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WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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NOAH: OBEDIENT FAITH IN A WICKED WORLD!

Mike Bonner

When considering the heroes of faith, we cannot help but to consider some of the blessed ones in the scriptures. The Heroes of Faith is a great and noble theme for the "Christian Worker" this month, and worthy of our exploration. With so many individuals looking for a hero, it would do us all well to go to the scriptures and find the heroes the Lord has left us to follow. We will consider Noah and his obedience to the God of Heaven in the midst of a wicked world.

Noah was born during a time of a society saturated with sin and immorality (Gen. 5:29). His name actually means, "comfort", and he truly lived up to his name. His society included people like Lamech (Gen. 4) and Cain (Gen. 4). These were people who murdered, and moved away from God's system of marriage and family (4:19-20). Yet, this man Noah, walked with the Lord and found grace in His sight (Gen. 6:8-9). He was an upright man, he did all according to the commandments of the Lord (Gen. 6:22). This is important for us, even among some of the wickedness, which John said "the world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19), that we can still bear fruit in a bad society. Noah did so and he did it by obedience to the will of God.

Even though the world was wicked, Noah shined as a lighthouse in the midst of a dark ocean at midnight. As a matter of fact, God tagged him with the adjective, "righteous" in his generation (Gen. 7:1). Could you imagine being tagged with that great adjective by the God of heaven? The answer should be a resounding, "YES"! The reason the Lord could call him this was this, he was obedient to the commands of the Lord (Gen. 9:1; 19). It was through the command of building the Ark, and doing it with precision, that he and his household was saved (Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20). Friends, if the people

of God would build their lives on the solid rock of Jesus Christ as Noah did on God's commandments, He will not only bless us, but save us (Matt. 7:24-28; John. 14:15).

So why was Noah successful, even in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation? It was because he received the words of God (Heb. 11:7). It is because he moved with "godly fear" in the preparing of the Ark, and for this reason, his life condemned the world around him. It was because of the word of God, he could have confidence to preach the righteousness of God. As a matter of fact, Peter records Noah being a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). It was through this preaching; God saved him and his house. It will be through the foolishness of preaching; God will save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18-21). Our lives should be up to God's moral code and standard, that when people around

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"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

ABRAHAM: HE WHO STAGGERED NOT IN UNBELIEF

The pages of scripture are full of men and women whose lives teach us so much. Some, like Ahab and Jezebel, reveal powerfully sobering lessons of the reality and consequence of wickedness. But most illustrate vividly the blessing of serving God. Chief among the great examples of a holy life is Abraham—he who staggered not in unbelief.

Abraham is an example of an obedient faith. It is said of him in Genesis 15:6, "And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." Paul referenced that passage in Romans 4:3 and James did as well in James 2:23. The point that both of those New Testament writers made is explained perfectly by James 2:24—"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." From the time that God called Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 12, his life is a constant reminder of the importance of being obedient to the will of God. When God called him to leave his homeland, he left. When He commanded him to circumcise the men of his household, he did it immediately. And when God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, he set out to do just that. Consequently, Romans 4:20 says of him, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to god." There may be times when we are unsure what the future may hold, or how we will be able to make ends meet. But Abraham's example reminds us that we must always be obedient to the will of God regardless of the circumstance.

Abraham is an example of a growing faith. One of the low points of Abraham's life is found in Genesis 12. There was a famine in the land so Abraham began traveling to Egypt. Before he arrived, he began to fear that the Egyptians would desire to have his wife, Sarah, and murder him in order to get her. So, Abraham and Sarah hatched a plan to lie to Pharaoh and tell him that she was only his sister. Indeed, they did lie to Pharaoh and

God plagued Pharaoh's house because of it (Gen. 12:17). No doubt this was one of Abraham's greatest mistakes. However, many years later, in Genesis 18:19, the Lord said of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." How remarkable that God would make such a statement of a man who earlier had lied to Pharaoh out of fear. It is a powerful lesson that reminds us that Abraham's faith, like ours, was one that grew and became stronger. His example reminds us that if we "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2) then our faith will grow in strength as well.

