see the errors of the past. His next commercial venture, while not a huge success, did do well enough to establish some well needed trade alliances. And the next time there was a threat of war, Grandfather called on God and trusted in the words of the prophets. He and his soldiers went out singing the praise of Jehovah and before they arrived the enemy had been destroyed. His reign ended in peace and the country experienced great prosperity as a result.

What he didn't see and only some of us suspected was a growing group of people who met with Athaliah secretly to worship Baal. None of us could prove it but we sensed a growing disregard among some for the word of God and the laws of Moses. With grandfather's death they became more public in their actions. They gave lip service to our temple

rituals and activities but became more open in their worship of Baal. What had been done in secret was now more open. One person even brought a report of an Asherah pole he had discovered partially hidden at one of these sites.

When my father became king, we realized just how much Athaliah had influenced him. The first couple of years he seemed to follow the directions of our father. He pleased Zechariah the priest with his plans and worked diligently to continue sending priests to teach the people from the Torah. But it was all a front. One day, without warning, he had all of his brothers (my half-brothers) killed and began to promote publicly the worship of Baal. Many followed him, but the priests opposed him and he began to fear them. To appease them he arranged my marriage to Jehoida, a priest. But, this too, was only a deception to allow him more time to prepare for greater betrayal and more vile forms of idolatry.

It was during this time we received a letter from Elijah. This caused a great deal of concern. Even my father was surprised. Never before had a king of Judah been confronted by a prophet of God from Israel. His warnings were dire. I had read enough of the sacred writings and seen the warnings given to those who openly opposed God and followed the false gods and their idols. Elijah's letter included a threat against our family that scared me. It finished with a promise of a hideous death.

Well, my father died from a painful disease and life became deadly. Athaliah gathered her friends and fellow idolaters around her and ordered them to kill all of her grandchildren. The world around me was in an incredible upheaval! People

running everywhere. Chaos. Children screaming. Mothers wailing until they too were slaughtered. Athaliah was insane! I soon realized that I could be a target as well.

There was only one area that remained safe - the temple. Fortunately, I was in our living quarters, which happened to be in the temple, when all the pandemonium began. With me that day was my nephew Joash (my father's brother's son). I quickly gathered up Joash and headed into the deepest corner of the temple. Jehoida posted the temple guards to prevent anyone from entering. God protected us. Incredibly Athaliah must have lost track of who was dead and who was not.

I think that day I began to clearly understand the nature of God's promise to maintain the line of David on the throne. The next few years were filled with fear, worry, tension, and hope. We lived in fear that we would be discovered and the last heir to David would be killed. We worried about how to provide for this child, and there was always the tension that someone would see us; someone would betray us. We lived from day to day, planning for the day when my husband felt we could right the wrong which had been done and that we could end the despicable and oppressive rule of Athaliah.

The day finally came when it was time to restore the true king and God's sovereignty. Jehoida called the temple guard and ordered them to kill anyone who tried to enter the temple. Then he summoned key leaders and they proclaimed Joash king. Athaliah tried to enter the temple, but the guards followed their orders and she was dragged out of the temple and killed. The revolt ended almost as quickly as it began and Athaliah and her inner core were dead. Jehoida became

the king's regent. This meant that until Joash came of age my husband served as the ruler of the country and I served at his side. Joash listened to us and showed us a great deal of respect. When he became king he supported all that Jehoida had done and focused on the rebuilding of the temple. Life was good and God blessed the country.

But all of that changed. My husband died and our son, Zechariah was appointed the new high priest. Joash suddenly changed. I wish I understood why. Maybe he listened to us only because we had saved his life and he felt obligated to do what pleased us. Maybe the treachery that was part of his life left him twisted inside. He saw early the nature of violence. He was saved from it and at the same time it was used to restore the crown to him.

He saw how people used their position and power to get what they wanted. Maybe he assumed we did the same and our faith was not genuine. . Maybe he feared how we would respond if he didn't listen. Maybe he fearfully respected Jehoida's power and felt that he had to obey us because Jehoida clearly had control of the palace and temple guards.

Sometimes we make mistakes and try to act on God's behalf. It doesn't work. Treachery is a double-edged sword. It can cut those that use it. It can also cause a deep-seated lack of trust. So, when our son Zechariah began to criticize and judge the king, Joash reacted with violence. He had my son Zechariah killed and returned the country to idolatry.

What was sad is that he had no one that he truly trusted. He had used a mob to kill my son and this left everyone fearful of him. His reign, as a result, was destabilized. This and the

growing threat and increasing attacks of the Syrians left him in a vulnerable state. When he became seriously ill after an attack by Hadad the king of Syria the situation became grave and he feared for his life. Many saw the attacks and illness as the clear judgement of God on him for killing Zechariah. This belief grew in strength until a group secretly began a plan to assassinate him. In the end, they successfully carried out their plan.

I have seen it all. Treachery, murder, assassination, betrayal, and revenge. When will we learn that we are not the ones in control? When will we learn that God is in control of all of history? When will we learn to obey God's Word and find the only true peace and protection that exists in this world?

I have seen it all. I have been there when others sought only what they wanted and not God. I have seen the depth of evil that can exist in a person who refuses to acknowledge God as the one and only true God.

### **Study Guide**

Recall a Bible story where someone risked their life to rescue another person?

What are the risks involved?

Read about Rahab - Joshua 2, 6

Paul's nephew - Acts 23:16-22

David and Jonathan – 1 Samuel 20

Obadiah and 100 prophets of God – 1 Ki 18:2-15

David and Ahimelech – 1 Samuel 21:8-9; 2 Samuel 22:9-19

Can you think of any others? What were some of the risks they faced in helping someone else escape or be rescued?

*Joanna (wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipas)*

*Benevolence from an unlikely source*

*Luke 8:3*

I have so much to tell you. It is hard to know where to begin. So let me start with where I live. That should make the rest of the story a bit clearer. I live in the palace of Herod Antipas. He is the son of Herod the Great. The palace is an immense place. No expense was spared in its construction. That is because it was built by Herod the Great who was known for his extravagance and for his ruthlessness in doing what he wanted no matter the expense. While ruthless, he knew how to administer his world.

Herod Antipas is not an administrator like his father, but he is sly and cunning. He uses his wealth and title to impress people. His wealth is based on his father's accomplishments and his power is based on the presence of the Roman government who is willing to allow much as long as those in control submit to Roman authority and all taxes are collected. So, to help maintain the illusion of power Antipas often holds elaborate parties.

This brings us to why I live in this place. My husband, Chuza, is the steward for this fool of a man. It is his job to make sure all the needs of the house are met, and he oversees the wasteful partying of his employer. He has to make sure that no one lacks for food, wine, and a multitude of other things. There are days when my husband wishes he were somewhere else, especially after one of those parties. Yet he doesn't want to leave because of the benefits he has as steward. We live a life of luxury.

Most of the time things go relatively smoothly. But when a party is finally finished there is so much work to do. I often find myself helping my husband clean up after these events and help him do the inventory of what is left to be sure it is replaced as quickly as possible. Chuza has learned from the stories of his predecessors that not having what Antipas wants can have serious consequences. So he works hard to be sure everything is in order. He is very good at his job and we have received many benefits and bonuses.

Because we live in the palace we have seen many things over the years. Most of them represent the depth of depravity that a person will descend to in order to get what they want and to please others. We saw Antipas' selfishness when he eloped with his cousin's wife while they were both still married to others. This caused an incredible outcry among the Jews. What was more disconcerting was the denouncement of John the Baptist. Everyone considered him a prophet and this more than anything brought fear to Antipas. So much so that he had John imprisoned.

It was this event and what happened at the next party that set the stage for a great change in our lives. You all know the story about the party, the dance, the promise, and the response. I thought Antipas was despicable but his wife Herodias, the wife he stole from his cousin, was no better. She convinced her daughter to request John's head on a platter. Antipas was a weak and dangerous man, and when such a man is trapped by his own foolishness, others will suffer. So, he had John beheaded to avoid appearing weak and to convince himself and his wife there was nothing wrong with their marriage.

I was shocked but not surprised. More than that, I was saddened by how far he would go to protect and defend his sin. Little did I know, however, that our lives were about to change drastically because of this event.

The next morning, per usual I helped Chuza check the storerooms to make a list of what needed to be replaced. With our list in hand we headed to the market with our helpers. What was not usual, was who we met that day as we were busy making our purchases and sending them back to the palace.

There is something I need to explain before I continue. There were two unique people living at this time. I have mentioned the one, John the Baptist. The other was a man named Jesus. He had lived in Nazareth most of his life, a place of little interest, of little prominence. But one day he appeared at the Jordan River where John was baptizing people. The story is that a dove descended on Him and a voice declared that this was His Son. Then he disappeared for over a month. Little is

known about what happened during that time, but when He returned he began to travel all through Galilee where Antipas was the ruler. We began to hear incredible stories about Jesus' miracles and his unique teaching style.

On this day, as we were busy buying supplies, we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of people. At the center of this crowd was Jesus. He too had a group with Him and they were buying supplies. While He was doing this people were asking Him questions and He was teaching them. One person asked Him what He thought of John the Baptist. His answer was insightful and challenging. He explained that John was not another crazy man preaching the end of the world, but was clearly a prophet sent to prepare us to receive God's Messiah. As we listened we forgot about our shopping and were drawn along by the crowd. Jesus' words were so powerful and filled an emptiness in our hearts that we had not realized was there.

We so wanted to stay and hear more but needed to finish our work. Antipas would wonder what happened and where we were. Actually, he would wonder why he didn't have what he wanted when he wanted it. So we quickly asked Jesus' followers where He would be the next few days and adjusted our schedule so we could go and listen. Well, so I could go! Being the steward of a palace doesn't allow much free time. So each day as I returned from listening to Jesus, I would tell my husband what I had learned. I found a peace I had never known was possible. The wealth and benefits of the palace lost their allure and I decided I needed to do something to make sure others could hear what I had heard.

As I thought about it I began to realize there was something I could do. That is, if my husband would let me. I could help provide finances and resources for Jesus and His group. But I had to be careful in how I did this. My husband did not want to quit his job. Nor did I want him to. But supporting Jesus and His praise of John could cause problems with Antipas. Antipas might see this as a subtle slur against him and his execution of John. So it was decided that I would take from my generous allocation for our personal household to help Jesus. It would mean some changes in how we lived but nothing that would attract unwanted attention from Antipas.

