

Life-Sharing Lesson 1 Striving For Excellence-Excelling in Giving, “How Our Giving Affects Us” 2 Kings 4:8-17

1. When did you give away something that you felt really made a difference for the person that you gave it to? How did you feel about it after you gave?

Once we won a \$100 food gift certificate at a carnival. We gave it to a lady who was really struggling with her bills. We felt that God sent it directly to us in order to help her out. We felt thankful.

2. Quite often on the tv, you are invited to sow a seed into someone’s ministry with the guarantee that God will double your gift if you send it to them? How do you feel when you hear this?

I’m amazed that people will have the audacity to say you must sow into their ministry if you’re going to be blessed. They don’t even know who you are. Sowing into the life of someone at Glenville who has a need for something, will do the same as sowing into a ministry halfway across the country. None of the people on tv want to let you know how much it costs for them to be on tv to ask you for your gift. It is fine to be a blessing to other ministries if you are being helped by them, but they cannot guarantee you that God is going to reward you double and more for your gift.

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV) ⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

3. The verse above is a command. Why do you think God requires of us that we give?

Giving is the means God has established to help us from becoming selfish and greedy. God requires that we are to be like Him. God is the most generous of all givers to both the just and unjust alike.

4. What happens to us when we refuse to become givers?

We stop our spiritual growth in the Lord because of our disobedience. We drift from the Lord. We become more self-centered and less compassionate to the needs of others. We begin criticizing the church saying all the church wants and talks about is money? We become unfruitful and unproductive in the life of the kingdom. We miss out on the best that God has for us to experience.

2 Kings 4:8-17 (NIV)

⁸ One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹ She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

¹¹ One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. ¹² He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. ¹³ Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'" She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

¹⁴ "What can be done for her?" Elisha asked. Gehazi said, "Well, she has no son and her husband is old."

¹⁵ Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway.

¹⁶ "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms." "No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" ¹⁷ But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

5. What qualities do you see in this woman from Shunem?

She was a compassionate woman. She was a woman who wanted to help the servants of God. She was generous with no strings attached. She was content with what she had. She was humble. She got joy out of trying to do things for others. She did what she did without ulterior motives.

6. What is her motivation for using her resources to build a room she was not going to use?

Her goal was to help people to get to know God. She saw God in Elisha and she was determined to help him in anyway that she could. She understood that in helping Elisha, she was helping all those who would be helped by Elisha. She saw her role as a kind of partnership in his ministry. She wanted to use here resources to be a blessing to those seeking to faithfully serve God.

7. Why would we expect people to make a sacrifice for parts of the Excelling in Giving Campaign that they might not use? For example the person without a car helping with the parking lot, the person who has no kids helping with the Nursery & Youth Worship Rooms, or the person who never uses the doors on that side helping with the doors.

The Campaign is part of a mission that is bigger than all of us. In the Body of Christ, we are always inheriting something from the saints that went before us. Each part of our building is there, because someone else made it happen. The ministry of the church can't be divided into neat little packets, where we only support areas where we are benefited. We are the body of Christ which means we are all interconnected. I may not use an area, but my children will. I may not use a ministry area, but the guest or family member I bring to the church will. We need all that we have in order to present a total outreach for Christ. Our love for each other should also motivate us to make sure everyone's needs are being met. A true giver says "let's make it happen", not "what's in this for me."

8. Why is Elisha determined to do something for this woman from Shunem?

Elisha is touched by the woman's generosity. He knows that he has not done anything extra special for this woman and her husband that they have gone through this added expense to make him comfortable. The room was large enough for him and Gehazi to rest there.

9. How is this woman surprised by God because of her generosity?

Determined to return her favors, Elisha discussed with Gehazi after she left his room what he might do for her. Gehazi observed that she had no son and probably never would have one since her husband was old. Elisha called her back and told her that she would have a son in about a year. This miraculous birth would be God's gift to her for her goodness to His servant. The woman's response to this announcement does not mean that she did not want a son; every Israelite woman did. To be childless was regarded in Israel as a great personal tragedy. Her reply indicates that she felt having a son was impossible. She urged Elisha not to build up her hopes only to disappoint her later. The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

10. What is something you would like from God, that money cannot make happen, but God can open the way to make it a reality?

I would like for God to help us all be willing to make our homes a more joyous place for the people we live with, and help move us beyond our selfishness of seeking only our happiness. It's a tragedy when we realize to late in life the joy that we have passed by that could have been ours if only we had done things differently in our relationships.

Luke 21:1-4 (NIV)

¹ As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury.

² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

11. Why did Jesus commend the widow who gave so little?

Her status as a widow may also have been revealed through her dress, or Jesus may have known this by his divine knowledge. As a widow, she had few resources for earning money and may have been without financial support. Jesus watched as she gave her gift, coins that amounted to no more than a fraction of a penny. Two lepta were the smallest coins in use, valued at about one-eighth of a penny or one-hundredth of the average daily wage. Yet these were put in the freewill-offering box, meaning that this was not a required tax but a gift. The widow was not to embarrassed to stand before others and have them snicker at the amount she had put in following the large contributions those who had gone before her had put in. Her gift was truly a gift for the Lord to appreciate.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

BEYOND CONVENIENCE

This widow gave all she had to live on, in contrast to the way most people handle their money. Those who consider giving a certain percentage of their income to be a great accomplishment resemble those who gave out of their wealth. Here in [21:1-2](#), Jesus was admiring generous and sacrificial giving. Believers should consider increasing their giving—whether of money, time, or talents—to a point beyond convenience, comfort, or safety.

12. Was the amount the woman from Shunem's gave a gift or a sacrifice? Why do you think so? What do we learn from God about how God responded to the Shunemite woman?