Abraham is an example of a rewarded faith. The Hebrews writer said of Abraham and Sarah, "These all died in faith not having received the promises... But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13-16). Abraham was a faithful servant of God. In fact, James 2:23 describes him as "the friend of God." He reminds us of that fact that God rewards those who are faithful to him. Peter spoke of the day in which we received the "end of our faith" (1 Pet. 1:9). It is a reference to fact that some day the end of all human affairs will arrive, and the faithful of God will go to be with Him in Heaven forever. What a day that will be when the fruit of faith is realized. Abraham's faithfulness reminds us daily of the multiplicity of blessings that are found in being God's faithful child.

CW



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BARNABAS: HE WHO MET THE NEED

Don Walker

As far as we know the first introduction the first introduction to Barnabas is found in Acts chapter 4. In this chapter, we learn that his given name was Joses and he was a Levite from Cyprus. We also learn that the apostles “surnamed [him] Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation)” (Acts 4:36). If the name was given because of Barnabas’ character, and most likely it was, then he was an encourager. Barnabas was one who met the needs of others. We mentioned, as far as we know this is the first mention of Barnabas in Scripture because Jewish legend (which often had its origin in truth) says that Barnabas was the same man as the rich young ruler which caused sorrow to the Lord upon their encounter, because he walked away sorrowfully having much goods. Be that as it may, Barnabas whose life as revealed in Scripture is certainly worthy of our attention. His was a sterling character.

Concerning Barnabas, we remember that when the brethren were fearful and questioning Saul of Tarsus and his conversion, it was Barnabas who was there to meet the need. Luke records,

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:26, 27)

As we consider Luke’s account of their work, we note that in the beginning, Barnabas seems to be the leader. It is not until we are well into their work that we begin to see “Paul and Barnabas” instead of “Barnabas and Saul.” Only eternity will tell how much influence Barnabas had on the apostle Paul. He was there to fill the gap.

In the eighth chapter of Acts we learn of a great persecution upon the church that resulted in the brethren being scattered abroad. Verse 8 tells us “they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.” Later, Luke records these words,

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the

word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. (Acts 11:19-21)

With this great number of conversions arose a need for further teaching and instruction. Continuing in this context, we learn of Barnabas’ role.

When tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. (Acts 11:22-24)

After that Barnabas would depart to Tarsus, “for to seek Saul” (Acts 11:25). From there he would continue with the apostle Paul in their evangelistic effort. Surely we are impressed by the fact that he had a good and honest heart which obeyed the gospel and produced much fruit.

Barnabas also had a great concern for the brethren. The very name that was given to him by the apostles in Acts 4 indicates there was a strong love for the brethren within this saint. His willingness to sell a field and give the proceeds to the apostles to meet the needs that were present indicates the brethren were foremost in his mind (Acts 4:36-37). His willingness to stand up for the apostle Paul in the beginning shows great concern for the brethren. It seems whenever we see a glimpse of Barnabas in Scripture, it is in a context where he is doing something for someone else. Though there are many other examples we could present and develop in thought, one example stands out in our mind, which we believe is worthy of our attention. In Acts 15, after the conference discussing circumcision and keeping of the law, Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch for a space of time, teaching (Acts 15:35). It was at this time that Paul determined it would be good to go back and visit every city where they had preached the gospel and see how the brethren were doing (v. 36). Yet, of Paul and Barnabas it says “a contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other” (v. 39). The contention was



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over whether or not John Mark should accompany them on this journey. Paul thought it not good because John Mark had “departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work” (v. 38). Silas thus would travel with Paul and Barnabas would travel to Cyprus with John Mark. Just as Barnabas had once stood with Paul when he was in need and desired to number himself with the brethren, he now stood with John Mark when Paul would have no part of it. One must wonder how this must have affected John Mark and also how it may have affected Paul. It was later that the apostle would call for John Mark saying “for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4: 11). Without question, Barnabas was one who had great concern for the brethren.