So, it began and continued throughout Jesus' ministry. I would put aside funds from the finances I received from my allowance, which was quite generous, and when Jesus or a disciple was in the area I would take it to them. While my name is mentioned as one of those who helped Jesus (Lk 8:3), I could not make such a vow or commitment without the consent of my husband. It is part of Jewish law.

As a result of this decision we have learned to live on less. We have learned the difference between what we want and what we need. We have learned what is of true value.

At times, it has been hard to continue working for Antipas. He is such a selfish and devious man. He can't be trusted. We often wonder how long we can continue working for him and yet help fund Jesus' ministry. We discuss whether it is right to work for a sinner and still be a true follower of Jesus. As we discuss this we realize that many people are in similar situations. We also realize that as long as we are honest and people of integrity we might be able to help others find the

truth, even Antipas. So, we continue our work. We focus on the person, their need, and not the sin. We commit ourselves to doing our best so that if and when the opportunity comes we can point others to Jesus and the truth. We also realize that a day will come when we have to take a stand if we are asked to do something that will bring us in conflict with what God wants in our lives. If Antipas tells us to cheat, lie, or deceive someone, that will be the day we have to leave. So far this has not happened.

We are more and more aware that all around us there are people in desperate need of truth. They need people in their lives who live in obedience to God and care about them. We are learning more and more that our faith can open the door to sharing with others our relationship with God. We are also learning how to put God first in everything. It is changing how people respond to us in the market and in the streets.

Well that is my story and how I became involved in the life and ministry of Jesus. What about you? Are you ready to meet Jesus, let him change your life, and become involved in doing whatever it takes for the world to hear the truth?

### **Study Guide**

Joanna was a very generous person. But she lived in a difficult place. Her income came from a wicked man who her husband worked for. Yet Jesus accepted her gifts and help.

Abraham, on one occasion, refused the generosity of a king. The reason? So that no one would think that this person had

made him rich. Yet he allowed his men to receive a share of the booty. (Genesis 14:21-24)

Are there times when we are allowed to accept pay or gifts from those who are not followers of God? When is it unacceptable to do so?

*Jochebed (mother of Miriam, Aaron and Moses)*

*Defiance and Risk – the definition of motherhood*

*Ex 2:1-10; 6:20; Numbers 26:59; Hebrews 11:23*

Yes, I am married to my nephew. My birth was a bit of a surprise to my parents. They were not expecting to have another child so late in life. And yes, it is strange to have a nephew that is older than you are, and then to marry him! But, our families were close and at that time no one saw a problem with us being married. It was not common but neither was it prohibited.

When we were still teenagers Pharaoh proclaimed that we, the Jews, were a threat to the people of Egypt and needed to be controlled. He ordered and signed an edict declaring that the midwives were to abort all newborn male babies. This caused a great deal of fear for all the parents, even those who had daughters because it meant there would be less males available to become future husbands. What would happen to the girls when they reached maturity? So Amram and I were pledged in marriage while we were still young teenagers, but it would be several years before we would actually live together.

Incredibly the midwives chose to defy Pharaoh. They didn't kill the newborn boys. In fact, they became highly respected and were married (midwives were typically single). They were blessed by God with families as well. Life seemed to return to normal until the next edict. It was during this time that our son, Aaron was born.

By then we were torn between the excitement of having more children and the fear of Pharaoh's latest edict, (he had

ordered his soldiers to throw all baby boys into the Nile River). The first edict had caused our early marriage. The second produced another wave of fear, and the next years were lived in a kind of nightmare. Our people were afraid to have children. They never knew if the birth of a child would bring joy or sorrow. Even the joy of the birth of a girl was mixed. Would she grow up and have a normal life? Would she have a husband? Or would she be taken by the Egyptians to be a house servant or something worse?

Pharaoh's edict was that the army of Egypt was to periodically carry out a search of all Israelite villages. If they encountered a newborn boy he was to be killed. Pregnancy was no longer celebrated but a source of stress and even fear because the soldiers always took note of who was pregnant and where they lived. All movements of the midwives were closely watched to be sure they were followed in the event they were called to deliver a baby.

So many women chose not to call the midwives in an attempt to hide their delivery and somehow escape the notice of the soldiers. It did not work. The soldiers always seemed to know and were present to burst in and take any boy away to be killed. A few managed to hide from the soldiers, but it did not take long and the soldiers found them and the result was the same. Life became filled with agony, hopelessness, and fear. Many even tried to avoid becoming pregnant in the hope that a day would come when the edict would be rescinded. It did not come. And the attempt to prevent pregnancy just didn't work. The desire to have children is a powerful emotion.

We, like everyone among us, feared the day I would become pregnant again. We considered what we would do to avoid the soldiers detecting my pregnancy and, if it was a boy, killing him. We formed a plan. I would begin visiting family

in other villages to create the idea that I was often gone from the house. This way when I became pregnant, and it became impossible to hide the fact, I could leave and go into hiding without creating undo suspicion. While we began this part of the plan we also began to look for a place to hide, deliver the child, and if needed, stay hidden while he grew. And then it happened. I became pregnant. This scared us but little could be done. What a great relief it was when a girl was born! We chose the name Miriam, which means rebellion, to help us keep focused on our plan to find a way to defy the edict of Pharaoh. It would be a number of years before the next pregnancy and it would be Miriam who found the place to save our next child.

When Moses was born I was able to hide for several months. Every few days Aaron would bring food to avoid the notice of the soldiers. But one day he almost led them to me and Moses. The soldiers had become curious about my long absence. They began to watch our house. They noted that Aaron left with a full bag and returned with it empty. So one day they decided to follow him and to his credit, he was a careful child, he caught sight of the one assigned to follow him. So he headed to the market, to the stall of a relative and sold what he had in the bag to them. Fortunately, we had anticipated this possibility and had prearranged for them to buy the food if the situation arose.

Aaron returned home and Amram began working on the next step of the plan we had discussed over and over. If we could not successfully avoid detection, the only hope we had of saving our boy's life was to put him in a basket and float him down the river. So my husband had become a basket maker on top of his other work as a mason. This meant there were always baskets in the house. Baskets for food, for seed. and of course, baskets for babies.

The hope was that God would somehow protect his life. Why did we hope this? I don't know. Yet we felt strongly that this is what we needed to do, and then we had to leave Moses in God's hands. . . . And so, we waited two days and then Miriam took one of the baby baskets and headed into town. She went directly to the house of lady who had recently given birth to a girl.

She stayed there until after dark. Sometime between her arrival and nightfall the soldiers who had followed her gave up and went back to their barracks. When it was certain there was no one watching, Miriam came to me where I was hiding. She quickly explained the delay, but I had already deduced the reason and had prepared everything for the next step. While still dark we readied Moses, and headed for the river. Under the cover of darkness and near daybreak we placed Moses in the river in his basket. The next phase of the plan had begun.

Miriam stayed behind to watch. She would not be missed in town. The soldiers paid little attention to little girls. Me? I began a day-long journey that would bring me to our house from the same direction I had left so many months before to fake my visit to relatives in another part of Egypt. The soldiers watched my arrival and paid no attention to me.

Miriam spent the day watching the basket. Amazingly Moses did not cry until late in the afternoon. She watched as the basket floated into the bathing area in front of the house of Pharaoh's daughter. It was the usual time for bathing. This meant that Pharaoh's daughter and her attendants were all there. It was at this point Moses cried and she noticed the basket. She opened it and saw the baby. In that moment, she decided that the baby would be hers. As they carried the baby out of the river they saw Miriam and called her over. Miriam was pretending to collect various reeds, a normal

task, and so they thought nothing of her presence. They asked if she might know someone who could nurse the baby. Of course, Miriam said yes.

Pharaoh's daughter finished bathing and then called some of her personal guards to escort Miriam to the woman who could nurse the baby. They arrived at the house a few hours after I had returned home. And so, began a strange time of my life. We were given a house near the bathing area of Pharaoh's daughter. For three years, the normal time for weaning a child, I was allowed to be part of my son's life. The fact that Pharaoh's daughter had chosen the child as her own protected him from Pharaoh's edict. Actually, they thought that one Hebrew child would have little impact on the course of history.

Pharaoh's daughter and I became friends and talked much about our lives. She even asked about our faith and seemed honestly interested. (This would later result in her choosing to leave with us when we finally left the land of Egypt for the promised land.) Unfortunately, once Moses was weaned he was then transferred to another location to begin learning what it meant to be part of the household of Pharaoh. We would have no further contact until he returned from exile almost 80 years later. Then we would watch that baby, the one Hebrew child that many believed would have little impact on the course of history, lead our people to freedom.

On that day of exodus, we couldn't help but think back and remember seeing him on the day of his birth and being convinced in our hearts that his would be an unusual life. We knew in our hearts that God would be with him and he would grow into a man of honor and faith. We were convinced that no risk was too great, no price was too small to pay, if it would make it possible for him to live. But is that not the hope and desire of every parent, to see their child grow,

mature, and know their Creator? Is not every parent willing to risk and sacrifice for this?

### **Study Guide**

To defy the laws of man, to defy the laws of God. This means a person is willing to disobey what they are told to do, and place themselves and others at risk as a result.

Jochebed defied Pharaoh and protected her newborn son.

Goliath defied God and David defeated him. Sam 17

Peter and the apostles defied the Sanhedrin and continued to preach the truth. Acts 5

What is involved in deciding when to defy the laws of man to obey God?

What is involved in knowing when an action of a person is in defiance of God?