I think the amount the widow gave was a gift because she and her husband were quite well off. But the willingness of her to open her home for Elisha to drop in at anytime was a sacrifice. God does not always ask for a huge portion of our income to be given away before the Lord sends blessings into our lives. Even people who have a lot of wealth, can be poor in other areas. When they are willing to use their wealth, God may fill in some of the gaps in their lives that they cannot fill on their own. For Elisha to have told her, God would bless her with twice as much money as she and her husband paid for the house, would not have been much of a blessing to her. She was already content and happy with what she had considering it to be more than enough wealth to live on.

13. What does the phrase “not equal giving, but equal sacrifice” mean to you.

A sacrifice is really between God and the person. We can't always understand how much it means for a person to give something up in order to further the kingdom of God. A true sacrifice for one person may seem insignificant to another. We can't all do equal giving because of so many differences in circumstances. We can all make an equal sacrifice knowing we truly are going without something meaningful to us for the kingdom of God.

Lesson 2 LifeSharing & Pioneers The Power Of Faith- This Mountain Can Be Moved Numbers 13:26-14:9

1. What's the earliest problem you can remember running into that you could not overcome?

My earliest problem was Robert Wells in the 2nd grade. He was the only boy in the class I didn't think I could beat in a fight so I hoped we never would have to find out.

2. What do you think are the purposes of mountains standing in our way in our spiritual lives?

Mountains provide us with the opportunity to rely upon God. We are given the choice of increasing our faith in God, or relying on our own skill and ingenuity to come up with a solution to a problem. Mountains are growing opportunities to discover the hand of God in our lives in a new way.

Numbers 13:26-33 (NIV)

²⁶ They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.

²⁷ They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.

²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there.

²⁹ The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan."

³⁰ Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.

³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Numbers 14:1-4 (NIV)

¹ That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.

² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!

³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

3. What is the real mountain that the people of God are facing in this passage?

Their real mountain is the fear that God is unable to do what He said He would do. They have sized up the enemy, and found the enemy to be greater than what God had first estimated the enemy to be. It is as though, God was totally caught off guard by the size of the people in the promised land. The mountain is being caused by them redefining the power that God had available to use on their behalf.

4. A couple of months ago, these same people saw the Red Sea parted by God. Why do you think they are ready to turn around and go back to Egypt?

Miracles do not change people's ways of thinking. They believe in a miracle when it happens, and then tend to minimize the miracle after a period of time goes by. People are also more likely to remember the past as being much better than it really was, especially when there is a mountain now facing them. They have already forgotten, if they go back the same way, the Sea would have to depart for them again. When we forget how big a deliverance God has given to us, we minimize it and start longing for the good ole days once again. The good ole days were never as good as any of us remember them to be. It's just that once we overcame some of the mountains, we forgot how big of a problem they really had been. Fear and lack of faith can cause us to remember things that never really existed.

5. What causes our faith to go weak in the face of mountains that come up in our lives and in our church?

There is the fear of “what if” it does not work out in the way we hope it works out. When we walk with God, rarely do things go the way we plan them to go because we forget that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and God’s ways are not always our ways.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There are many experiences we would not have chosen to go through on our own, but God used them to bring us to a point in our relationship to Him. America teaches us that in order to win, we must be winners. God has no problem leading us into failure so that we might put our strength in Him and quit boasting of our own accomplishments. In the passage below, the Lord led the Israelites to defeat twice in a row, before choosing to give them victory on their third try.

Judges 20:17-25 (NIV)

¹⁷ Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand swordsmen, all of them fighting men.

¹⁸ The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God. They said, "Who of us shall go first to fight against the Benjamites?" The LORD replied, "Judah shall go first."

¹⁹ The next morning the Israelites got up and pitched camp near Gibeah.

²⁰ The men of Israel went out to fight the Benjamites and took up battle positions against them at Gibeah.

²¹ The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.

²² But the men of Israel encouraged one another and again took up their positions where they had stationed themselves the first day.

²³ The Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and they inquired of the LORD. They said, "Shall we go up again to battle against the Benjamites, our brothers?" The LORD answered, "Go up against them."

²⁴ Then the Israelites drew near to Benjamin the second day.

²⁵ This time, when the Benjamites came out from Gibeah to oppose them, they cut down another eighteen thousand Israelites, all of them armed with swords.

We are always interested in the results, but God is more interested in the process that God wants to do in our lives. We try to mandate to God in prayer a particular outcome about the mountains in front of us, but God has something else in mind. We are also afraid of the changes we must make in order to overcome some of the mountains. We especially hate lifestyle changes that require us to downsize.

6. One of the mountains working against our Striving For Excellence-Excelling in Giving Campaign from a human perspective is the state of the economy. How much do you think our faith in God is to be shaped by the economic conditions around us?

God is actually the one who determines what an economy is going to be for a nation because God is the one who exalts and humbles nations. He often does it through their economic and military power. But regardless of the economy, it is God who blesses and takes away from his people even in the midst of a downturn. God looks at our individual actions even in the midst of an economy. Look at the passage from Haggai 1:5-11 below.

⁵ Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

⁷ This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. ⁹ "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

God also makes it clear in Deuteronomy that He determines the economic power of a nation.

Numbers 14:26-38 (NIV) ²⁶ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron:

²⁷ "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸ So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: ²⁹ In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

³⁰ Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

³¹ As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected.

³² But you--your bodies will fall in this desert.

³³ Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.

³⁴ For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.'

³⁵ I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die."

³⁶ So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it--

³⁷ these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD.

³⁸ Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

7. What was the cost the people of Israel paid for choosing to not exercise their faith?

Their hesitation caused them to lose out on the blessing that God had in store for them. They received a 40 year sentence of wandering in the desert. They lost 10 of their warriors who were sent into the land. They made life much more difficult for their children than God had planned it to be. They didn't allow God to do for them, all that God truly wanted to do.

8. What is the possible price we could pay as a church if we refuse to exercise our faith with this campaign?

We will not get some things done that need to be done. We will miss reaching some people for Christ that God intended for us to reach. We will miss out on

some of the blessings the Lord has in store for us as a church. We will make it harder the next time we choose to step out in faith for God.

9. People may think, "if we don't do this now, we can always do it tomorrow", do you think this is always true when it comes to moving mountains from our lives?