It seems we live in a day where most are looking out for themselves and their own desires. It is rare, sometimes even in the church of the Lord, to find men who can overcome strife or vainglory and in lowliness of mind esteem other better than themselves. However, men like Barnabas look not on their own things, but also on the things of others. We need more like Barnabas in the Lord’s church today. Let us all study our Bibles more and more as we strive to build character within our lives and may we learn the great lessons from our faithful brother Barnabas.

CW

JOHN THE BAPTIZER: THE MOST HUMBLE DISCIPLE

Carl McCann

At the precise moment in history the advent of Jesus Christ occurred (Gal. 4:4). Into a world of sin, sorrow, and shame the blessed Savior came. Commencing His public ministry at the age of thirty (Luke. 3:23), Jesus benefitted from the work of a kinsman, who was none other than John the Baptizer (Matt. 3:3; Luke. 1:76-79). John dwelt in the isolated (desert) places, wore clothing made from camel’s hair, and ate locust and wild honey (Matt. 3:4; Luke. 1:80), yet the work He did preaching in the wilderness set the stage for the preaching of Jesus.

The Bible informs us that John was filled with the Spirit while still in His mother’s womb (Luke. 1:15). He alone was assigned the job of preparing the way of the Lord (Luke. 1:76). John was successful in his work as great multitudes from the area of the Jordan became His disciples (Matt. 3:5-6). Even Jesus exalted the greatness of John the Baptizer (Matt. 11:11). Examining the foregoing information, one can readily see how John could have become prideful over His wonderful accomplishments. However, John’s life was characterized by service, sacrifice, and humility. One simple, yet profound sentence elucidates the nature of John the Baptizer, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John. 3:30). John is referring to the growing popularity of Jesus while His own was waning, and that is just as it was supposed to be! How was John able to maintain such a magnanimous attitude?

John remained humble because He knew who He was. Religious leaders came to John asking, “Who are you?” (John. 1:20). John reminded His own disciples that He was not the Christ (John. 3:28). John fully embraced who he was – the one sent before, the friend of the bridegroom, the maker of highways, straightener of crooked places and the smoother of rough places (Isa. 40:3-4, John. 3:28-29). John was clear about who He was!

John remained humble because He understood His role. He realized His unique mission was God given. While John was faithful in all aspects of said mission, God had graciously given it to Him, so he could point people to Jesus. The last sentence of John 3:29 is extremely interesting, “...Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.” Contextually, as John saw Jesus’ work succeeding, he recognized the greatness of the occasion and found JOY

to the FULL! Imagine finding complete satisfaction in the successful work of another, when their success marked the end of your labors. Before leaving this point, please consider the work of our missionaries. When a missionary is successful they have worked themselves out of a job (at least in that locale). In any mission field the focus is to so establish the church that she might be self supporting. When this occurs the missionary (family) rejoices, yet realizes it is time to move on. The missionary has successfully and joyously worked himself out of a job. So it was for John the Baptizer!

John remained humble because He understood success. Too often preachers declare success when they are preaching for the largest congregation in town. Likewise, members declare success when they worship at the largest congregation in town. However, notice John's example of humble success. Amidst the disciples concern relative to declining numbers (John. 3:26), he explains that their concern was really reason for great joy. John wasn't worried about his number of followers, but whether people were following Jesus. The true measure of success is not determined solely by numerical count. Christian success is guaranteed when God is truly glorified by those who call upon Him (1 Cor. 6:20).

John remained humble because his days were fleeting. Surely John understood this from his motto, "He must increase, I must decrease." His days of service would soon end (Matt. 14:1-12), but John remained faithful and influential to the end.