***Lydia (seller of purple)***

***Prudence and Astuteness – being a dove and a serpent***

***Acts 16:13-15***

My name is Lydia. I am from Thyatira and am a member of the purple dyer's guild. While it is not common for a woman to hold such a position, it is not impossible. There are several ways that one may gain such a position:

1. Family heritage – A father who has no sons and only daughters may bestow on his daughter the responsibility to represent him and so maintain his name in the guild. At the same time, he can be assured that his goods will be received and distributed in the marketplace by a trustworthy family member.
2. By virtue of one's ability to produce purple dye and to dye the materials for sale. It is not a simple task, so one's ability to do this can make a significant difference in their status and economic reality. One who masters these skills gains recognition and their products are sought after. A knowledgeable buyer can quickly identify the difference between inferior and quality products. The better the work, the greater the status among the dyers. This can gain a woman acceptance in the guilds.
3. By one's shrewdness in business. This is based on knowledge of the products and the market for those products. It is not just about the ability to sell, but to sell the right type of cloth to each customer. There are some that will try to sell anything to anyone. While this may work for a while it is the astute business person who knows the customers, their needs, and what they can afford to pay. People quickly learn about such sellers and are drawn to them. There is confidence that they will get exactly what they need and what they paid for. The guild knows this and is quick to identify such people, male or female, because they are critical in the long-range development of the market for the products.

Even better is the person who brings both, an ability to produce unique and high-quality products, and the ability to market those products. I was one who could do both, plus my father had no sons. I was born into a family of dyers of purple and we had developed a distinct style of dying that yielded a quality product. Alongside that, we had developed several other lines of products that were affordable for people of different social standings and economic levels.

As a family, we continually sought ways to improve our products, and other markets for them. It was during a discussion about expanding our market that it was decided that my husband and I should move to Philippi. This would give us access to all the trade caravans passing through the region. The family would send us goods to sell and we were also to investigate establishing a local dying industry. The decision was timely and our business grew like never before. Sadly, during this time, my husband unexpectedly passed away.

After an appropriate time of mourning, I decided that I would stay in Philippi. I was well established and recognized locally, both as a respected member of the dyer's guild, and as a shrewd business woman. It was through my involvement with the business community that I came in contact with the Jewish people. I enjoyed doing business with them. They were shrewd, honest, and reliable. As I got to know them I began to learn about their faith and how it guided them in every aspect of their lives, including their business practices.

I began to study their faith and attended their gatherings by the river. This was easy since it was near the place where we

had set up a small dying operation to supplement the products being sent to me from Thyatira. While they were not as good in quality, they were popular among the local population because they were locally made and helped the economy.

One day, while preparing to start the day's work, a group of men arrived looking for the place where the Jewish people gathered. We led them to the place and began to ask them the usual questions about where they were from and so on. This is a normal part of life since most news arrives via the travelers and the caravans that pass through our area. I was truly fascinated to learn they had come from my home area in Asia and that they were teaching people about a new Rabbi they called "the Promised Messiah."

It quickly became clear to me, based on all that I had learned about the Scriptures, that this man, Paul, had been sent by God. My heart was filled with joy at the opportunity to learn more about God's love, the sending of His Son, and the offer of forgiveness. I did not hesitate and gladly accepted the message. I invited Paul and his group to come to my house. In fact, I insisted that he must stay in my home because my family, my workers, my entire household needed to hear this message. What a joyous day it was as they heard and responded!

The next days were filled with joy, pain, and victory as our group of followers saw both extremes of how the world responds to the truth. We found a joy that overcame all threats, all conditions, all powers of this world, and of Satan. We became part of the great mission Paul taught and lived.

We joined him in carrying this message to those who had not heard.

However, because of my family's relationship to Paul we lost some clients. The Jews that opposed Paul made our lives difficult and at times would do what they could to damage our business. This is a sad reflection on those who had the truth previously but became blind to it. Yet, we learned to depend on God and always had what we needed and enough to support Paul as he continued to travel and proclaim the gospel throughout Macedonia. Together we made it possible for the message to finally reach into the province of Asia and eventually to my home town of Thyatira.

God blessed me in so many ways and I had the incredible opportunity to share this blessing with others.

### **Study Guide**

To be successful in her world Lydia needed to be prudent. Proverbs has a number of comments about prudence. Read them and develop a definition for the word.

Proverbs 1:3; 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 19:14; 22:3; 27:12

Lydia chose to ally herself with Paul. How do you think this affected her business? Why would she choose to continue this relationship even after Paul was attacked and imprisoned?

How does one deal with the negative aspects of the way people think and act and how that impacts their lives?

Jesus uses the word shrewd to describe how we are to live in this world. Matthew 10:16. Do you think that this the same as prudent?

Reflect on the above passage and consider your attitude when dealing with difficult issues in your life.

### ***Mother-in-law of Peter***

### ***Bitterness and Restoration***

### ***Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39***

My name is not important. But what is important is that I am a mother-in-law. I have an incredible responsibility to help my daughter be the best mother and wife possible. I have a unique position and authority that gives me influence over my son-in-law and the power to impact his decisions and behavior. It is my right as a mother-in-law.

Those who are mothers-in-laws understand exactly what I am saying. Those who are sons-in-laws also have a pretty good idea as well of the power and influence I can have over their marriage. In the best of situations, mine is a role that brings blessing and harmony. It makes possible the growth and development of a marriage. At its worst, it can be a nightmare. My role brings fear and frustration. It creates division and disharmony.

I will not evaluate my position in the marriage of my daughter and Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. When we met him, and arranged their marriage he seemed to be wonderful young man. However, it was not long before we discovered

that he was boastful, a bully, a man whose language could burn the ears of those he spoke to. He was a successful businessman, but he was a tyrant.

As the years passed I became more and more impatient with him. I made it known he was not welcome in our home. He, in response, made it difficult for our daughter to visit. Yet he never harmed her and always treated her well, providing more than adequately for her needs and those of their children. Yet the tensions remained.

Then one day I heard the story of Peter's first encounter with Jesus, how he allowed Jesus to use his boat as a pulpit and did so without fuss and without demanding payment. Even more surprising was his sudden willingness to be told by Jesus where and how to fish. But the real shocker was Peter's admission of his sinfulness. I could hardly believe it!

By this time, I was so embittered by his treatment and attitude that I could not believe that it meant anything. That is, until he abandoned his fishing boats, all he had built, his business, his power, and his place in the community, to follow this unknown man; an unknown teacher. But instead of seeing this as a hopeful change in his life, I only saw it as a failure. It meant he would no longer be able to provide adequately for my daughter and grandchildren. It meant, to me at least, that he was willing to abandon them to follow a teacher, an unapproved teacher, a man rejected by the leaders and teachers.

As the stories of Jesus' miracles came to me and the people shared what they had heard, I began to rethink my evaluation of this teacher. I also learned that Jesus had chosen Peter to

be one of his 12 key disciples, and later, one of the inner three. I found this incredulous. Peter had no teaching in the Law. He had no understanding of how to follow God. It left me perplexed to say the least.

In spite of all of the changes in Peter's life, I refused to let go of my bitterness towards him. He had done so much to make my life miserable and to fill my daughter's life with stress. It was this bitterness that began to affect my health. I began to have digestion troubles and developed a number of issues related to this. As time passed it became so severe that at times I could not get out of my bed.

It was during one of these periods that Jesus came to our town to visit. As was becoming more typical for me, I was in bed. I had collapsed in agony the day before with pain and a high fever. My condition was so serious that my daughter decided to go and tell Peter what was happening, even though he was still not welcome in my home.

My daughter, though, had seen the changes in Peter and she had sat and listened to Jesus. She knew that if Jesus came, He could heal me, and just maybe I would see and believe in Peter's change as well.

I was completely unprepared for Jesus' and Peter's arrival. Like most women, I do not like surprise visitors, especially when I have not had time to clean the house and prepare a proper meal. As I heard them approaching the house and realized who was coming, I became furious. But before I could get up, I was doubled over in pain and overcome by the fever that was raging in my body. I collapsed back into my bed as Jesus entered the room and came directly to me.

He looked at me and quietly spoke. His words cut directly to my heart. He said, "You are forgiven." I saw the truth about my attitude. I saw the fact that my bitterness was the source of my pain. And, as I looked into His eyes I saw forgiveness, and for the first time understood what had happened to Peter when he confessed his sins and abandoned his fishing career to follow this man.

My heart of stone melted and I too saw my sinfulness and was forgiven. Jesus then reached out his hand and touched me. I will never forget that touch and the heavy weight that lifted from my heart, from my shoulders, from my thoughts. The pain left, the fever broke, and my strength returned. But, most important, I was forgiven and knew what I must do. I ran to Peter and his wife (my daughter) and sought and received their forgiveness.

My heart was filled with joy. The anger that had so dominated my life was gone. I was freed and immediately set out to care for those who had come to my house. Oh what joy was mine as I prepared the meal and learned anew the joy of serving others and the blessing that comes when all is well. For the first time, I was truly able to enjoy my role as mother-in-law. But I had so much to undo because of my past behavior and so much to learn about how to truly fulfill my role.

I still have a great deal of power and authority. I am the mother-in-law after all! But more importantly I have learned how to use these to serve and not to control or judge. I have learned the appropriate ways to use my influence and position. I have learned that if I use my position correctly

and with patience I will have the opportunity to speak and counsel my daughter and son-in-law and not cause dissention and strife in their lives.

### **Study Guide**

Bitterness and resentment are closely linked.

Why are people bitter? Why do they allow resentment to grow in their hearts?

Make a list of things that cause resentment.

Read the following Scripture:

Proverbs 14:9-12

9 Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.

10 Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.

11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.

12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

What kind of bitterness does joy bring? Now reread verse 12 and Ephesians 4:31-32.

How can a person overcome bitterness and be restored?

*Peninah (wife of Elkanah, co-wife with Hannah)*

*The trap of jealousy*

*1 Samuel 1:1-7*

When I was a child my parents would tell me the story of Jacob and his two wives, Rachel and Leah. I thought a lot about this story as I reached the age for marriage and decided that I didn't want to be a first wife or a second wife. I wanted to be the only wife. And so, like any young lady, I prayed for a good husband, one who I could learn to love and trust and who was able to provide what I needed.

You can imagine my excitement when my parents told me they had arranged my marriage to the son of a family that was well known and well off. What you can't imagine is the horror I felt when they introduced me to his wife, Hannah. The thing I hated and wanted to avoid had happened. If I had been the first wife it may have reduced my disappointment; at least for a while I would have had my husband to myself. But no, I was to be his second wife.

Unfortunately, in our culture, I could say nothing. I was trapped. The truth is that many people saw this as an honor because I was to be part of a marriage where the husband could provide for two wives. My marriage would provide a new level of respect for me and my family, access to special benefits, and a status not otherwise possible.

I began to focus on doing everything I could to gain my husband's attention and improve my status in the family.