No. Some mountains are there only for a season just as some opportunities are only there for a season. Tomorrow is not promised to any of us. There may be pieces working together in our favor today, that will not be with us tomorrow. Delayed obedience to the word of God is still a form of disobedience.

Numbers 14:39-45 (NIV)

³⁹ When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly.

⁴⁰ Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised."

⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed!

⁴² Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, ⁴³ for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword."

⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp.

⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

10. The Israelites chose to exercise their faith in God and move the mountain, after God had said for them not to go. What is wrong with this way of thinking?

God's promises are given to us at specific times for specific reasons. When we rebel, we often must settle for a lot less than what God had in mind. God didn't get rid of the rebelling children of Israel, but they did not receive what he had, because they chose to wait when God said go. God had clearly said for them not

to go, but relying on an earlier period in time, they insisted they could still go into the land. Their second act of going was not prompted by faith, but by a desire to force God to change the punishment that had been decreed. They were certain God would come to their aid just because of who they were. A special relationship to God is still not a ticket to sin. God is not going to always allow us forever to make up our minds.

11. What's the right way to handle moving your mountain out of your life?

The right way to handle a mountain is to recognize that God is sovereign even over this mountain. This mountain did not catch God by surprise. God will give you strength to either go over the mountain, go around the mountain, go through the mountain, or keep you on this side of the mountain. Recognize that every mountain is a growth opportunity, and that you are not the first and only person to face this particular mountain. Recognize that you can't dictate to God, how this particular mountain must be taken care of. Recognize that you can be victorious in God even in the midst of defeat.

12. It took 40 years to move the mountain of entering into the promised land. How long must we wait for some mountains to be removed from our lives?

Some mountains last a lifetime. Some mountains extend to the next generation. Waiting does not mean sitting idly by and doing nothing. It means trusting in God and watching God work, even while the mountain is still there.

Lesson 3 Life-Sharing and Pioneers The Power Of Faith- Faith vs The Darkside

1 Samuel 28:3-20

Lay Pastors & Teachers Back Ground Information & Terms

Various Forms As stated in the article *Divination*, there were forms of ascertaining the divine will and future events that were taken in good sense and, therefore, not forbidden. Two other classes of divination are mentioned in Scripture—those forbidden and those without special sanction or reprobation. We group these together for greater convenience in the study of the subject:

Astrologers. Called by the Hebrews “dividers of the heavens,” they are mentioned with “those who prophesy by the stars” (Isaiah 47:13). They apparently “cut up the heavens” into certain sections in order to trace the course of them, making an effort to foretell the future. They were a part of the court of Nebuchadnezzar II (Daniel 2:2, marg.) and were characteristic of such ancient courts as that of Babylon and Chaldea. Astrology was widely practiced among heathen nations but was accounted illegitimate among the Hebrews, being considered inconsistent with the worship of Jehovah and classified (as in Isaiah 47:12-13) with occultism and demon-inspired paganism.

Belomancy. This is divination by arrows. It is said of the king of Babylon that “he shakes the arrows” (Ezekiel 21:21), more strictly, the quiver with the arrows. On this practice itself Jerome writes: “He consults the oracle according to the custom of his nation, putting his arrows into a quiver, and mixing them together, with the names of individuals inscribed or stamped upon them, to see whose arrow will come out, and which state shall be first attacked.” In this case Jerusalem was the ill-fated object of this divination, as we learn from the next verse, “Into his right hand came the divination ‘Jerusalem.’” The arrow lot of the ancient Greeks was similar to this; also that of the ancient Arabs. Another kind of arrow lot was by shooting. Three suitors of an Eastern princess decided their claims by each shooting an arrow inscribed with his own name. The arrow taking the longest flight indicated the name of the successful competitor. This sort of divination is

not to be confounded with the arrow shot by Jonathan, which was an understood sign; nor the shooting of the arrows by Joash, king of Israel, at the command of the prophet, in which we have a symbolical prophecy

. *The Chaldeans.* Among others consulted by the king of Babylon respecting his dream were the Chaldeans. Among an Aramaic people the priests in a stricter sense were called Chaldeans, from the fact of the ancient supremacy of the Chaldean people in Babylonia. These Chaldeans sought their greatest glory in the study of astrology and also possessed the knowledge of divination from omens, of expounding of dreams and prodigies, and of skillfully casting horoscopes (Keil, *Com.*, on Daniel 2:2). See also the articles Chaldean Astrologers; Magi.

Charmers (Heb. *lāḥash*, to “whisper”), a word used to express *serpent charming* (Psalm 58:5; Jeremiah 8:17; Ecclesiastes 10:11). In the first of these passages *lāḥash* occurs in connection with the Heb. word *heber*, meaning a “confederacy” (i.e., with the spirits of the other world), which is rendered in the same manner and has a similar meaning. It is certain that from time immemorial some people of the East have exercised remarkable power over even the most poisonous of serpents (see Serpent Charming). The “charmer” mentioned in the KJV of Deuteronomy 18:11 is one who pronounced a ban, probably referring to the custom of binding or banning by magical knots, or one who casts a spell (so NIV). Another reference to character is found in Isaiah 19:3 (Heb. *’ittîm*, “mutterers”).

Divination, Diviners. Generally speaking, “divination differs from prophecy in that the one is a human device while the other is a divine gift—the one an unwarranted prying into the future by means of magical arts, superstitious incantations, or natural signs, arbitrarily interpreted; the other a partially disclosed insight into the future by the supernatural aid of Him who sees the end from the beginning” (*Imperial Bible Dictionary*, s.v.). In Scripture the diviners were *false* prophets, and divination was allied to witchcraft and idolatry (Deuteronomy 18:10; Joshua 13:32; 1 Samuel 15:23; Jeremiah 27:9; etc.), and energized by demon power (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21). See also Divination in the general listing.