This article has briefly noted the life and example of John the Baptizer. John was the faithful, God appointed forerunner of the Messiah. Understanding why John remained humble will help all Christians to do the same. Let us all remember that, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Let us all seek to have the attitude of John, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

CW



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PETER: FROM A PEBBLE TO A ROCK

Clay Bond

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, the first two people He called to be His disciples were brothers, Andrew and Simon, who were fisherman. When Simon came to see Jesus, Jesus immediately remarked that Simon should be called Cephas (Aramaic) or Peter (Greek) "which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:40-42). Not only was Peter among the first apostles called, he also appears first in all biblical lists of apostles (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). Some have concluded from the Biblical text that Peter was the spokesman for the twelve (Matt. 15:15; 18:21; 19:27; Mark 11:21; Luke 8:45; 12:41; John 6:68; 13:6-9, 36). Jesus made it clear to Peter that he would play an important role in unlocking the doors of the coming kingdom. Jesus said,

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

All of this comes to fruition in the book of Acts where Peter clearly emerges as a leader in the early church (Acts 1:13-22). It was Peter who explained that the events at Pentecost were a fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:14-42; Joel 2:28-32). It was Peter who first preached salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 8 & 10), and who was the primary spokesman of the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15).

However, at the outset Peter was an impetuous, hotheaded young buck with a lot of raw edges. Remember that when Jesus came walking on the water, it was only Peter who asked to join Jesus (Matt. 14:22-33). It was Peter who was overconfident in his own steadfastness as seen in his assertion to the Lord that "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). In fact, even after Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times, Peter continued, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. 26:35). On yet another occasion when Jesus explained to His disciples that He would have to go into Jerusalem and suffer many things, it was Peter

who received a rebuke for presuming to take Jesus aside for correction (Matt. 16:22-23)!

Yes, Peter, the rock, was notoriously impulsive with questions like “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?” (Matt. 18:21), and “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27). Before the crucifixion, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet teaching them one of the greatest lessons on selfless service, but in the midst of it Peter spoke boldly, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” It was Peter again who rushed to Jesus’ defense, cutting off a man’s ear in his zeal (John 18:10-11).

There were certain things Peter struggled with even after Jesus’ ascension and the establishment of the kingdom. In Galatians chapter two, Paul recounts having to confront Peter, the man who ushered the Gentiles into the kingdom, for prejudice against the Gentiles (Jas. 2:9; Acts 10:35)!

All of these rash statements, bold yet misguided actions, and this mistaken self-assurance serve to teach us a valuable lesson on spiritual growth. Through all of Peter’s experiences, we see a man in the process of maturing spiritually. The Lord used Peter’s failings and shortcomings to teach him how to walk closer with God. When you move from the gospel accounts into the book of Acts and then to Peter’s two epistles, you see a wonderful example of spiritual growth. You see a man transformed from a pebble into a solid rock.

Peter’s life gives us hope by revealing God’s plan for our own spiritual growth. While the Lord tested, corrected, and even rebuked Peter, Jesus’ gentle love changed an impulsive boy into a stalwart soldier. As the Psalmist declared, “Your gentleness has made me great” (Ps. 18:35). In Peter’s first epistle he teaches that without this kind of testing there would be no way for our faith to be refined, strengthened, and proved genuine (1 Pet. 1:6-9). Peter’s life shows us that each and every Christian has the potential to grow spiritually as we have been commanded to do (1 Pet. 2:1-3). Peter went from questioning, rebuking and even denying the Lord, to being a bulwark for God’s people. Each of us must be like Peter who willingly turned his life over to the Lord. If we will follow his example, we can rest assured that the Lord will do His part to transform us into His image (Rom. 8:29). Jesus did not just see what Peter was, He saw all that Peter could be, and the same is true for you and me!

CW

JOSHUA: THE COURAGEOUS LEADER

Bill Burk

Joshua, the son of Nun, is one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. God used him to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land as well as to aid them in the allotment of it. His abilities and strategies as a military leader have been studied and applied by military men ever since his day. The most important thing about Joshua is that he was God’s man and He was faithful. From his life and the book that bears his name, we learn some of the keys for courageous leadership.