When I became pregnant before the first wife I began to act harshly towards her. Hannah tried desperately to be my friend, but I would not permit it. I wanted what she had, the title of first wife, something that would never happen. It was obvious that my behavior caused her a great deal of pain. What surprised me was that she did not retaliate and did not complain to our husband.

Instead of being sensitive to her, I used her barrenness to strengthen my position. (In our culture, a barren wife is treated with disdain.) People came to me and not her when they needed to speak to our husband. Yet, he seemed oblivious to all of this. He did everything he could to relieve her pain and frustration and inner suffering. Yes, he allowed me to have more authority, but it was not to make me happy but rather to ease the stress on Hannah. This made me jealous and I embarked on another round of attacks to belittle her.

What was so frustrating is that her attitude did not change toward me. She remained kind and seemed to understand why I was behaving the way I did. She didn't criticize me or our husband. Instead she spent more time in prayer and more than once I heard her praying for me, that God would care for me. I thought this was a waste of her time, but this was a serious error on my part. She chose not to forget all that God had given her. I, on the other hand, had selectively chosen to do the opposite. I forgot about the children God had provided me. I forgot how God could do marvelous things for those who honor him. I forgot about what God did for Sarah, Rebecca, and for Rachel. All of them had been barren and yet God, in his time, chose to give them children.

Through all of this Hannah remained faithful, respectful, and kind to me and to my children. She loved our husband and only revealed her struggle when alone with him. She said nothing about what happened between us, only about how she felt she was a failure because she had not provided him with a child.

Then on one of our trips to the temple I watched as she entered alone. This was not common for a woman. I went about my business and lost all track of time. She was gone for hours. When she returned there was something clearly different. Usually when she came back from our time in the temple she was even more distraught, but this time she was not. In fact, she seemed to be at peace, even joyful. I had never seen her like this before.

Well, a few months later the impossible occurred. She was pregnant. It was then I learned about the vow she had made during her time of prayer. While we were traveling home from the temple that day she had told our husband that if God gave her a child she had vowed to give that child back to Him . I also learned that our husband, in foolish love, had not rejected it. He had the right to do so, but chose not to. She was happy, truly happy, and he didn't want to risk her losing that joy.

Her peace and joy were profound. I began to desire what she had. I began to see that I had spent my time ruining the peace we could have had in an attempt to gain what I wanted. I hurt her, others, and even myself in an attempt to control her and our husband and increase what I falsely believed would provide what I needed to be satisfied and respected.

Then the day came. She gave birth. It was incredible to watch as the child grew. Her faith and confidence deepened. I struggled to imagine how this could be, knowing that she would have to give him to the high priest when he turned three.

When the day came she did just that. There was no grief, no regret. She presented him to God and I was dumbfounded. I could not comprehend how God could allow a person to relinquish their only child because of a promise. A promise made in a time of anguish and suffering.

Yet each day her joy in obeying God grew and it was infectious. Slowly we became friends. Our home became a place of joy and a place that people wanted to visit. When she became pregnant again, the celebration was infectious. We celebrated the miracles that God had performed. Our relationship deepened. The idea of being the second wife faded. We no longer fought over our husband but worked together to create the best home we could.

I saw the truth of this when Samuel would call me his mother. I didn't deserve that. Hannah could have objected out of revenge for how I had treated her. But she didn't. Samuel's birth opened the way for me to learn. So, I could choose to be jealous and cruel, causing as much trouble as possible, or I could learn to understand what I had received and how to love my husband, his first wife, and all those who were part of our family.

You will not find anything about this in history. And I believe that is because when we do what is right we don't have to have our name proclaimed and our good deeds

recorded for all to see and remember. God knows and that is enough.

We can compete with each other and no one will win, or we can care for each other and everyone will benefit. It took a long time, and the kindness of the other wife for me to learn this. I started by doing everything wrong, making others suffer; but slowly, because of my co-wife, the love of my husband, and the birth of a baby, I learned what faith in God means and where true joy and peace lie. It is a lesson all of us have to learn.

### **Study Guide**

Jealousy is a powerful emotion and can do serious damage to relationships.

Read the following stories and consider what happened as a result of jealousy:

Rachel – Genesis 30

Joseph – Genesis 37

Ananias and Sapphira – Acts 5:1-11

Saul – 1 Samuel 18:6-11

Read the following Scriptures about jealousy and envy. Why is it so dangerous? What can you do to identify it in your life and avoid those dangers?

Proverbs 14:30; Ecclesiastes 4:4; Matthew 27:18; Galatians 5:19-21



## *Phoebe (a special friend of Paul)*

### *Hospitality and more*

#### *Romans 16:1-2*

My name is Phoebe and I am from the town of Cenchrae. It is the port city on the eastern side of the isthmus that connects the trade routes from Italy to Asia. It is not likely you have heard of our fair town. You probably have heard of Corinth which is on the other side of the isthmus. It is the cultural and economic center for our region, but without our port, Corinth would be nothing. Seems a bit unfair and yet because of that we do not have the problems and misbehavior that is so prevalent there. So in this case, less recognition is better.

While we don't have the temples and businesses that attract visitors from around the Empire, we do have some important products that are highly desired in Rome. We grow millet, onions, and we have a unique set of salt water springs that attracts health nuts from Rome as well. My husband and I are in the agriculture business and our farms are some of the best in producing both millet and onions. As a result, our home is spacious and we are financially able to travel often to Corinth to trade and to see the sights.

It was on such a trip that we encountered Paul preaching in the house of Justus. Justus is a friend of ours, as well as a business associate. We had heard from travelers about this new itinerant teacher. We heard about his travels through the

region and his invitation to the agora in Athens. News travels fast, especially when it peaks the interest of the philosophers.

As usual, Justus invited us to stay with him and so we were able to hear first-hand what this new teacher had to say. His words touched my heart immediately. My husband, however, was less enthusiastic and it would be some time before he was willing to accept Paul's teaching and become a follower of Jesus. But he at least was willing to listen and found it beneficial to his business activities. It is amazing how having first-hand information about what is happening in the world around you can open doors and smooth the way in one's business activity. My husband made the most of it.

So whenever we went to Corinth for business or pleasure, we sought out our friend Justus to see if we could stay in his house and to inquire if Paul was still around. This was always a possibility because Paul had found work in the area with some tentmakers named Aquila and Priscilla. He worked and stayed with them. But since their house was small, Paul regularly came to our friends' house in the evenings to teach and to invite others to become followers of Jesus.

One time, while we were visiting, a number of Jews tried to have Paul arrested. They had decided that he was a heretic and needed to be jailed, punished, or removed so he could no longer teach. Part of their anger stemmed from the fact that one of the leaders of the synagogue had become a follower of Jesus. This infuriated them! And they reasoned that they had finally found an excuse to drag him before the proconsul (local Roman authority). They tried to convince Gallio that

what Paul was doing was illegal. But Gallio saw right through them and declared that this was a religious matter and not his responsibility to resolve. Oh, were they furious!

In spite of this, Paul became even more courageous and bold in his proclamation of the truth. Even I began to share with all my friends in Cenchrae and before long we had organized our own group of Christ followers. We met in our house, a fact that my husband wasn't sure was wise. But when he saw that it didn't affect our business and actually attracted new customers he was quite willing to allow our group to meet in the house.

It was almost 1½ years later that Paul showed up at our house and requested a room for a couple of weeks to wait for a boat. He told us that he was planning a trip to Rome in the future, but first he hoped to go to Jerusalem. Paul wanted desperately for his people to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to us and He desires to restore all who believe in His name. It was during these days that my husband finally began to understand and accept the truth of what Paul was teaching.

While in our home, Paul requested writing materials and a table so that he could write a letter to the believers in Rome. As he wrote, he shared its contents with us. The letter filled us with wonder as it explained so much about God's plan and what it meant to those who believed.

Paul continued to talk about his travel plans and about a vow that he planned to take, to let them know in Jerusalem of his commitment to the truth; the depth of his connection to our people the Jews and; his concern for them. In the last couple

of days before his trip he shaved his head in preparation for fulfilling the vow. As his boat was about to leave, Paul gave me the finished letter and asked if I could carry it to Rome. He told me who to give the letter to.

I was excited about this opportunity; my husband was not. I had to remind him that we had traveled to Rome on several occasions. He said it was dangerous. He has always been overprotective and I love him for that. So I suggested that I take a couple of traveling companions. He finally relented when I reminded him it would also be a great opportunity to renew various business connections.

Paul's final notes in his letter introduced me to key people that would help me deliver the letter, and maybe even help to expand our business contacts. And so, with letter in hand, I journeyed to Rome. It was an incredible trip, unlike any I had ever had. The people I met were incredible. They read and reread the letter. They, like my husband and I, were encouraged and challenged in our faith.

I was able to connect with Aquila and Priscilla. Even more incredible was the help given to me by Erastus, who is the director of public works. He and I signed a contract for millet and he also introduced me to others interested in obtaining onions from our farm. The trip helped me understand how God worked ahead of time to prepare hearts to receive the good news and to bless our business venture! Now I am home and my husband and I continue to teach others what God has taught us.

### **Study Guide**

Is your life open to provide for those in need?

There is a unique Scripture that encourages us to always be ready to entertain those passing through our lives. (Hebrews 13:2)

Read about these women who have been honored for their willingness to care for others:

Rahab – Joshua 2, 3

Widow of Zarepath – 1 Kings 17:9-24

Shunammite woman – 2 Kings 4:8-37

Read Romans 12:13; 16:23; 1 Timothy 5:10; 1 Peter 4:9; 3 John 8

What can you do to develop this in your life?

What is the value of hospitality? Why should we be ready to be hospitable?

***Puah and Shiphrah (midwives)***

***Ethical and Courageous for all to see***

***Exodus 1:15-21***

Puah – We are the ones that took the risk.

Shiprah – Most people don't understand what that involved.

P – To go against a direct command of the Pharaoh.

S – Not just that but to face, every day, the anger and fear of the Egyptians.

P – Yes, they were always watching us and reporting our activity to the authorities and our supervisors.

S – And, they were watching those we were responsible for. There were a lot of midwives under us that provided care and supervision for the pregnant women of our people.