Dreams, Divination by. The Hebrews, along with other Easterners, greatly regarded dreams and applied for their interpretation to those who undertook to explain them. Such diviners were called *oneirocritics*, and the art itself *oneiromancy*. Dreams were looked upon from the earliest antiquity as premonitions from their idol gods to future events. Opposed to this was the command of Jehovah forbidding His people from observing dreams and from consulting explainers of them. Those who pretended to have prophetic dreams and to foretell future events, even though what they foretold came to pass, if they had any tendency to promote idolatry, were put to death (Deuteronomy 13:1-4). In opposition to the word of God no prophets were to be received, although they rained signs and wonders—not even an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:8).

Enchantment. The practice of conjurers and exorcists in employing incantations or magic, ritual procedures in enlisting the aid of evil spirits to effect some design or in purportedly setting free the demonized from their torments (cf. Daniel 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27). It appears as the heathen counterpart of prayer. See Divination; Enchantment; Magic, Magicians: Sorcery.

Exorcist (Gk. *'exorkistēs*, “one who exacts an oath”). One who employs a formula of conjuration for expelling demons (Acts 19:13). The use of the term *exorcists* in this passage, as the designation of a well-known class of persons to which the individuals mentioned belonged, confirms what we know from other sources as to the common practice of exorcism among the Jews. Among all the references to exorcism, as practiced by the Jews, in the NT (Matthew 12:27; Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49-50) we find only one instance that affords any clues as to the means employed (Acts 19:13). In this passage it is said that “some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” See Demon; Exorcism.

Familiar Spirits, Consulter with. See Familiar Spirit in the general listing.
Idolomancy. Consulting with images, literally *teraphim*. These household gods of the Semitic nations are often mentioned in the OT from the time of

Laban (Genesis 31:19, see marg.). They were wooden images (1 Samuel 19:13, 16) consulted as “idols,” from which the excited worshipers fancied that they received oracular responses (Ezekiel 21:21; Zechariah 10:2).

Magician. A general term including all those who worked wonders beyond the ordinary powers of man. See head of this article. *Medium*. See Magic, Magicians: Necromancer: Necromancer; Magic, Magicians: Necromancer: Spiritist; and also the articles Familiar Spirit; Necromancer; and Spiritist in the general listing.

Necromancer (Heb. *dōrēsh ’el hammēthîm*, “one who inquires of the dead”). One who pretends to be able by incantations to call up the dead to consult them respecting things unknown to the living, often called in Scripture “mediums and spiritists.” A few, such as Cicero (*Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.16.37), scoffed at the idea, but the practice has held its ground in pagan and even Christian lands until the present. The Eastern magi were especially famed for necromantic skill. The necromancer was supposed to be the possessor of a conjuring spirit, i.e., of a spirit with which the dead were conjured up for the purpose of making inquiry concerning the future (see Leviticus 19:31). Such a person was the medium of Endor, to whose incantations the ghost of Samuel responded (see Saul). It is evident from her exclamation that she was surprised at this appearance, and that she was not able to conjure up departed spirits or persons who had died. The spirit was supposed to be granted to the necromancer as a servant or attendant, and to be bound to him by the ties or obligations of witchcraft. To the spirits of the departed thus evoked the necromancer lent a low, soft, almost whispering voice (Isaiah 8:19; cf. 19:3), as seemed natural for such beings. It is not certain that these mutterings and whisperings were produced by ventriloquism, although this may be the case, as ventriloquism was one of the arts of ancient jugglers. “In most parts of Greece necromancy was practiced by priests or consecrated persons in the temples: in Thessaly it was the profession of a distinct class of persons called Psychagogoi (evokers of spirits).” Necromancy was forbidden to the Israelites as a heathen superstition (Leviticus 19:31), and those who disobeyed were threatened with death (Leviticus 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10-

14). Still, it found its way among them, especially when idolaters occupied the throne (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19; 29:4; cf. 19:3, where the Egyptian enchantments are mentioned). See also Spiritists, this entry; and the articles Familiar Spirit; Necromancer in the general listing.

Prognosticators (Heb. *môdî'îm lehōdāshîm*, “making known as to the months”). These are mentioned in Isaiah 47:13, where the prophet enumerates the astrological superstitions of the Chaldeans, who foretold the future by observing the phases of the moon. See Astrology.

Rabdomancy (Gk. *hrabdos*, a “staff,” and *manteia*, “divination”). Divination by rods. Cyril of Alexandria calls this an invention of the Chaldeans and describes it as consisting in this, that two rods were held upright and then allowed to fall while forms of incantation were being uttered. The oracle was inferred by the way in which the rods fell, whether forward or backward, to the right or to the left. This custom is referred to in Hosea 4:12: “And their diviner’s wand informs them,” and is evidence of the tendency of Israel to idolatry. *Soothsayer, Soothsaying*. The soothsayer (diviner) was the pagan counterpart of the prophet, prognosticating future events, or professing to do so (Joshua 13:22) by various arts. Actually, diviners were energized by evil powers, as the prophet of the Lord was under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Sorcery (Heb. from *kāshap*, to “whisper”; Gk. *mageia*, Acts 8:11; *pharmakeia*, “medication”). A sorcerer was one who professed to tell the lot of others, to have power with evil spirits (Isaiah 47:9, 12; Daniel 2:2), and was severely denounced (Malachi 3:5; Revelation 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15). This art was also practiced in connection with pharmacy, the mixing of drugs and medical compounds. See Sorcery.

Spiritist (Heb. *yidd^e’ōnî*, a “knowing” one). A term denoting a person pretending to be wise but usually employed in connection with mediums. A spiritist might employ any of the magical arts (Leviticus 19:31; 20:27; 1 Samuel 28:3, 9), and the Israelites were forbidden to consult any such person (Deuteronomy 18:11).

