



**LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES**

SAWET

The Testimony of
FAITHFUL WITNESSES

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The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary as a signal for silence
- II. Singing
- III. The Apostles' Creed
- IV. Prayer, closing with the Lord's Prayer in concert
- V. Singing
- VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
- VII. Responsive reading of the lesson text by school
- VIII. The Decalogue

The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while the classes are being arranged
- II. Class study of the lesson
- III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
- IV. Closing bell — silence

The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

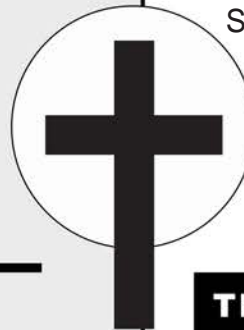
Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Lionel Merritt

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.



The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

Don't Forget to join us on Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

The blessings from the teachings of the virtual AME Connectional Church School have been immeasurable. We convene the Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- www.iamame.org- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

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Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher



HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 1-7

| | |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (A Leader Who Sets an Example) |
| Tuesday | Acts 9:36-42 (A Leader Who Cares) |
| Wednesday | Acts 18:24-28 (Leaders Who Build Other Leaders) |
| Thursday | Nehemiah 2:1-8 (A Leader Who Listens) |
| Friday | Nehemiah 4:1-6 (A Leader Who Intercedes) |
| Saturday | John 13:3-17 (Jesus, the Pattern for Leaders) |
| Sunday | Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (A Leader Who Inspires) |

Deborah, a Leader in a National Emergency

Lesson Scripture: Judges 4:1-24

Focus Scripture: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

Key Verses: At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. Judges 4:4-5

JUDGES 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (NRSV UE)

Judges 4:4-10

4 At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel.

5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.

6 She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Position yourself at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun.

7 I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand.'"

8 Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

9 And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand warriors went up behind him, and Deborah went up with him.

14

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Ta-

JUDGES 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (KJV)

Judges 4:4-10

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

14

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount

bor with ten thousand warriors following him.

21-22

21 But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died.

22 Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went into her tent, and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

21-22

21 Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

Key Terms

- **Witness** – A person who can give a firsthand account relating to a person or event from what they saw, heard, or felt.
- **Syncretism** – Mixing elements of Christianity with aspects of traditional African spiritualism.
- **Angola** – A nation of 40 million people on the west coast of Africa.

form our spiritual growth and daily Christian walk. Like the witnesses in scripture, we, too, can give effective Christian witness.

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Questions about the existence of God, his character, ability to love, care for, and protect his people have engaged religion from ancient times. As in the courts of law, throughout the ages, God chose to call character witnesses to testify to his character and his ability to provide and protect his people. What we will see in these lessons

Introduction

In this series, the key-word is *witness*. Keep before you who is a witness, the purpose a witness serves, and how this concept of witnessing can in-

form our spiritual growth and daily Christian walk. Like the witnesses in scripture, we, too, can give effective Christian witness. Questions about the existence of God, his character, ability to love, care for, and protect his people have engaged religion from ancient times. As in the courts of law, throughout the ages, God chose to call character witnesses to testify to his character and his ability to provide and protect his people. What we will see in these lessons is the persons through whom this witness of God’s character and deep love for his people was revealed. As you study these lessons, please act as the jury in

the case of God vs. Israel. Assess how well the players in these historical dramas of God's interactions with his people validated what scripture claims about God.

Telling the Bible Story

Keeping with the theme of witnesses, note that different witnesses are called to testify to varying points of law or ev-

idence. In this first lesson about Deborah's role as a judge and warrior, mark how the text makes clear what God was doing and why God wanted a witness at this time. Judges 3:1-2 spells it out clearly. God wanted to teach Israel discipline and the art of warfare. But Deborah is a woman! She was not supposed to be a war-

rior. Still, isn't that just like God: to step outside ordinary patterns to do the extraordinary?

But the story of Deborah as a judge and war general also highlights an uncomfortable truth about God. Yes, God is a protector. He shows up when his people are in trouble or under threat from enemies.