P – As midwives, we didn't just arrive in time to help deliver a baby, we had a lot of work to do beforehand. We checked with the mothers regularly to be sure all was going well and that the due date was correct. We had to spend time with each one to be sure that we would be ready when it was time for them to give birth.

S – We tried to provide the best care possible.

P – We had a wonderful job, helping people bring new life into the world. Even in the face of slavery it was something incredible to see and be a part of.

S – You're right - until the Egyptians began to worry we might take over, rebel, or even help their enemies conquer them. They had so little understanding.

P – That fear began to grow until it affected Pharaoh. His wise men could only see one solution, an extreme reaction. Kill all the boy babies as they came into the world. This was horrible, just horrible!

S – We, as midwives are trusted by all. We are honored and respected, yet we were expected to use our position to gain

entry into the homes of all the mothers as they were in labor and kill their babies even as they arrived into the world.

P – How could we do such a vile and wicked thing?

S – We couldn't and wouldn't do it and so we devised a plan to train the mothers to be, and their mothers and the mothers-in-law in what to do. This meant they only had to call us if there was a serious problem.

P – This worked and we often didn't arrive at the house of a newborn until a week or more after its birth. We did this so that there would be no questions about why we didn't kill the babies.

S- Yes, that is right. When the officers came to us we could say that the women delivered so fast that we never arrived in time to terminate the birth.

P – This actually worked for a long time. We almost began to believe that Pharaoh had decided to give up on his plan.

S- In the meantime something wonderful happened in the lives of many of the midwives. We began to have our own children! This did not happen often!

P – You see most midwives are women that have not been able to have children for one reason or another. That means that we have the freedom to help others and encourage each other. It is very therapeutic. Many of us find an incredible level of fulfillment in helping others.

S – And now, God was blessing our group with families of our own.

P – And, because of the training we had given to others, there was less need for us to be present at every birth and less demand on our time. This meant more free time for our own families, which God had so generously provided.

S – What a blessing it has been. I now have children, and Puah has given birth to her first, a beautiful baby boy.

P – God honored our decision to not obey Pharaoh. And it seemed that life was almost back to normal.

S – Almost, but not quite. The change came suddenly and without warning.

P – Pharaoh's soldiers broke into our houses and questioned all of us. We had to give up all our records about those we knew to be pregnant. We were questioned for hours until they were satisfied they had gained all they wanted.

S – At first, we were confused about why they had come and what it all meant.

P – But then reports began to come in from various parts of Egypt about death squads. These were not your usual death squads, you know, police and military searching out traitors, insurrectionists, and rebels.

S – That would have been awful, but not unusual in a kingdom that was living in fear of a group of foreigners. But this was different.

P – The traitors, insurrectionists, and rebels were not adults. Rather, our babies had been labeled a threat to the future stability and peace of the country and the squads

methodically visited each village at key times to kill the newborn baby boys. It was methodical because they knew where to go, when to go, and they would repeat the process about every 3-6 months.

S – We felt horrible as we began to realize that their raids and killings were based on all the information they had taken and extracted from us.

P- We midwives gathered to console each other and weep as we felt the heartache of all those mothers, all those fathers. We found very little to give us hope and joy. Some of us as well, lost our babies to the death squads.

S – Until we heard the story of Moses. Then we realized that God was watching and was planning a day when He would respond. It would be many years later, but Pharaoh would one day feel a pain no one should ever face. The death of his own child.

P – We often think about what happened to Pharaoh and all who supported his decision.

S – Some rejoiced in the retribution. Others of us were saddened that a person would so offend God, would be so rigid in defense of their actions that they would do nothing to admit their sin, to recognize the truth. To be so egotistical as to defy God and cause such suffering.

P – Our freedom came at an incredible price, but we wish that it had not been so. Pharaoh could have spared all of our babies. But then we realized that we could not blame ourselves. We had resisted doing evil and God had cared for

us. We had not helped in the killing of any child and we were honored by God and the people.

S – In the end, our example encouraged the people, and if Pharaoh had been a humble man, our example might have shown him the path to follow, and revealed true wisdom and faith.

P – You never know what will happen as a result of your decisions. What is important is to be sure you do what is right.

S – Yes, be sure to do what is right and believe in your heart that God sees and cares for what is beyond your ability to do so.

### **Study Guide**

Doing the right thing can be dangerous.

Read Deuteronomy 6:18; Proverbs 21:3, 7; 2 Corinthians 8:21; 13:7; 1 Peter 3:6; 1 Jn 3:10

Write a set of guidelines to help you in doing what is right?

What do you think about the following statement? “Doing the right thing can be dangerous and can get you killed?” Is this true? Is being a Christian and obeying God the same as doing the right thing?

Here is the really hard question? Will you be willing to do what is right even if it may hurt you or someone you care about?

*Queen of Babylon (friend of Daniel)*

*Commitment to the truth*

*Daniel 5:10-12.*

Can we talk? I mean really talk? Can I be honest with you?

My husband is a fool. Well that may be a strong word but, really, he doesn't seem to have it all together. Now I am not talking about the normal silly stuff men do. You know, fishing every week and never really catching anything! I guess that isn't so bad but does he really need that boat, those rods, and... you know what I mean. Maybe for your husband it's hunting, or a favorite sport, his car, or something where he just doesn't seem to keep things in perspective.

However, my husband's hobby (if you will) has turned into an obsession. My husband loves to party – to host and boast to his guests. He is always planning another party, another celebration. At first, I saw the value of these events. They were small and clearly related to developing good relations with the officials of our country and the representatives of other countries. Then the parties began to be more elaborate, but still not a problem. I enjoyed celebrating those special days with friends, but he was inviting people that weren't necessarily our friends or close acquaintances. Little by little the invitation list grew and grew. The parties became more and more elaborate and were about showing off his wealth and so on.

Finally, I stopped going. I just couldn't handle another party, another round of foolishness. And yes, that did cause some stress between us. The worst was one day when he decided to show off all of the spoils from the temple of God in Jerusalem. We had a huge fight as I tried to warn him that he was making a serious mistake and clearly not respecting the wishes of his father.

Let me explain. I grew up during the reign of the great king Nebuchadnezzar. I saw him return from his conquests with mountains of plunder. Because I was part of the elite, I also became aware of the rise of Daniel as the premier wise man of the nation. I was there when Nebuchadnezzar threw the three Jews into the fiery furnace and watched them walk out untouched by the fire. I became captivated by the words they spoke of their god who they called the one true God.

But what changed my life forever was the interpretation and fulfillment of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The golden statue revealed the immense size of his ego and his lack of fear of Daniel's god. But when the three walked out of the fire he made the right decision. He chose to honor their god and give, at least, lip service to his power, but that didn't mean he changed. In fact, he did not. And then came the dream. The dream that warned of the king's punishment for assuming he was in control. And that everyone, even gods, must bow to the one God.

The dream was clear. Nebuchadnezzar would lose his senses and wander like an animal for 10 years. And that is just what happened. One day everything was normal and the next he was gone. When they found him, he was like a wild animal.

So wild, and canny, that they could not catch him. So, a guard was set to trail and watch him. Those were amazing years. Amazing because the king was a Wildman; and amazing because Daniel kept everything in order and prevented anyone from usurping the throne. Daniel was an incredible man, a humble man. He knew the king would be back and so he ruled in his place with power and wisdom. His ruled so wisely that all were pleased and could find no reason to change anything or challenge his right to rule in the king's place.

Then just as suddenly as it began, the king's sanity returned. To him it was like awakening from a dream but with the clear awareness that it had not been a dream. He returned to power and no one questioned his right to rule nor his ability to rule. He had been changed by the experience and the people saw the difference and the wisdom he had gained.

It was during this time that King Nebuchadnezzar put in place a number of guides related to how we treated those we had conquered. A number related specifically to the Jews and the items that had been taken from the temple of their god. These items were never to be used for any purpose other than what was written in the laws of the Jews. They were placed in special places of honor and in separate storerooms from the plunder of other countries.

I often saw Nebuchadnezzar enter into those rooms with Daniel and occasionally overheard them talking about the God of the Jews. Daniel noticed me one day and invited me in. I was scared. He saw how scared I was and came over to me and led me in. I was about to collapse to my knees but

never made it to the ground. Before I knew it the king had taken my hand and seated me in a chair. He smiled at me, and well, that began a unique and special time of my life. In our conversations that followed I learned much about the true God and his love for all people.

I became a believer and follower. Actually, I was not alone. It seemed like every week the king and Daniel drew others into these discussions as well. My future husband, Belshazzar, attended a couple of them, but he never understood (or wanted to understand) what they were saying. Nebuchadnezzar was concerned about this and arranged my marriage to his son. He hoped, as did I, that I would be able to reach him with the truth over time.

Sadly, it didn't happen. Instead Belshazzar became infatuated with the treasure of the Jews and the recognition he could gain by displaying it and embellishing his life with it. This love of the treasure and the power it represented resulted in the increasingly elaborate parties and finally his lack of respect for all his father had tried to teach him about who had truly made all his wealth and power possible. Finally, Belshazzar broke his father's promise and brought out the sacred objects of the Jews to use in one of his wild and careless parties.

It was at this party that my warning became real. I had gone to my room, unable to tolerate their wickedness. But Belshazzar was celebrating his power, his greatness over the world, and his victory over the gods of those they had conquered, when the hand appeared. It wrote on the wall a few simple words and disappeared. The party came to a grinding halt and fear gripped the people. This fear grew and

grew as each group of wise men and priests was brought in to decipher it but admitted that they could not translate the words on the wall.

Hysteria was spreading rapidly. The racket grew until I could hear it in my private rooms. I tried to ignore it but could not. I finally went to the door and asked the guard if he knew what was happening. He told me about a mysterious hand writing a message on the wall of the throne room. He said every few minutes someone would rush by bringing another wise man or priest or astrologer. He said each time they passed they seemed to be more and more frantic. At this point I could clearly hear the noise in the throne room and even heard my husband threatening to kill everyone if they could not find someone to translate the message.

Out of concern for the lives of all those in the room I decided I needed to go and find out for myself what was happening. At my appearance things calmed down a little and he told me the story. I looked at the wall and realized there was only one man who could translate such a message. I told them to call for Daniel.