Splanchnomancy. The term refers to divination by inspection of entrails. Splanchnomancy was practiced in Rome by the Etrurian soothsayers and frequently referred to by Greek and Latin writers. Cicero (*De divinatione* 2.15) mentions the importance of the *liver* in divination of this kind. One example of this is contained in Scripture (Ezekiel 21:21), where it is said that the king of Babylon “looks at the liver,” when deciding future course. Liver-divination was especially widespread in Assyria-Babylonia, and thousands of clay tablets dealing with omens and incantations have been dug up. *Stargazer* (Heb. *ḥōzeh*, “beholder,” and *kôkāb*, “star”). One who attempts to foretell what will happen by observing the stars (Isaiah 47:13). See Astrology, above. *Witch, Witchcraft*. Generally the KJV rendering of the same original words translated “sorcery,” “sorcerer”. *Witchcraft* (functioning as a medium, NIV) is mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:11 as being forbidden to the Israelites. *Wizard*. The KJV term *wizard* is replaced in the NASB and NIV by *spiritist*, and also the article Spiritist).

1. The movie Star Wars, made famous the words “the Force” and “The Darkside.” The Force represented Good and the Darkside represented Evil. Do you think there is a power of evil that people are able to tap into to get results in life? For example with people claiming to be able contact others from the dead.

I believe that evil is not only real, but that it is also personified in that it seeks to trap people into a darkside of spirituality that will not let them go. Satan is willing to use spirituality to draw people away from God. Demon possession is real, and along with demonic possessions comes demonic powers.

Leviticus 19:31 (NIV)

³¹ "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 20:6 (NIV)

⁶ "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.

Leviticus 20:27 (NIV)

²⁷ "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads."

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

Divination

Divination, the art of obtaining secret knowledge, especially of the future, is a pagan counterpart of prophecy. Careful comparison of Scripture will reveal that inspirational divination is by demonic power, whereas genuine prophecy is by the Spirit of God. The biblical attitude toward divination is distinctly hostile (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The prophet of Jehovah is contrasted with diviners of all sorts and is set forth as the only authorized medium of supernatural revelation. Baalam (Numbers 22-24) was a pagan diviner but rose to the status of a bona-fide prophet of the Lord, although he reverted to paganism. In Isaiah 3:2; Jeremiah 29:8; Ezekiel 22:28 the diviner is classified with the prophet, but this does not mean condonement of divination. It points rather to the apostasy and pagan contamination of the era. The worship of the true God is basically at variance with divination of every sort. Seeking knowledge of the future from any source other than the God of Israel was an insult to His holy Being and the revelation of Himself and His purpose for men.

2. The Bible makes it clear that there is a power that can be generated from the Darkside of spirituality. God has a strong prohibition against it. Why do you think God forbids our participation in the activities listed in the Scriptures above

The law contains distinct prohibitions against all magical arts. Besides several passages condemning them, in one place there is a specification that is so full that it seems evident that its object is to include every kind of magical art. The Israelites are commanded not to learn the abominations of the peoples of the Promised Land. Then follows this prohibition: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer" (Deuteronomy 18:10). It is added that these phenomena of demon-inspired paganism are abominations, and that because of them the Canaanites were driven out from before the Israelites. All Forms of turning to magic,

witchcraft or mediums is a direct rejection of looking to God for the situations in our lives. When we follow the dark side of spirituality, it will always lead us away from trusting in God and toward the destruction of people.

Scripture Accounts Of Magic, Mediums, Spiritists

The household idols or “teraphim” were consulted by the Israelites for oracular answers (see Judges 18:5-6; Zechariah 10:2). The only account of divining by teraphim is in the record of Nebuchadnezzar’s advance against Jerusalem (Ezekiel 21:19-22). In Genesis 44:5, referring to the cup found in Benjamin’s sack, we read: “Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and which he indeed uses for divination?” (see Cup, no. 4). It is certainly not to be inferred that Joseph actually adopted this superstitious practice. The intention of the statement may simply have been to represent the goblet as a sacred vessel, and Joseph as acquainted with its common divinatory use. In the histories of Joseph and Moses the magicians are spoken of as a class. When Pharaoh’s officers were troubled by their dreams, being in prison, they were at a loss for an interpreter. Before Joseph explained the dreams he disclaimed the power of interpreting save by divine aid, saying, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please” (Genesis 40:8).

In like manner, when Pharaoh had his two dreams, we find that he had recourse to those who professed to interpret dreams. Joseph, being sent for on the report of the chief of the cupbearers, was told by Pharaoh that he had heard that he could interpret a dream. From the expectations of the Egyptians and Joseph’s disavowals, we see that the interpretation of dreams was a branch of the knowledge to which the ancient Egyptian magicians pretended. The Bible narrative of the events immediately preceding the Exodus introduces the magicians. When the rod of Aaron was changed into a serpent, it is said that Pharaoh called his magicians, and they also “did the same with their secret arts” (Exodus 7:11). The same is said of their imitation of the first and second plagues (Exodus 7:22; 8:7). But when they attempted to imitate Moses in the plague of the gnats, they were unsuccessful, for it is recorded that “the magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not” (Exodus 8:18). Whether the magicians really did what they appeared to do, or only performed a clever trick, has been a question of much dispute. Some contend that they did produce the same sort of miracle as that wrought through Moses, and that this was through demoniacal influence. It would seem the writer’s intention to

intimate that the Egyptian magicians considered Moses to be one of their own profession—what he did, that they claimed to be able to do also—he worked by the same means and only exceeded them in degree. And this was unquestionably the opinion of the king himself. That they could not produce gnats is not conclusive proof against their having acted through supernatural agency. It is quite evident from Scripture that satanic and demonic power, although great, is definitely limited and can go only so far. They admitted that this plague was from Jehovah, and the next plague (boils) attacked them and caused them embarrassment and perplexity

. Balaam (see Numbers 22:5-41; Joshua 13:22) furnishes us another case of a man accustomed to using incantations; and it is evident that Balak believed, in common with the whole ancient world, in the power and operation of the curses, anathemas, and incantations pronounced by priests, soothsayers, and so on. Saul attempted to obtain a knowledge of the future in ungodly ways and commanded his servants to seek for a woman who was a medium—the mistress of a conjuring spirit with which the dead were conjured up for the purpose of making inquiry concerning the future (1 Samuel 28:7-14; see Magic, Magicians: Necromancy, below).