But he is also a God of justice, who does not tolerate rebellion and unfaithfulness. So, God judges his people and allows them to be captured or defeated when they turn their backs on him. Judges 3:7-12, therefore, shows a cyclical pattern of sin, punishment, crying out, and rescue by God's judges.

It is tempting to focus too heavily on Deb-

orah's exploits as a war general and ignore her daily duties as a prophetess. But to do this is to miss a key point of the narrative. To appreciate her unusual achievement in war, we must understand her closeness to the ultimate general, Yahweh, who strategized the victory attributed to her.

Deborah's closeness to God jumps out at us in

Judges 4:4-5, which highlights her usual activities as a judge of Israel. She needed the wisdom of God to guide the people in the events of daily living. In this respect, she was a female version of the revered prophet and judge, Moses.

The killing of Sisera raises some complex

To appreciate her unusual achievement in war, we must understand her closeness to the ultimate general, Yahweh, who strategized the victory attributed to her.

issues about the ways of God: how God often steps outside tradition and religious order to accomplish desired outcomes. Follow closely the events leading to Sisera's murder. See verse 4:14, Deborah's role as an encourager. At verse 4:15, note that it is God himself who set up the victory for Israel. The panic God initiated signaled to Sisera that defeat was imminent, causing him to flee on foot. Then in comes Jael. What she did in attacking Sisera was culturally and religiously offensive. A host should not violate a guest's rights or comfort. Yet this seemed acceptable to God for Israel to achieve the victory God had initiated. So, a perplexing question arises. When is a person permitted to break with customs and religious norms to achieve a desired outcome with God?

Also note the need for cooperation and coordination among people in achieving godly outcomes. Yes, this narrative focuses on Deborah. However, Barak and Jael played crucial roles. The role of Jael is particularly fascinating. She was not

an Israelite. She was not a warrior. And she did not use a military weapon to kill Sisera. These facts teach us to be open to God's unusual ways of working.

Sankofa

When we think of Deborah, we see a woman of great wisdom and faith who God used for national liberation. The same can be said for Nzinga Mbande (1583-

1663) from the nation known today as Angola. Nzinga was born into royalty. This allowed her to be trained in skills that were normally reserved for men: diplomacy, languages, and statecraft. These skills proved useful when she represented the king (her brother) in negotiations about liberation from the Portu-

guese colonizers. And upon her brother's death, Queen Nzinga stepped into leadership of the nation. She led a strong, enduring campaign of resistance against Portuguese domination, was a tough opponent against the Atlantic slave trade, and skillfully used diplomacy and military tactics to push for the liberation and sov-



Also note the need for cooperation and coordination among people in achieving godly outcomes.

ereignty of her people.

Case Study


The religious life of Nzinga Mbande provides an interesting case study which challenges us to examine some of the key assumptions we make about who Jehovah God blesses and uses. In our discussion about Deborah, we regard her as an Israelite – a member of God’s chosen people. But that description pushes the envelope outside the historical range of truth. At Deborah’s time, there was no kingdom of Judah, nor a Jewish ethnic-religious identity.

Nzinga Mbande’s life struck a similar profile. As a Mbundu queen, in her early life, Nzinga followed the traditional religion of her ancestors, embracing reverence for ancestral spirits, traditional community rituals, and native deities.

Around age 40, Nzinga became a Roman Catholic and took a Christian name (Ana de Sousa). After that, Nzinga seems to practice an oscillating form of pragmatic

syncretism. She was Christian or traditionalist as the situation demanded.

In noting the amazing success of women like Nzinga Mbande, how can we maintain that our God only blesses and works with people who check all our religious boxes? Too often we aim to fit God and people into neat boxes. Consider the degree to which your church community practices this.



Too often we aim to fit God and people into neat boxes. Consider the degree to which your church community practices this.

Life Application

Above, we noted that the people God used to bring deliverance to nations did not fit neatly in traditional or religious boxes. How about putting to the test your acceptance of this position?