I was not surprised that they had forgotten about Daniel. In the past, they were insulted when he advised them on how to rule the kingdom and lead the people. They did not like his warnings about the wastefulness of these parties and the disrespect they showed to the common people and those that had been conquered. But on this day, they listened to my advice and chose to call him and had no choice but to listen.

Daniel's interpretation was clear. It was a message they had heard before. The king (my husband) and all those present

knew the story of the ten years of insanity of King Nebuchadnezzar. They knew the rules set up for showing respect to the God of the heavens and the Jews and their sacred relics, but they had chosen to ignore and forget all. The message was simple. “You have failed, you have been weighed, and you have been judged. You have ignored God, you have done what is wrong, and as a result the kingdom will be taken away from you.”

My heart almost failed me. The last time I heard words like that the king passed into the wild and a life of an animal. I knew that they would be fulfilled. At that moment, I did not realize just how near the fulfillment was. I was relieved and fearful at the same time. The truth had been proclaimed. But would they listen? Would they have time to respond?

The answer was NO. That night the Persians arrived, and my husband was killed along with many, many others. They had defied God and dishonored His name. I am one of the few that survived. I am no longer the queen but that is not important. I no longer live a life of ease and bounty. That, too, is not important. What I do have is my faith in God and my friendship with Daniel.

The greatness of Babylon is now history. The God of Israel though remains unchanged and unchallenged.

### **Study Guide**

What are you committed to?

What is the most important thing in your life?

When others choose to go the wrong way or become involved in things that lead them away from God, how do you respond?

Read the following Scripture about Joshua and his commitment. Joshua 24:14-24.

Is your commitment strong enough that God can use it to guide and influence others to choose the right path and make the right decisions about their life and commitments?

## *Rizpah (concubine of Saul)*

### *Grievance and pain caused by another's sin*

#### **2 Sam 3:7; 21:8-11**

I have a sad story. No, I have a horrible story; a story filled with disaster, death, and shame. Only in the end did I find any peace or comfort. Let me explain.

I am from a group called the Horites. We are descendants from the line of Esau. When Israel moved into our land (during the time of Joshua) we were not in the list of nations to be destroyed and so we managed to survive the conquest of the land. We lived a peaceful life among the Israelites and avoided being affected by their lack of obedience and the judgment that usually resulted from such failure on their part.

Though my people were not tagged for destruction neither were we included in any of the Israelite's blessings. We were treated as inferior. It was because of this that I was only a concubine of Saul. There could be no officially approved marriage between us. Still, such a situation did provide many benefits to me, my family, and especially my children by Saul. For many years we enjoyed a better life and shared in the spoils of war and the respect of the people who admired Saul.

This began to change, however, when Saul lost the favor and support of Samuel. He began to lose confidence in himself as well, and let others face the threats and challenges on his

behalf. Saul also made bad decisions like when he almost killed Jonathan for eating a little honey. (Saul had foolishly commanded that no one should eat until the battle was done.)

It was at this time that David became part of the army and, for a while, my life improved again. The victories increased, but so did David's fame. Saul became jealous. So, David fled to avoid Saul's attempts to kill him. This was a difficult time and Saul lost the respect of his leaders and the men of the army. It became increasingly challenging to defeat the enemy. So, Saul sent the army to destroy a group of people called the Gibeonites. They had been listed among the peoples to be destroyed but had managed to negotiate a treaty of protection. Saul, in desperation to win a battle, chose them, conveniently forgetting about the treaty, and declared it was time to carry out the word of God to destroy them. Off the army went, including my sons and the other sons of Saul. (As is often true the king's sons are expected to serve in the army to establish their potential candidacy for succession to the crown.)

There were many voices that expressed concern about this breach of covenant that Joshua had made with the Gibeonites, but the soldiers carried out the order. It was an easy victory. The Gibeonites were unprepared and almost destroyed. When they came home you could tell that many were unsettled. But the family of Saul was excited. They had won a victory and believed that Saul's fortunes would improve. It was not to be. The army was demoralized by the victory and it was not long before the Philistines attacked and Saul was defeated. He and several of his sons were

killed. My boys along with a number of others, escaped and we all went into hiding.

With Saul's death, my life became unsettled. Abner, Saul's general, kindly accepted me into his house and married me, even though I was not an Israelite. This created a rupture in the relations between Abner and Ishbosheth, Saul's heir. Ishbosheth saw our marriage as an attempt by Abner to displace him and take over the throne. Abner had no such thoughts but the offense of such an accusation caused him to abandon Ishbosheth and deliver the army of Saul to David. While this appeared a good choice, there were those who did not want Abner as part of the army, especially Joab, who promptly arranged Abner's death. So for the second time, I became a widow. Shortly after I would be haunted by Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites and my son's involvement in this heinous event.

It was then the drought came. Not just a few weeks, or a few months. It lasted years. For a while the stores of grain from previous years provided what we needed. Then we were dependent on what was gained from the spoils of war. In the end those began to dry up as well. The impact of the drought had spread beyond our borders and there was just not enough food in Israel or in the lands nearby.

It was then we learned why God had allowed this drought. It was because of the violation of the covenant of protection Joshua had made with the Gibeonites. This happened when Saul ordered the destruction of this people. David had not been present and had no knowledge of the event but that did not change the fact that the people of Israel had committed

this atrocity and that there were people alive who had been involved. This fact was about to cause me a level of suffering a mother should never have to experience.

My two sons were taken from me. They along with five other sons of Saul were handed over to the Gibeonites who had survived. They promptly killed them and then hung them on crosses in humiliation and retribution for what had been done.

My sons were dead and the pain was incredible. I could not grasp the reason. The truth or correctness of the judgment and execution mattered little to me. All I could see was the fact that they were dead and that they had been humiliated severely. I could not accept that they deserved to die in this manner.

So, day after day and night after night, I stayed with their bodies. I drove off the birds and animals. I protected their bodies and tried to restore them to some form of dignity and honor. Yes, they had participated in the massacre but as a mother I could not let them be dishonored in this way.

Finally, David heard of my vigil. A vigil that had lasted for weeks. He sent soldiers who respectfully lowered my sons' bodies from the crosses. They carried them to a grave that had been especially made for them. Then I saw them bring the bones of Saul and Jonathan and place them in the same grave. This act brought some measure of peace and closure to my life. But I will forever struggle with how and why my boys died. Why were they taken from me? Why did they have to die this way? Why did no one else care?

My life ended in disaster, death, and shame. I am still struggling to understand how to keep on living. Only David's act of respect in organizing their burial brought a little comfort. It was a small ray of hope. I pray that God will help me use that to find a peace that so far has escaped me.

### **Study Guide**

Sorrow is a part of life. How we deal with sorrow says a lot about who we are and about our relationship with God

Confusion is also a part of life. We are never fully aware of all that has happened to bring us to where we are. How we handle the confusion of life says a lot about the way we live and the nature of our hope and faith in God.

Read Psalms 6, 13, 31, 90, and 107. How are sorrow and confusion discussed in these verses?

What guidelines can you develop that will help you deal with sorrow and confusion in your life?

*Salome (mother of James and John)*

*A mother's pride out of control*

*Mt 20:20, 27:56; Mk 10:35-40, 15:40, 16:1*

How many of you mothers would do anything for your children? Most of you, of course. If and when the opportunity presents itself a mother will do what she can to

give her children an advantage, put in a good word, and promote them when necessary.

My two boys are incredible young men with a great future. They learned the fishing trade from Peter. He was the best commercial fisherman in our region. He owned at least two boats and employed crews for both of them. My boys are also incredibly intense. They have been nicknamed “the Sons of Thunder.” They react strongly when challenged, especially when it relates to things they are passionate about.

I remember a number of times when they almost exploded. The first was when Jesus showed up after they had fished all night and he told them to go back out in the boat and cast the net on the opposite side. My boys were amazed that Peter consented to this. Peter was noted to be a man with a foul mood even on a good day, and this day was one of the worst. He had caught nothing and here was Jesus telling him how to fish? The boys were ready to explode. Only the fact that Peter somehow controlled his temper kept them under control. And then the full net of fish changed everything.

My boys were so amazed, that when Jesus told them to leave everything and follow him, they did. And Peter too - he left it all. At first I was in shock! Then I realized that if this man could find fish where there were none, then my boys should be following him and I needed to do everything I could to encourage them. So I packed up my bags and joined the group of ladies that traveled with this group caring for their needs: preparing food, washing clothes, and whatever else needed to be done. At this point my decision was solely

about my boys and being sure I could watch out for them and get them what they needed to impress this teacher.

Another tense time was a year or so later. Our group had arrived in a village and the people were not receptive to our presence or to Jesus' teaching. At this point my boys could no longer contain their frustration or their need to protect the honor of their teacher. In their anger, they told Jesus that they were ready to call on God to rain down fire on this town for the disrespect they were showing their master. Jesus rebuked them. But I was proud of them for taking such a stand. It was evident they had moved up in their status within the group.

I was also extremely proud when I learned that they had been selected to be part of the inner twelve, and later the innermost three. My boys and Peter had left everything and they were the ones chosen over all the others. My pride as a mother knew no limits. In fact, I went to Jesus and requested that he elevate them to the highest position there is in any kingdom. I requested that he give them chairs at his right hand and left hand; positions that would let everyone know how important my boys were to the kingdom.

I did what I believed any mother would do and it all backfired. Jesus looked at me and the boys and asked them if they were ready to suffer with him in the way he had recently described. They, of course, said yes. I nodded in agreement. However, we did not believe that he would suffer but would reign, and they with him. His response was unnerving. He looked at them and stated clearly, they would,

in fact, suffer for him. But only God the Father has the right to decide who sits where.

I was disappointed and frustrated. What more did my boys have to do to be given what they truly deserved? My disappointment soon turned to shame when the others learned of what I had requested. They became very upset with me and my sons. They were indignant with the idea that I would make such a request and that James and John would be in agreement with my action. Things were getting tense, but when Jesus arrived, as always, He used the situation to explain more about the kingdom.

Position in the kingdom was not about power or based on one's ability to control or have authority over others. It was based on the ability to serve. In this kingdom those who served, who were humble, who lowered themselves in the eyes of others, were the ones who would truly be honored. Real power came from service, not one's title or position. My sons saw and understood this much more quickly than I did.