The supernatural terror running throughout the account cannot, however, be proved to be due to this art; for it has always been held by sober critics that the appearing of Samuel was permitted for the purpose of declaring the doom of Saul, and not that it was caused by the medium's incantations. She is no more than a bystander after the first; she sees Samuel, and that is all. The prophets, through their condemnation of them, tell us that magical practices prevailed among the Hebrews in the later days of the two kingdoms. Isaiah (Isaiah 2:6) says that the people were "soothsayers like the Philistines," understood by Delitzsch (*Com.*, ad loc.) to mean "cloud-gatherers," or "storm-raisers."

In another place (Isaiah 8:19) he reproves the people for consulting "the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter"; whereas in Isaiah 47:12-13 the magic of Babylon is characterized by the prominence given to astrology. Micah (Micah 3:5-7) refers to the prevalence of divination among those who were such pretended prophets as the opponents of Jeremiah, not avowed prophets of idols as Ahab's seem to have been. Jeremiah was constantly opposed by false prophets who pretended to speak in the name of the Lord, saying that they had dreamed, but they told false visions and practiced various magical arts (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:25-32; 27:9-10). From Ezekiel (Ezekiel 8:7-12) we learn that fetishism was among the idolatries that the Hebrews, in the latter days of the

kingdom of Judah, had adopted from their neighbors. The passage in 13:18 is thought by some to refer to the making of amulets; whereas others believe that it is figurative of hiding the truth. Daniel, when taken captive, was instructed in the learning of the Chaldeans and placed among the wise men of Babylon (Daniel 1:4-6), by whom we are to understand the *magi*, for the term is used as including magicians, conjurers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans, the last being apparently the most important class (Daniel 2:2, 4-5, 10; cf. 1:20).

As in other cases the true prophet was put to the test with the magicians, and he succeeded where they utterly failed. After the captivity it is probable that the Jews gradually abandoned the practice of magic. Zechariah speaks indeed of the deceit of teraphim and diviners (Zechariah 10:2), and foretells a time when the very names of idols should be forgotten and false prophets should have virtually ceased (Zechariah 13:1-4), yet in neither case does it seem certain that he is alluding to the usages of his own day. In the Apocrypha we find indications that in the later centuries preceding the Christian era magic was no longer practiced by educated Jews. In the NT we read little of magic.

Philip the deacon found in Samaria Simon, a famous magician, known as *Simon Magus*, who, while having great power with the people, is not said to have been able to work wonders. At Paphos, Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, was struck blind for a time at the word of Paul (Acts 13:6-12); while at Ephesus, Jewish believers abandoned their practice of the magical arts. We have also the remarkable case of Paul casting out a “spirit of divination” from a slave girl “who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling” (Acts 16:16-18). “Our examination of the various notices of magic in the Bible gives us this general result: They do not, as far as we can understand, once state positively that any but illusive results were produced by magical rites. They therefore afford no evidence that man can gain supernatural powers to use at his will.”

3. King Saul, when he was striving to do right, ordered all the mediums and spiritists out of the land or else face death. Yet when he could not get a word from the Lord, he decided to go and seek his future from one of the mediums that was left in the land. Look at the following passage. In 1 Samuel 3:3-20

1 Samuel 28:3-20 (NIV)

³ Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.

⁴ The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. ⁵ When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.

⁶ He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

⁷ Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.

⁸ So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." ⁹ But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"

¹⁰ Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this."

¹¹ Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said.

¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"

¹³ The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground."

¹⁴ "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

¹⁵ Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

¹⁶ Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy?"

¹⁷ The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors--to David.

¹⁸ Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today.

¹⁹ The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines."

²⁰ Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and night.

What are some of the serious mistakes that Saul Makes in this passage?

1. He let fear take over his life when he compared the Philistine army to his own.

2. He refused to continue to wait on the Lord after giving the Lord a certain time period to respond.
3. He made the decision to contact a medium when he knew it was wrong to do it.
4. He actually went to the medium and sought her advice instead of putting her to death as the law commanded. He swore by the Lord, not to carry out the Lord's command.
5. He put his trust in the dead (Samuel) , rather than keeping his home in the Lord.
6. He forgot that God was observing everything that He was doing.

4. Do you think people have some of the same dark powers today to contact the dead or to enlist Satan's power to know the future?

Satan's power is as real today as it was in the time of Saul. We are foolish to think that séances, voodoo and witchcraft have no power in them from the dark side. By opening ourselves to these influences, we may be inviting the demonic world into our spirits. Even in the apostles we find demonic power to know the future in Acts & In Acts 8 with Simon The Sorcerer and in Acts 16:19 with the girl possesses by demons.

The first incident in Acts 8 involved a sorcerer named *Simon*. Evidently, Simon had quite a following in the region and was using his sorcery to draw crowds of his own (he had *amazed all the people of Samaria . . . for a long time with his magic*). Simon's magic was not for entertainment or to trick people. He was a charlatan whose goal was to get money. Later, there was a legendary figure called Simon Magus who may have been this Simon. Justin Martyr, who was a Samaritan Christian, said Simon lived in Samaria and later moved to Rome. In Samaria, Antiochus Epiphanes built a temple to Zeus on Mount Gerazim, so there was pagan worship in Samaria. Later a sect of Gnostic Christians claimed Simon as a founder.

Simon's "magic" was the practice of his *sorcery*. In the days of the early church, sorcerers and magicians were numerous and influential. They worked wonders, performed healings and exorcisms, and practiced astrology. The "wonders" included magic tricks, but the sorcerers utilized the power of Satan or

other evil spirits ([Matthew 24:24](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:9](#)). Simon had done so many wonders that some even thought that he was *the divine power known as the Great Power* (in other words, the Messiah); however, his powers did not come from God (see [8:18-24](#)). Evidently, Simon's ego played a large part in promoting his popularity, as he *boasted that he was someone great*.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

Acts 16:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

¹⁷ This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."

¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.

Fortune-telling was common in Greek and Roman culture. People used many superstitious methods for trying to see the future—from interpreting omens in nature to communicating with the spirits of the dead. This young slave girl had an evil spirit, and she made her masters rich by interpreting signs and by fortune-telling. *Her masters* were exploiting her unfortunate condition for personal gain.

[16:17](#) This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."^{NIV} What the slave girl said was true, although the source of her knowledge was a demon. Paul and his companions indeed were *servants of the Most High God* and, in fact, were telling others *the way to be saved*. Why did a demon announce the truth about Paul, and why did this annoy Paul? If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the gospel with demon-related activities, not to mention the prophecy-for-profit approach that this girl's owners had taken. Such association would damage the message of Christ.

[16:18](#) She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.^{NIV} Evidently, the young girl followed them every day as they made their way from Lydia's home to the place of prayer down by the river (or wherever else they went). *Finally Paul became so troubled* that he directly rebuked *the spirit* that was abusing the girl. Using the powerful *name of Jesus Christ*, Paul commanded the demon to depart. And at

that moment the spirit left her (compare this with similar successes over demonic powers recorded in [8:9-24](#); [19:13-20](#)).

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

5. Saul thought seeing Samuel would be a good thing. Do you think Saul was worse off or better off with the message he received from Saul and why?

Saul was worse off seeing Samuel because he was in a complete state of rebellion and disobedience in this whole encounter. Saul lost his kingdom because he would not wait on the Lord and be obedient. He had a habit of almost doing the right thing by only partially obeying the Lord. He had nowhere to turn after this episode with Samuel. Samuel did not have one good encouraging word to say to Saul.

6. Many people not only look to mediums and witches, they also look to their horoscopes as a guide for their future or their lives. What could be a problem with astrology for the believer?

Astrology asserts that the stars and the planets have a control and influence over our lives that the Bible says should belong to God. Astrology allows us to justify a sinful behavior or attitude simply because everybody born in this month has a problem with anger, or rage, or jealousy or whatever. In Christ we become new creations. Jesus is to be the determiner of our attitudes and actions rather than parts of creation. No part of creation is given the ability to rule over our lives. When we bow down to any part of creation, we have made that part an idol. All idol worship is forbidden.

Astrology The ancient art of divination by consulting the planets and stars, which until Kepler's time was inextricably bound up with astronomy. The

practice consists in consulting the heavenly bodies, particularly the signs of the zodiac in relation to observed human events, and making deductions and predictions on this basis. This largely unscientific practice is nevertheless an important divinatory practice still in vogue in modern Western civilization —as is evidenced by horoscopes printed regularly in metropolitan newspapers, the existence of popular astrology magazines having large circulation, and astrological services available for those who refuse to make important decisions without first consulting the stars (see Astrologers, Divination, Diviners under Magic

Isaiah 47:13-14 (NIV)

¹³ All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.

¹⁴ Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by.

7. Astrology has been around for a long time, and God's people have often drifted into it. Why would it's powers be considered from the Dark Side of spirituality?

It's powers would have to be considered from the Dark Side, because nowhere in the Bible does it suggests that its power comes from God. Astrology was a competing force in the people's lives in their allegiance to God. They were putting their trust in the astrologers rather than listening to the prophets of God. In the passage in Isaiah above, you can see they are in competition with Isaiah the prophet.

8. Why do you think mediums, spiritists, palm readers, and horoscope advisors are all a temptation for God's people?

Our biggest problem is that we want to know the future. A knowledge of the future before it happens can give a person a huge advantage in life when it comes to wealth. We also want to be able to make what we consider a good and

wise choice. Knowing the future allows us to become mini-gods that we can put our trust in.

9. How should a Christian handle the question “What’s your sign” without coming off as “rude” or “holier than thou” with the person asking the question?

We should take this question as an invitation to make known our faith. My sign is that of Jesus Christ. Every since he came into my life, I have been trying to allow him to control my future.

10. Why is Faith at odds with the DarkSide and with supersition?

Faith says our trust should be in God and God alone. As long as we are abiding in Christ, the darkside and superstition cannot control our lives. We do not need the darkside to give us an advantage in life. Faith says God is in control of my future, and I trust God to do good with my future even when I don’t understand it.

12. In the context of the powers of the Dark Side, what does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord?

It means, no weapon that is formed against me by Satan is going to prosper while I am under the authority of Jesus Christ. I do not have to fear any power because I am in the hands of God.

Lesson 4 Life-Sharing & Pioneers The Power Of Faith---The Odds Are Against You 2 Kings 6:8-25

1. When have you been an underdog in life, but managed to somehow come out on top? How did you feel when it happened?

We were playing a team called Tufts University and everyone expected them to destroy us on the football field. They took a number of foolish gambles in the game because of their over confidence and quickly fell behind 21 to 0. We held on to win the the game. It was a sensational feeling for us and was the biggest victory we had all year.

2. Do you think our Excellence In Giving Campaign places our church in the roll of an underdog or not? Why or Why not?

We are an underdog in the sense of people having to make a conscious decision to voluntarily give up something in order to make it happen. Very few people in our church have large sums of money stashed away just waiting to be used. We are not an underdog in view of the size of the God we serve and the things we want to get accomplished. This is campaign is not as large as the first campaign that we attempted which means even though it is a step of faith, it is certainly within our reach if the majority of the congregation chooses to participate.

2 Kings 6:8-22 (NIV)

⁸ Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

⁹ The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there."

¹⁰ So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

¹³ "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan."

3. Aram was a very powerful nation that was threatening the people of God. Aram's army should have been able to easily defeat the Israelites, except the Israelite army kept escaping thanks to Elisha. How can we be encouraged by what God does in this passage of Scripture?

This passage of Scripture demonstrates that God knows all the plans and strategies of our enemies including that of Satan, and God is able to warn us, protect us, shield us, and make us victorious in every circumstance that comes into our lives. God is a great provider, and nothing catches God by surprise.

¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

4. Last week we looked at the power of the "Darkside." Here is a spiritual force that is very real and very powerful, yet it could not be detected by the human eye. Dothan was not a large city. What encouragement can we receive from this passage when we are trying to figure out the odds of our success?

We can see the odds that are against us, but we never really know what the odds are that are on our side. Sometimes God has things available to us that we can't see at the moment, but they are still there. Ours is a walk of faith. God may allow us to be in a situation that from the outside looks hopeless, but God has a plan to make things happen. 22 years ago, our presbytery fully expected Glenville to close and fold as a church. God had other plans in mind. The odds were not in Glenville's favor, but that's only because we could see the odds visible to our own natural eyes. Nobody saw the power of the Spirit that was about to begin to sweep over us as a church.

Saul almost robbed David of defeating Goliath simply because the odds were against David. The disciples almost missed the feeding of the 5000 because the odds of them feeding the people were not in their favor. The Bible is full of stories in which the odds were not in God's people favor. Odds are meaningless when we are intent on being obedient and following the leading of the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

5. Are angelic beings still around to help us in times of crisis or need today, or do you think it ended with biblical times?

There is nothing to support the idea that angels ceased to be available to help us after the first century. Just as demons are alive and well today, so are their counterparts. We find the following verse in Hebrews to let us know angels are among us today.

Hebrews 13:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

We also find that many of the plagues that hit the earth in the end times in the book of revelation are put into place by the action of the angels. They are preaching, warning, and making known what is about to happen.

Revelation 14:6-10 (NIV)

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people.

⁷ He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

⁸ A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

⁹ A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand,

¹⁰ he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full

strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.

¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

¹⁹ Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

²⁰ After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

6. The blindness they are struck with is not a case of their eyesight, but of their ability to see clearly where they were. The Aramean army left an undefended small town, and followed Elisha into a heavily fortified capital city in which they were surrounded.

What encouragement can we receive from this passage concerning the power of God in dealing with those who want to destroy us?

No enemy is too difficult for God's power to overcome. God is able to do things to people that they never would have thought possible. God is able to confuse people's minds so that they can neither see clearly nor think clearly. We cannot limit the way in which God may choose to demonstrate His power in a given situation. The Arameans helped out in their own defeat by marching behind Elisha to the capital city.

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" ²² "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master."

²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

7. The king had been praying for a great defeat of his enemy. Why do you think God did not allow him to kill his enemy's army?

I think this was a victory that belonged totally to the power of God and God wanted to display his grace and mercy to the Arameans. This was not the time for the King of Israel to boast of his victory over the Aramean army. God has plans for the Aramean army in the future. The God of the Old Testament is often portrayed as being vengeful and angry at people, but that's not who God truly is. God is a God of compassion and would much rather see people repent than destroyed. King Joram who was over Israel at that time was not following God any closer than the Arameans were. God is giving King Joram a chance to be obedient to the word of the Lord as spoken through Elisha. King Joram is going to need the Lord's help in the future and here is his chance to bow to the will of God.

8. Why do you think God sometimes gives us only a partial victory in the odds that we have to overcome?

God's goal is to draw us closer to himself by getting us to yield more and more of our lives to Him through Jesus Christ. There are times when a total victory may lead us to pride and arrogance on our part. Success has probably destroyed as many Christians as failure has. We can become so determined on reaching a goal that we miss the process and the spiritual growth that God wants us to go through on the way to the goal. Sometimes God never intends for us to reach the goal itself, because God's goal was for a change to take place in our lives rather than the goal we had set up for ourselves.

9. What do you think the King of Israel was hoping would happen if he followed Elisha's advice in feeding and letting the soldiers go free?

The king of Israel was probably hoping that the King Of Aram would no longer send his soldiers to attack Israel or that if the King of Aram did attack, God would come through with a quick a smashing defeat of the King of Aram's army. Unfortunately for the King of Israel, it did not happen that way.

2 Kings 6:24-25 (NIV)

²⁴ Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. ²⁵ There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

10. Instead of being grateful for the lives of his soldiers being spared, the King of Aram attacked the city from which they had been freed in put in place a siege that led to the starvation of many people in the city of Samaria. Why didn't God surround the city with an angelic host as God had done at Dothan to deliver His people."

God is not obligated to do the same thing in every situation. Sometimes God allows the natural course of events to take place in a situation. In times of war there are famines and death. God's purpose at Dothan was different that God's purpose at Samaria. The people in Samaria had not returned to the Lord from the evil practices of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel who had attempted to wipe out all the prophets of the Lord from that land. Queen Jezebel is still alive and has an influence on her son the king, King Joram. God was allowing them to experience the natural consequences of their rejection of His plans and purpose for their lives.

11. Why is that our sacrifices for the Lord do not turn out in the way we had hoped they would?

1) Sometimes we offer sacrifices to the Lord with wrong motives. We are insisting that God do this for us, because we did that. 2) Sometimes we offer sacrifices as excuses for our disobedient to God in other areas. We are attempting to bribe God to overlook our sin. 3) Sometimes we offer sacrifices with noble motives, but we want to happen is not what the will of God is for a given situation. We may want the Lord to do something, but God will not take away someone's free will to make it happen. 4) Sometimes what we call a sacrifice, God knows that it is not truly a sacrifice on our part. 5) Sometimes God simply says no to the outcome of our sacrifice, because His love for us intends to do something far greater for us than we had hoped for.

12. When the odds are against us, what should be our position as believers?

We should be determined to stand for God no matter what. We know that God is able to do what we need, but even if God does not do it than we accept the consequences of our actions. See the testimonies of the saints in the passages below.

Daniel 3:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Esther 4:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Acts 21:10-14 (NIV)

¹⁰ After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³ Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

13. What's the only means by which our faith can truly grow as a church?

By putting our trust in God to being obedient to God to accomplish tasks that we cannot do on our own. The odds truly have to be against us.