Consider recent state or national elections, your preferred candidate(s), and why they were your preference. Then, consider the election results, especially where an opposing candidate won. Think about if God had a hand in the outcome, and if he did, why would he have allowed the opposing candidate to win? Do the same for the selection of church officials. If you do this honestly,

you will see the mental boxes that you expect people to check for God's favor.

Deborah and Nzinga, as women, acted outside their cultural roles. Jael used an unusual weapon to kill Sisera. This tells us that God's solutions do not have to include the usual elements and people. Be open to the uncommon moves of God when planning church or personal projects.

Questions

1. In your opinion, why did Israel go through cycles of rebellion and deliverance?

2. Are such cycles inevitable even today in the lives of believers, and why?

3. Can you identify any religious boxes in your mind that frame how you assess people?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" (*AMECH #52*)

Closing Prayer: Dear God, help me open my heart to all that you are doing around me, irrespective of who you are doing it through. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 8-14

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | Ezekiel 18:5-9 (Leading a Life of Righteousness) |
| Tuesday | Genesis 16:1, 4-16 (Trusting in a God Who Sees) |
| Wednesday | Proverbs 6:20-22 (Do Not Forsake Your Mother's Teaching) |
| Thursday | Psalms 113 (Praising God for Home and Family) |
| Friday | Isaiah 66:9-13 (A Mother Who Comforts Her Child) |
| Saturday | Luke 1:46-56 (Rejoicing in God's Deliverance) |
| Sunday | 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25 (Seeking God's Blessing) |

Hannah, a Godly Mother

Lesson Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11, 18-19; 3:1-18

Focus Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25b (starting at “and they brought the child to Eli”)

Key Verse: In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the Lord.” 1 Samuel 1:20

1 SAMUEL 1:9-20, 25B (NRSV UE)

1 Samuel 1:9-20

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord.

10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

11 She made this vow: “O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.”

12 As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk.

14 So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.”

15 But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.”

17 Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.”

1 SAMUEL 1:9-20, 25B (KJV)

1 Samuel 1:9-20

9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord.

10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.

11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way,

18 And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went her way and ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

19 They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her.

20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

25b

25b ...and (they) brought the child to Eli.

and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her.

20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

25b

25b ...and (they) brought the child to Eli.

Key Terms

- **Apostasy** – The deliberate turning away from God (faith in and allegiance to).
- **Prerogative** – God's right to do whatever ensures his will is done.
- **Stigma** – A mark of shame or disgrace attached to a person or situation.

Introduction

In the first lesson, we saw Deborah bearing witness that God is a deliverer. The Lord rescues his people even when they are facing crushing odds. But that is God working at the national level. In this lesson, we see a witness of God working at the personal level: a barren woman

whose prayers God answered.

By a single revelation or event, God addresses both individual and national needs.

And although this happened at a personal level, it had great national importance. This is an amazing feature of the way God intervenes in human affairs. By a single revelation or event, God addresses both individual and national needs.

Telling the Bible Story

To grasp the intensity of Hannah's lament and pleading to God, you must feel the social and religious weight attached to barrenness in Hannah's time. It was seen as a curse that women dreaded. How would God reverse or cure this distressing curse in Hannah's life?

Also note that Hannah's vow (1 Sam. 1:11) was not a random vow of desperation. It resembled the Nazirite vow: a special vow of consecration designed to set a person apart for holiness and God's use. In a sense, this was puzzling. Hannah, desperate for a son, offered to give him back to God. This underscores the view that God chose Hannah rather than Hannah choosing God.

We see parallels of Hannah's barrenness with other cases of barrenness in the scriptures. However, the one that strikes deepest is the comparison with Elizabeth in Luke 1. Both women were desperate and had their husbands' support. But what really stands out is that their children (Samuel and John the Baptist) – God's response to their prayers – became mighty prophets of God. Both shook Israel on the national level.

Note also in the narrative some prideful, selfish human behavior, and the time God took to respond to Hannah. Poor, barren Hannah endured cruel ridicule from a per-

son who should have been kind. And this horror went on "year by year," often distressing Hannah. So, what is the witness here? In our period of grief and struggle, people close to us don't always respond with kindness. And, when we pray to God for relief, God does not always work in microwave-like time.