My life's value had been based in my ability to be a wife and a mother. I gained my position and respect from what they accomplished. I was the wife of Zebedee and I was the mother of James and John. The greater their position, their power, and the respect of others, the higher my status would be.

I began to ponder Jesus' words and how I was living my life. I was not there to serve but to promote my sons and gain honor through them. I had never thought of that as being selfish and inconsiderate of others. I now began to evaluate

how this attitude affected the way I treated others. It was not a pleasant process. I had used others to get what I wanted and what I believed my boys wanted. I had little concern for how my actions affected others, they were just a means to an end.

As the days passed I began to watch more carefully what Jesus did and said and began to realize that all his teaching and activity had nothing to do with promoting Himself. Instead it was all about helping others to grow and learn. It was about helping others understand God's love and willingness to restore us. It was about serving so that others could grow in their relationship to God and be restored. As I learned this truth my manner changed and I saw a change in how others treated me as well. It did not happen overnight. I had lived for so long for myself and my sons, yet at the expense of my husband and my sons. Does that make sense?

By the time we arrived in Jerusalem, I understood how to serve and think more of the needs of others than of my needs. I became part of a group of women that followed Jesus' words and purpose. We stayed when the others fled. We were on the mountain when they crucified Jesus. I was very proud of John on that day. He alone stayed near and I heard Jesus tell him to take care of Mary, His mother. My heart nearly burst with pride that he would be given such an honor, an honor so much greater than a seat by the throne. And, I was there with the others when we heard the words of the angels: "Jesus is risen!"

How do I explain to you the emotion of that moment? We, the lowly, were honored over others.

## **Study Guide**

Pride, can be a dangerous trap depending on the source of your pride and how you use it.

The Proverbs provide a number of warnings regarding pride. Read the following and make a list of the dangers that come with pride. Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 21:24; 29:23

Paul's letters suggest that there are also some good reasons to have pride. Read the following and make a list of good sources of pride. 1 Corinthians 4:6, 7 2 Corinthians 5:12; 7:4; 8:24; Galatians 6:4

Did you have pride in someone or something? How does it compare to what you learned above? How does a person make sure their pride is not misdirected and destructive to them and others?

*Shemaiah (fictional name of Naaman's slave girl)*

*Faith and Belief instead of hatred*

*2 Kings 5*

Actors: Shemaiah (Slave Girl); Arenaza – (Naaman's Wife); Naaman; Servant; Servant 2

Opening Scene - Kitchen

Servant: The general is back.

Shemaiah: Really, where is he? How is he? Is he angry? Is he happy? (enter Servant 2)

Servant 2: He is asking for you Shemaiah.

Shemaiah: Me! Why me?

Arenaza: I don't know but you better get going. He is waiting in the courtyard.

Scene: Courtyard

Naaman: Where is Shemaiah?

Arenaza: I sent for her but she is really scared.

Naaman: Why should she be scared?

Arenaza: Anytime you call for a slave to come it causes fear.

Naaman: Why should it cause them to be afraid? I treat them well.

Arenaza: Yes you do dear, but you are also the one responsible for the deaths of many of their family and friends. And you are the one who made slaves of them. Even though we treat them well they are still afraid when you call for them.

Naaman: Oh, but I have such wonderful news to share. Where is Shemaiah?

Arenaza: Here she comes. Be gentle. She does not know if you are going to punish her or be pleased with her.

Shemaiah: Sir, I have come as you wish.

Naaman: Oh Shemaiah. How can I ever thank you?

Shemaiah: To serve in your house is thanks enough.

Naaman: Oh, but it isn't. No, it isn't. You deserve so much more and I have done so much harm to you and your people.

Shemaiah – (look of confusion and uncertainty)

Naaman: Shemaiah, do you remember the day you had the courage to tell me that the only way I could be cured of my leprosy was to go and see the prophet Elijah.

Shemaiah: Yes sir.

Naaman: Why did you risk everything to tell me? You know that I have little patience with insolence. ....

Shemaiah: Yes sir.

Naaman: So why did you risk a beating, or being sent out of my house to the fields, or worse, being sold to another?

Arenaza: Dear, don't be afraid. Nothing will happen to you today. Tell him.

Shemaiah: Master, my parents were some of the few who still served our God faithfully. They taught me the words of the Torah, the words of God Almighty. They taught me that God could do marvelous things to those who faithfully obeyed him. They also taught me that our people were not obeying those teachings. They told me about the prophets that God sent from Judah and other places to warn us that God was tired of our disobedience and that a great people from the north would soon come and attack us. My parents

taught me to pray to God and tell others the truth. We were often laughed at and even attacked for not serving the false gods. When you came and attacked Israel we understood that God was fulfilling His promise to punish us. My parents refused to help the king and his leaders in the war and they were arrested. I was sent to some relatives who were told to teach me how to worship the gods. I was often beaten for not doing what they told me to do. I often cried myself to sleep asking God to help me be strong and faithful.

It wasn't long and your army came and attacked the town where I was living. I ran and hid but some of your soldiers found me and took me to Damascus. I was scared and not sure what would happen next. We had heard many stories about what happens to young slave girls. I felt abandoned by God but then remembered some of the Psalms of David that my parents had taught me. He experienced some very dark times and yet shared how he learned that God was always near. That gave me strength and the hope that God would care for me.

The next day you bought me at the slave auction. You have treated me kindly and I have been free to worship God. I began to understand that you were not as evil as our people believed and that, in fact, you were carrying out God's judgment for our disobedience. I also saw that your wife is a kind woman, so when I learned that you were ill I began to pray that God would show me how to help you. That is when I remembered the stories of Elijah my parents had told me. How he had defied a great king to serve God; how God had protected him and provided for all his needs. I also

remembered the stories of how God used his student Elisha to heal people.

As I prayed and remembered I sensed that God was telling me to tell you to go to Elisha. He would be able to heal you. Something in my heart told me that God loves all people and if we obey Him, He will take care of us. So, knowing the risk of what can happen to a slave when they approach their master without permission, I told your wife what my God was telling me. Your wife is a good woman and her love for you is great. But I was still a bit shocked when she gladly listened to me and asked me to tell you about Elisha. (Pauses uncertain if she should continue)

Naaman: Don't be afraid. Please continue.

Shemaiah: I saw the anger in your eyes when I suggested that you go to him. Your pride almost prevented you from listening. I understood clearly why. If I had told you to go to the king or one of your generals, that would have been tolerable. But to go to an enemy to seek help was almost impossible for you to accept. As I left the room I truly believed that I would be sent from the house or even sold for the insolence of my suggestion. Yet you didn't.

Several days later I learned that in fact you decided to go. I prayed every day that God would hear me and heal you that God would reveal himself to you. I have been torn between fear and hope. Fear that God would choose not to answer and I would be punished and sold. Hope that God would hear and my faith would be confirmed. As each day passed I sensed a change in me. I began to understand that my faith did not depend on God's answer. What God really wanted was for

me to understand that true obedience makes possible a deeper relationship with Him. Nothing can change that.

Even now I am not sure what will happen to me. I have so many questions but I am afraid to ask. But this I know, whether God chose to heal you or not, I will continue to believe and serve the one who created the universe and cares about me. But I would like to know. Did you see Elisha and did God heal you?

Naaman: Oh Shemaiah. Have no fear. I have incredible news for you. Not only did I see Elisha, but I was healed. Later I will tell you all about that. But first I need to tell you something that is even more wonderful and important. Shemaiah, my heart is healed. I have met your God and want to learn to serve Him for the rest of my life. Thank you so much for being brave. Thank you for believing and trusting your God.

Be assured that I will do everything I can to learn if your parents are still alive and if possible reunite you with them. And, if I don't find them I will talk with my wife about adopting you as our daughter. In the meantime, I hope that you will teach me more about your God and how to serve Him. Would you like that?

Shemaiah – In shock can only nod her agreement.

### **Study Guide**

How strong is your faith? Do you continue to believe in God even when things go very wrong?

This is not the only story of such faith.

Read the story of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1, 3, 6. They were taken into exile and on several occasions threatened with death for their faith.

Read the story of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 37. He was beaten, imprisoned, and left to die for proclaiming the truth.

Read the story of Abiathar 1 Samuel 22. His father was killed for helping David.

So, when your world is falling apart, where do you turn? Do you continue believing that God is in control? Or do you blame Him for the bad things that happen?

The Bible says clearly that God is not the source of sin or evil. 1 Peter 2:22 1 John 3:5

If God cannot be the source of evil then is God the cause of the bad we experience?

What do you think is the source? Read Romans 7:5-11 and James 1:14-15 and review your answer.

*Jamar (Wife of Judah and mother of two sons of Judah)*

*Life and Culture – a dangerous world*

*Genesis 38; Matthew 1:3*

I have a complicated story to tell about my life. In the part of the world where I live the culture has some interesting rules

about marriage and the status of women. The most important issue being the woman's ability to have children and maintain the future of the family line. The pressure to have children is so strong that our culture has established guidelines about what should happen if a wife's husband should die before she has children.

Like all marriages in our area mine was arranged by my parents. I was a bit afraid about who they would select and what would happen once I was married. A girl's life can be so uncertain, and to be married to an uncaring man could make her life one of misery and struggle. So when my parents told me they had arranged for me to marry one of the sons of Judah, Er, I was quite excited. Judah and his family were strangers in our land but had become well known and were very prosperous. There were many stories of how the God of their family had promised them that one day they would own all the land where we lived. Based on how their herds and wealth multiplied, it appeared that this promise would not take long.

Our wedding was incredible and life started off with a great deal of hope and promise until my husband began to act despicably. I don't know why he deserted the beliefs of his father. He would listen to no one, not even to his grandfather Jacob who tried to explain the risks of defying the God they served. Nothing worked. No one could convince him that he would pay for his wickedness and that someday God would grow weary of his behavior. And He did.

Judah and Jacob, his father, had talked and decided that they would try one more time to help my husband understand

how dangerous his behavior was. As before, he became angry, and using some of the vilest language I have ever heard, cursed God and his family, then flew out of the tent. He only managed to go a few steps away from the tent when his face became twisted with fear and he collapsed. He was dead before he hit the ground.