A courageous leader obtains his fearlessness from God. Joshua chapter one is enthralling. The chapter opens with the Lord’s words to Joshua, “Moses My servant is dead” (Josh. 1:2). The Lord then explained to Joshua that he would finish what Moses began. Joshua would have to carry out the task that Moses failed to complete (cf. Num. 20:12). One can only imagine the fear and trepidation that might strike the heart in being given such a task. However, the Lord supplied Joshua with the necessary comfort. After reaffirming His word to give His people the Promised Land, he said to Joshua...

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.... Be strong and of good

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courage; do not be afraid or dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:5, 9)

The courageous leader is emboldened by the knowledge that, if He lives his life in compliance with God's will, the Lord will be with Him in all that He does (Heb. 13:5-6).

A courageous leader draws courage from the notion that he doesn't have to lead like someone else. Moses was a great and godly servant of Jehovah. He was unlike any other (Num. 12:3; Deut. 34:10-12). Moses possessed his own specific circumstances and skill set. Moses and Joshua, although both godly servants, were different men. Yet, God used them both to carry out His will in the leading of His people. All any leader should concern himself with is if he is doing what he can, in his own sphere of influence, to the best of his ability. All of us were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), yet we bring to the table our own unique personalities and traits (cf. Ps. 139:13-14). Joshua didn't have to be Moses, he only had to be himself. Such a truth relieves stress and removes the temptation of comparing ourselves with others (2 Cor. 10:12).

A courageous leader guides others bravely because he always knows where success is found. If one hundred people were polled and each asked to define what "success" means the answers would vary greatly. Godly leaders are concerned with how the Lord defines success. In Joshua's case, the Lord both defined and provided the means for successful leadership with the following instruction.

Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success (Josh. 1:6-8).

Successful, courageous leadership is founded upon the word of God and obedience to it. As long as a leader is faithful to the will of God success will naturally follow. Joshua was successful from the beginning of his era of leadership (Josh. 1:10) until the end of it (Josh. 24:15). Therefore, true prosperity followed him (Ps. 1:2-3). The

same holds true for all who lead today.

Joshua faced a daunting task in filling the shoes of Moses. He did it with great success and grace because He trusted in the promises of God, used his own particular gifts as a leader, and sought to pursue success as God defines it. Courageous leadership is needed today more than ever among God's people. May the Lord raise up more like Joshua.

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FOCAL POINT

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us see our way of life and hear our speech, it should cause them to pause. It should cause them to feel and know something is different or wrong. We should move with godly fear in our stance for righteousness and morality.

It was the preaching of righteousness that causes Noah to stand out. It was through his preaching, those who did not enter the Ark were condemned and drowned in the waters that covered the earth (Gen. 7:1-16). It was his preaching and his obedience to the word of God, which delivered him from the destructive floodwaters and wrath of God. It will be our preaching of the truth, obedience to the word of God, the covering of the blood of Christ that will deliver us as well. Shouldn't we do the will of God, even if the world around us may detest it and call it old fashion? The answer is yes, friends. Let us be faithful, even in the face of opposition and abide in the grace and mercy of God.

In closing, Noah was such a blessing and such a hero, that the flood was named after him in Isaiah 54:9. God saw him in high esteem; he counted him among the righteous with Job and Daniel in Ezekiel 14:14 and 20. Noah stood out in a wicked world so much, even Jesus referred to him when talking to the religious leaders (Matt. 24:37-38). He was great in the eyes of God because of his obedience, God made a covenant with the earth in the form of a rainbow (Gen. 9:1-7). This man, our hero, was such a blessing that he is in the lineage of Christ (Luke 3:36). Finally, God gave him what we all desire, a long fruitful life (950 years) in a wicked world (Gen. 9:29).

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