Sankofa

Many women in some African societies today still face the stigma of infertility that Hannah experienced. In Ghana, among the Akan communities, children are regarded as essential to the family's social status, necessary for the continuation of the family line, and for the building of wealth. Childless women are seen as persons who failed in fulfilling their social role to society. Child-

less women are likened in local proverbs to "landless persons," indicating a woman of diminished social value.

A similar outlook is held in Nigeria among some communities (Amakiri and Lopen). We hope that with time, as societies be-

But what really stands out is that their children (Samuel and John the Baptist) – God's response to their prayers – became mighty prophets of God. Both shook Israel on the national level.

come more educated about the complexities of infertility, more enlightened Christian attitudes will develop, with fewer Peninnahs in society.

Case Study

In this study of the witness of Hannah's life, it is tempting to gloss over the fact that the Lord had closed Hannah's womb (1 Sam. 1:5). It is normal to rush to the "shouting points" in a text, as these are the keys to inspire faith. But in our rush to shout, we must not miss the signpost pointing to God's character and ways of working. Over the centuries, theologians and commentators wrestled with this point of God closing Hannah's womb. We note two of those opinions here.

John Calvin was clear that the closing of Hannah's womb was an act of divine prerogative, not punishment. For people who attribute all good outcomes to God and all bad results to the devil, this view may be hard to grasp. But it fits well with the overall view that Hannah was part of a divine plan by God to provide a faithful

prophet for Israel at a time when the nation was losing its way. Hannah was a respondent, not an initiator.

The Matthew Henry view is similar. It sees Hannah's infertility as a divine device fashioned to drive Hannah to earnest prayer and deepen her humility. It was part of a setup to get Hannah ready and willing to participate in God's grand

design. Thankfully, Hannah passed the testing, playing her role well. However, the glory goes where it always belongs – to God.

Life Application

Apart from God and Hannah, the story has two other key players: Elkanah and Peninnah. Naturally, everyone wants to identify with Hannah. It is so wonderful to have a witness of answered prayers. Still,

we cannot forget Elkanah and Peninnah because their roles bring the matter right home to us. As you reflect on the text, ask yourself in what ways you act like those two individuals. Are you the type of person who, like Peninnah, looks down on others who don't seem to have the

But it fits well with the overall view that Hannah was part of a divine plan by God to provide a faithful prophet for Israel at a time when the nation was losing its way.

blessings that you currently enjoy? Your source of haughty pride doesn't have to be children. It could be a career, an academic degree, or a position in ministry. Do people look at your parading of yourself and feel pain? That is the Peninnah mindset: a haughty, self-righteous posturing.

Alternatively, are you of the Elkanan mindset: empathizing with people in their struggles, and doing what you can to encourage and assist them? Please, during a time of private meditation, check yourself against both models. Based on what you see in your thinking and behavior, commit to doing better. Prayfully, ask God to lead you away from the unchristian Peninnah attitude to more of the Elkanan disposition. People in despair need our encouragement and support, not our taunting. Elkanah's attitude pleases God, so the Holy Spirit will

help you to develop it.

Questions

1. Why was Peninnah's behavior included in the text?
2. Any thoughts on why God took years to respond to Hannah?
3. Was Hannah's vow a desperate bargain with God, and why did she make it?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus (*AMECH* #440)

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, I know that I can bring my struggles to you for answers that are right for me. Please calm my anxiety during the waiting period. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 15-21

| | |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | Romans 1:8-12 (Encouraging Each Other's Faith) |
| Tuesday | 1 Corinthians 15:30-34 (Choose Your Friends Wisely) |
| Wednesday | Proverbs 18:19-24 (A Friend Closer Than a Brother) |
| Thursday | Ruth 1:11-18 (Friends When All Is Lost) |
| Friday | John 15:9-17 (The Greatest Love) |
| Saturday | 1 Samuel 20:16-17, 32-34, 42 (Fierce and Faithful Friends) |
| Sunday | 2 Samuel 1:17, 19-27 (A Death in the Family) |

Jonathan and David, a Noble Friendship

Lesson Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; 20:1-42; 2 Samuel 1:17-27; 21:7

Focus Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 Samuel 1:26-27; 21:7

Key Verse: Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" 1 Samuel 20:42

1 SAMUEL 18:1-4; 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 SAMUEL 1:26-27; 21:7 (NRSV UE)

1 Samuel 18:1-4

1 When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul.

4 Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing and gave it to David and his armor and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

20:16-17

16 Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord seek out the enemies of David."