This is when our marriage custom became a reality. Let me explain. In our culture when a man dies before his wife bears him any children, his brother is to marry her and produce children with her to make sure his brother's name lives on in his children. So, my husband's brother, Onan, and I were soon married. But Onan had no interest in providing children for his brother. He wanted his own family and so began to behave in ways that prevented me from becoming pregnant. In fact, for some reason he decided to tell everyone what he was doing. This disturbed Judah and Jacob even more than the wickedness of Er. But he, like his brother, refused to listen to them. And he, like his brother, was dealt with by God and died.

There was one more brother but he was only 10 years old. Judah was trapped on two sides. He had an obligation to provide an heir for his oldest son but he was afraid that the youngest would follow the same trap. So he told me to go home to my family and wait until the youngest son grew up and then he would have him marry me and provide an heir for his brother. According to my culture that was the most shameful thing he could have told me to do. It would have been better for him to marry me and provide a child for his son.

But, without his blessing, I could not stay and so I returned home. My family was furious and embarrassed. They felt angry that we had been treated in such a callous manner. They were embarrassed to be seen in public with me. Such a rejection would make it difficult for them to find suitable husbands for their other daughters. My family was also afraid because they had already spent the bride price given to them by Judah's family. Maybe they would be required to pay it back to Judah because I had been sent home for failing to produce a child? It didn't matter if it was not my fault. In my world, the woman is always to blame.

My life became more and more unbearable. Judah had denied my rights. He had shamed me before my family. Each day was filled with more suffering as I struggled to live on the little I received. Unless something changed I had only two options - die of starvation or become a prostitute. I didn't like either option. So, I resorted to deception.

I learned that Judah was coming to our area to shear his sheep. So I studied the place where they were camped and put my plan into action. I dressed myself as a prostitute and chose a place where he would see me and not be able to avoid my presence. He thought I was a temple prostitute and we had sex. As a result, I became pregnant.

Culture and the need to belong are powerful forces. My rights had been denied, but did that give me the right to act the way I did? When Judah found out who I was and who the father of my children was, he declared that I was more just and righteous than he. He took me into his household and

fulfilled the duties of father to our sons. My family regained their respect among our people and I was vindicated.

There are days when I wonder about what I did and if there was any other way to resolve the issue of an heir for my first husband. Some may think that I should not worry too much about the past and keep in focus what happened as a result of my actions. My sons became forefathers of the line of David and I am one of three women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus. I could easily say I was vindicated at one level.

Yet, what if I had been more patient? What if I had placed greater trust in the God of my husband? What if I had presented my rights to the correct people and they had championed my case before the family of my father-in-law (now husband)? The results of my situation were culturally correct. It was my right to have a child - a child by a male member of the family of Judah, either one of the brothers or even the father. (That is why Judah declared me just and I was within my rights.) But what do we risk when we choose to force the issue and use human wisdom instead of depending on God?

Today I am at peace. My sons are playing at my feet. But I will never be able to escape the question, what if...? So, before you follow what seems to be the path of wisdom, human wisdom, take time to consider what God might do if you truly put your trust in Him.

### **Study Guide**

Culturally it looks like what Tamar did was right. At least Judah chose not to judge her.

Life will be filled with situations where the culture approves what appears to be wrong to us.

The question will always be whether this action, tradition, practice, etc. does or does not violate the law of God. Read Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 9:17-25

Peter struggled with this idea in relation to the Gentiles. Read about what happened to him in Acts 10.

Is there anything in your life that you need to review to be sure it is not in conflict with God's law even though it may be acceptable to the people around you?

Can you use the above Scriptures to create a guideline for yourself? It will be helpful if you also read what Paul writes in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

Sometimes there may be no clear answer and much disagreement. What is the key guide we need to follow when dealing with such issues?

*Noah's wife (mother and wife at the end of world)*

*How great is your Faith?*

*Genesis 7:7*

It had been at least a century since anyone had heard the voice of God. So, you can imagine my surprise when my husband came in from working in the garden to announce he was about to make a career change! He had just received a

message from God that we would have to relocate and my husband, the farmer, would have to learn the trade of a boat builder.

I was in shock - but not because of the decision to relocate. We had been married for over 3 centuries and had moved a number of times. Everyone did. We had been told since our childhood that we were to multiply and subdue the world and there was a lot of world to explore and subdue.

What was so shocking about this announcement was the idea of a new career. I had never heard of boat building. I didn't even know what a boat was. The biggest waters around us were some rivers, and I had seen a few people who had built crafts to float on the water. But he was talking about something called an ark. My head was just starting to clear when he started laying out the plans and describing its dimensions. This ark was going to be bigger than anything I had ever seen or heard of.

Before I continue, I want to make a few things really clear. My husband is an incredible person. I have never seen anyone like him in all of my 480 years. He cares about people; he treats them fairly and justly. He makes time every day to talk to God, or least to reflect on the stories we have heard about Adam and Eve, the garden, how sin entered the world, and stories of those who walked and talked with God like Enoch, Seth, and others. Noah is truly concerned about what God thinks about us and what we are doing, and he works at trying to live in a way that honors God. I trust Noah and have a deep respect for his insights into what is happening in the world around us.

Even so, when he told me the next part of the message God had given him, I almost thought he had gone mad. This ark thing was being built to save us, our little family, and a whole bunch of animals from God's wrath. He said God was going to destroy the world with a flood and only those in the ark would survive.

Each time my husband opened his mouth things got stranger and stranger. First the change in career, then the boat, then all the animals and the food we would have to gather to care for them. And now water falling from the sky and a flood! The move was not a problem, the boat was a bit strange. I could even understand the concept of floating on water. But rain and a flood? I had no clue what that meant.

Have you ever had your spouse tell you something you just couldn't believe or didn't want to believe? Has your spouse ever made you wonder why you married him/her? Of course! Your marriage wouldn't be normal if it hasn't happened. The key to dealing with such moments is reflecting on the totality of your relationship and deciding whether they are worthy of your trust. Is your spouse worthy of your trust? And what are you willing to do to reveal your trust?

I was about to learn a lot about how much I trusted my husband. Not because of the unusual, even weird nature of all that God had told him. No, that only required a few moments of trust. The real test came as the years passed. Do you have any idea what is involved in building an ark and preparing it to house an unspecified quantity and variety of animals? Neither did I. Do any of you have any idea how long it takes to build an ark? Do any of you know what it's

like for everybody to believe your husband is nuts and then have to help your kids deal with those very vocal opinions? That is the real test, isn't it. How it impacts our family is the real test of our ability to trust our spouse.

This ark thing took 100 years to build. 100 years of people ridiculing - not just him, but me, and the three boys. I am really amazed that we all survived. And not only survived, but actively supported him and joined him in building his ark.

It was trying to watch as people came by day after day, for years, to laugh, criticize, and ridicule us. My friends just shook their heads and finally stopped coming by for tea or for anything. Nobody wanted to do business with us for fear of being ridiculed or associated with "that crazy family." What hurt the most was to watch the boys grow and fear they would never find wives. Who wanted to be married to one of them? I am still not sure how it happened but each of them found a young lady willing to take the risk; three women who chose the possibility of being rejected to be part of something incredible. Now there were seven of us who chose to believe that God had spoken and we believed what He had told Noah. We chose to risk everything on the promise that when God's judgment came, and it would come, our faith and trust would be rewarded.

That meant 100 years of dealing with a multitude of issues. Getting the tools Noah needed was no small task. He spent two years in that process alone and only succeeded with the help of Tubal-Cain's family. At first, they were very reluctant to be associated with this thing. But finally, for a

price, they agreed to make the tools he needed. That is just one example of the struggles we faced.

One hundred years. One hundred years of washing sweat-stained clothes. One hundred years of bandaging cuts and caring for the inevitable injuries. One hundred years of cooking and caring. One hundred years of hearing the warning and watching the people jeer and reject the truth. One hundred years of seeing more and more profoundly the truth of that message and the depth of sin that existed around us. One hundred years of trust rewarded with another day, week, month, year ...until...

They came, hundreds, no thousands of animals. We had just finished the ark and they began to come. Suddenly we knew all the work had a purpose. Those next days were frantic ones as we began to move the last of the food and supplies into the ark. Noah made a few more desperate and futile attempts to warn the people, but to no avail. Years before the people had stopped coming to stare and to ridicule. They were absolutely convinced we were crazy, and so no one saw the animals come. Even when the clouds started to form, something we had never seen before, they didn't come.

At that point, we no longer had time to think about them. We were too busy getting the animals in place and storing the last items. So busy, in fact, that when the first drops of rain began to fall we hardly noticed it. So busy, we almost didn't hear Noah shout that we should get inside NOW! We rushed in, and as the last one entered, the doors shut themselves. I will admit that was a bit unnerving, but nothing like what was about to happen.

The rain began to fall harder. From within the ark we heard the voices of the people crying to let them in. I can't remember how long that lasted. I don't want to remember. We had warned them for a hundred years but now the door was shut and could not be opened.

It was a sobering moment for me as I realized how important it was to trust the one who chose to follow God, the one who chose to obey God, the one I called my husband. It was a truth we would share as a family and retell over and over to the generations that came after us.

We had learned as a family to trust God because of my husband, a man who had chosen to serve God, to trust God above all else. As a family, we learned the value of encouraging each other in our walk with God and He honored that trust.

It is still true today. We need to follow God and we need to trust those called by God to lead us. It doesn't matter who that person is: husband, wife, family member, pastor, or friend. You may not have to deal with an end of the world event like us. But we hope our example of trusting in God will help you be faithful in guiding others to find the ark of salvation that God has provided, which is his Son Jesus.

What kind of trust do you have today? And who are you putting your trust in?

### **Study Guide**

Take time to read the story of the flood.

How do you think Noah's direction from God and his decision to do something unusual, even crazy, affected the life of his wife?

We don't read many stories about the wives of those God has called and how their lives were impacted by those decisions. Here are a couple:

Zipporah – wife of Moses – Exodus 4:25; 18:2

Rachel and Leah – wives of Jacob – Genesis 31:5-16

Sarah – Wife of Abraham – Genesis 12:1-13

Would you be willing to go and do what your spouse tells you God is telling him/her to do? How will following your spouse impact your life and activities? Will other people ridicule you for believing God is speaking, even when it seems insane or unrealistic?

What part does your faith in God play in your marriage and the decisions you make as a couple?