17 Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own life.

32-34

32 Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"

33 But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him, so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death.

34 Jonathan sprang up from the table in fierce anger and ate no food on the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David and because his father had disgraced him.

42

42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in

1 SAMUEL 18:1-4; 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 SAMUEL 1:26-27; 21:7 (KJV)

1 Samuel 18:1-4

1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

20:16-17

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the Lord even require it at the hand of David's enemies.

17 And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

32-34

32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?

33 And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.

34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.

42

42 And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace,

peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" He got up and left, and Jonathan went into the city.

2 Samuel 1:26-27

26 "Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

27 How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

21:7

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul.

forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

2 Samuel 1:26-27

26 I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

27 How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

21:7

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

Key Terms

- **No Holds Barred** – Without restrictions or conditions; total freedom in speaking.
- **Posterity** – Future generations.
- **Tanzania** – A country of about 70 million people in Eastern Africa.

Introduction

In lessons 1 and 2, we saw the faithfulness of God expressed through two individuals (Deborah and Hannah) to achieve great outcomes. The witness now turns to an expression of friendship between two friends. Throughout the centuries, this relationship has drawn serious atten-

tion from theologians, Bible commentators, and even critics and haters of the scriptures and religion.

On the positive side, believers see this friendship as a model of commitment and loyalty that God enables between friends who are devoted to each other's well-being. Here, there is no limit on what one friend would do to help the other. But certain Bible scholars see the relationship between David and Jonathan as a case of hidden homosexuality in the scriptures. And maybe this is understandable given how the friendship is described in the Hebrew dialect using the word *hesed*, which has no accurate one-word English match. It is that quality that some translations loosely call lovingkindness,

mercy, faithfulness, and covenant loyalty. The relationship between Ruth and Naomi reflected this *hesed* quality (Ruth 1:8, 3:10).

Follow as it is highlighted in the text.

Telling the Bible Story

As noted above, the *hesed* feature is clear at three points in the text: 1 Samuel 20:8, 20:14, and 20:15. The bonds of friendship were so strong that Jonathan shifted loyalties from his natural father to David. Some commentators read this shift in loyalties as springing from Jonathan's conviction that God had moved the kingly anointing from King Saul to David. The text does not explicitly state this, but passages like 1 Samuel 18:1-4 shout it.

For the soul of the relationship, focus on 1 Samuel chapter 20. There you see two friends in a no holds barred conversation expressing their fears, loyalties, and commitment to protect each other, whatever happens. This is the face of real, loyal, genuine friendship.

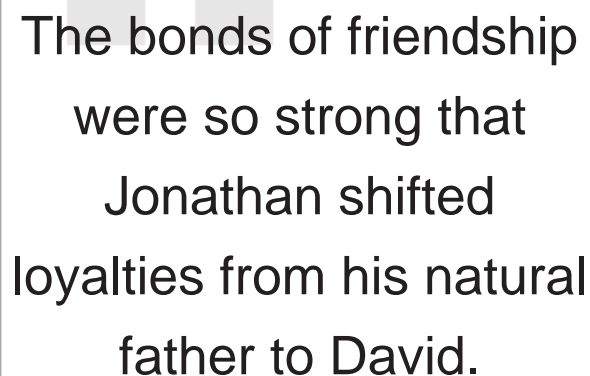
Also noted in that text are the many references to God and the Lord. This is crucial to understanding the narrative. David and Jonathan were convinced that what they were doing had God's approval and was in line with what God was doing.

Another great insight comes as we ponder who Jonathan was: the natural heir to the throne of Israel. King Saul hinted at this in 1 Samuel 20:31. David was a

threat to Jonathan's chances of getting and maintaining a kingdom, Saul's legacy. But Jonathan was letting go of all of that to be in a covenant relationship with the man God had approved as the next king. How noble was that?

1 Samuel 20:42 put everything in clear perspective. What was

this friendship between David and Jonathan all about; what really were they trying to achieve? It was not only for their immediate satisfaction. It was for the benefit of posterity. They were setting the future of Israel the way they understood God wanted that future to look.



The bonds of friendship were so strong that Jonathan shifted loyalties from his natural father to David.

Sankofa

The deep friendship between David and Jonathan helped to shape the history of Israel. A similar (political) friendship between Julius Nyerere and Rashidi Kawawa (1950's to 1980's) likewise shaped the history of modern Tanzania. This friendship of mutual support and respect shaped Tanzania's independence, and the economic and social policies it followed thereafter.

Nyerere was the leader – the ideological driving force – while Kawawa was the deputy, bringing the ideas to life and protecting Nyerere. When Nyerere stepped away from being prime minister in 1962 to devote his time to party matters, Kawawa stepped up to the position until

Nyerere was ready to move back into the top spot. From all reports, the two men lived to encourage and support each other for the good of their beloved Tanzania. Their model of cooperation in leadership was an inspiration to many other leaders inside and outside of Africa. The way 1 Samuel 20 portrays Jonathan's loyalty to David is the way the historical records

of Tanzania portray Kawawa's loyalty to Nyerere. Black leaders can work together for a common good.

Case Study

We saw above the value of strong friendships in setting the course of nations. But what about setting economic freedom for individuals? The establishment and phenomenal growth of FUBU – the ur-

ban clothing company – shows what strong personal friendships can achieve.

The four original FUBU founders – Daymond John, J. Alexander Martin, Keith Perrin, and Carlton Brown – were friends who grew up together in Hollis, New York. Their common bond was hip-hop culture, with a focus on

clothing that reflected the culture. Like David and Jonathan, they shared a deep respect for each other, with an enduring trust. In 1992, FUBU was launched as a symbol of the trust, respect, and cooperation among four friends. The rest, as they say, is history.

As a people, we must lament that such

The deep friendship between David and Jonathan helped to shape the history of Israel.

a story is so rare. We need to see them more often.

Life Application

Because of a few bad life experiences – some lived, many imagined – some people take pride in having no friends, or only one or two. Usually, this is a self-protective measure. But it is not one we encourage. A person without friends robs themselves of one of the joys of being human. Of course, interactions with other people can bring seasons of distress and pain. Yet, from wholesome friendships spring crucial emotional support, better mental health, and opportunities to relish the joys of sharing. Friendships satisfy that deep human craving for belonging.

So, the challenge for this lesson is to examine your level of friendship with others. How many people outside your immediate family circle can you call friends, who would also call you a friend? To whom

can you turn for emotional support, honest advice, and counsel in life's trying moments? David had Jonathan, the Lone Ranger had Tonto, the FUBU boys had each other. Who do you have? The answer to these questions will explain the quality of life you now live.

Questions

1. Why did Jonathan sacrifice his chance to be king for a friendship with David?
2. Apart from Ruth and Naomi, do you know of another such friendship?
3. Is it necessary to be vulnerable in a close friendship?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (AMECH #325)

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, help me to know my friends so we can deal effectively with the enemies. And Lord, help me to heal from the trauma of past hurtful relationships. Amen.



So, the challenge for this lesson is to examine your level of friendship with others.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**June 22-28**

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | Isaiah 61:4-9 (The Lord Loves Justice) |
| Tuesday | Luke 15:1-7 (A Shepherd Who Seeks the Lost) |
| Wednesday | Amos 5:16-20 (The Lord's Day Is Coming) |
| Thursday | Amos 5:21-27 (Let Justice Roll Down Like Water) |
| Friday | John 10:1-9 (Good and Safe Pastures) |
| Saturday | John 10:10-18 (Jesus Is the Good Shepherd) |
| Sunday | Amos 7:10-15 (Chosen by God) |

DECALOGUE

Superintendent—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise:
And hosts of sins are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

Superintendent—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not kill.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not steal.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

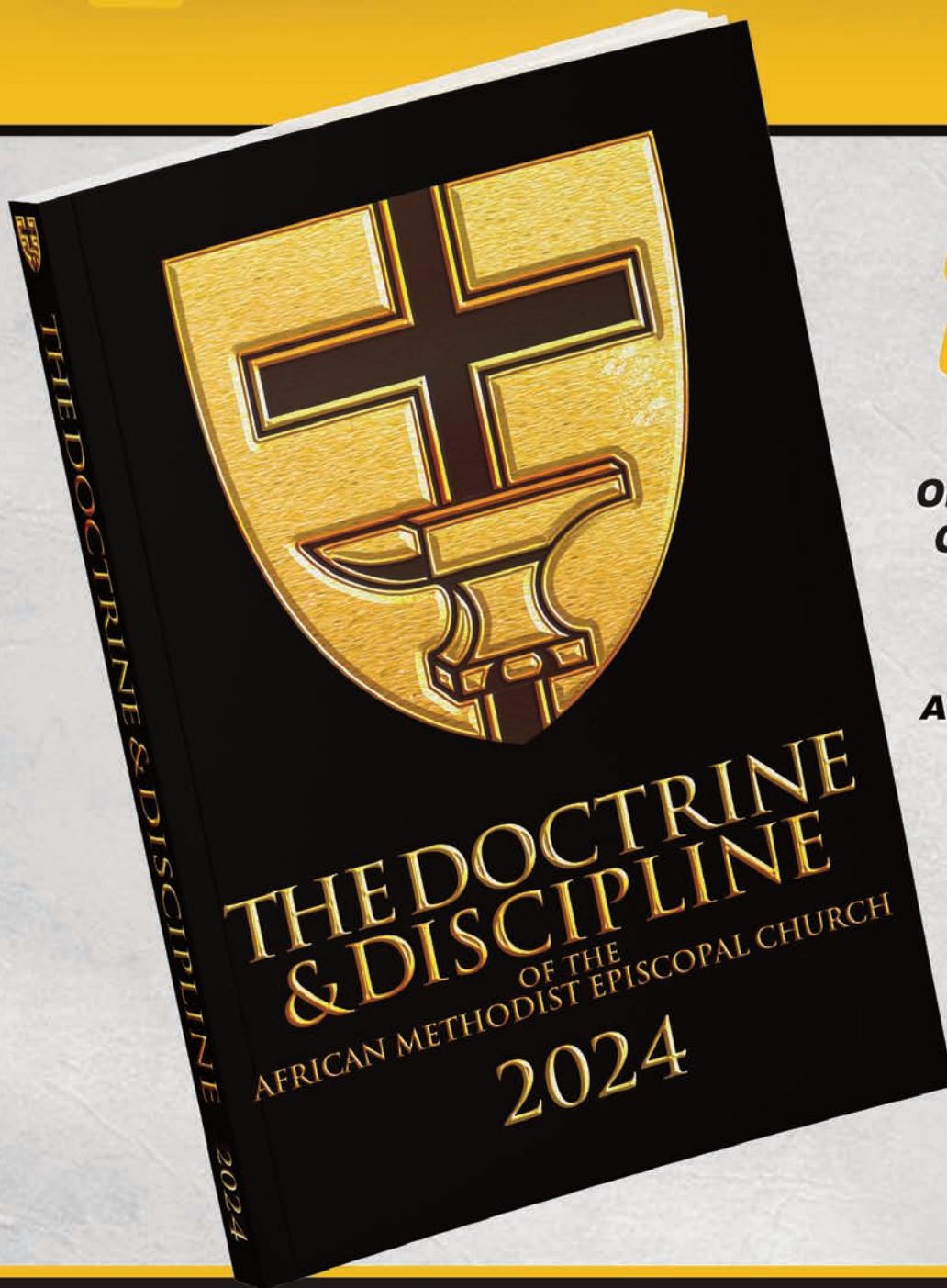
School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!

Superintendent—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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