

## *Women & More*

### ***If You; Then You***

Lesson 8: **October 23, 2014**—*integrity*

In Jeremiah 7:5-7 the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah concerning the people of Judah: ***“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.”*** They were already in default!

Jeremiah 17:4 (God’s warning to Israel and us) ***“Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever.”*** And God will be the One to know if it is through our own fault that such and such happened, and reveal that to us, as He did in this verse in Jeremiah. And we are not to try and assess the ‘fault’ fact in someone else’s difficulties.

It matters very much to God that we act with integrity; that we obey Him; that we walk circumspectly; that we make ‘right’ choices and ‘right’ decisions. Someone has said that our decisions determine our destiny. And that is the absolute truth. So many Scripture verses in the Old and New Testaments teach us the way of integrity before our God. In Deuteronomy 5:29, our God pleads: ***“Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever.”***

► One of the most amazing yet confounding accounts of ‘wrong’ choices made is recorded in Numbers 22, and concerns the faithless Balak and his hiring of Balaam; compounded by Balaam’s choice to consult God with the ‘wrong’ motivation. The Israelites were defeating their enemies and verse 1 said, ***“Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho.”*** Heading for Canaan, Israel wanted to pass through Moab, but the last line in verse 2 said that ***“Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites.”*** Balak, king of Moab, consumed with great fear of Israel, made a decision to send for Balaam, a pagan diviner, to place a curse on this nation blessed by God.

Balak had decided that if God’s blessing of the Israelites could be undone, they would no longer be a threat. God foretold the terror and fear that would come upon Israel’s enemies in Deuteronomy 2:25 after Israel defeated Sihon King of Heshbon: ***“This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you.”*** So, Balaam was sent for and he told the men to spend the night and he would bring back to them ***“the answer the LORD gives me”*** in verse 8. Balaam had made a decision to consult the LORD about what he should do.

But before we give any credit, any ‘kudos’, to him, the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* has this to say: “Balaam was an internationally known prophet, an expert in examining the entrails of animals and observing natural phenomena to determine the will of the gods. He thought that the Lord God of Israel was like any other deity whom he imagined he might manipulate by mantic acts.” Woe!

**A right decision with a wrong motive:** Balaam’s motive for consulting God was wrong! He operated on the premise that since he had repeatedly had his way with the gods—though they were no-gods—that he would throw the God of Israel into the mix! He had no fear or ‘awe’ of God! Full-of-himself Balaam was in for a big surprise: **God spoke back to him, and that should have shaken him, but it didn’t;** in Deuteronomy 2:12 God said ‘no’ to going with the men and in 20 God said ‘yes’ and then God displayed His anger through a donkey in 22—finally getting Balaam’s attention. We must not think for a second that God was changing His mind or that He was undecided; be sure, **God was dealing with the very contrary character of Balaam!**

God told Balaam that he was only to speak what God spoke through him, and so Israel was ‘blessed’ again and again—seven times in all. God protected Israel from receiving even one curse. It’s been suggested that Balaam had to learn from a donkey before he could learn from God. There is, however, no indication that Balaam ever came to believe in God, and Joshua 13:22b tells us, “...the Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.”

**Unbelievers will do what ‘unbelief’ will do—fail to believe God!** The vast majority of people in the world and in our nation are in that category—they will do what they will do. But as children of the living God, each one of us must choose to do the right. Charles Stanley said, “One strong non-compromising child of God is a powerhouse.” That ‘if’ you ‘then’ you verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, “***If*** my people, who are called by my name, will 1) ***humble themselves and 2) pray and 3) seek my face and 4) turn from their wicked ways, then*** will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” We that believe must turn from our wicked ways, personally, to receive God’s forgiveness and healing for our land!

What are we to do about our wicked ways (sins) **before we’re able to get rid of them?** Steps we must take **daily** to fulfill the 2 Chronicles 7:14 ‘if’ include:

1. **Admit** our sins (wicked ways) that we **daily** struggle with:
  2. make the decision to **take full responsibility** for them;
  3. make the decision to **deal with them** (Hebrews 12:1); and ‘**then**’
  4. **turn from them** (Philippians 4:13), because we can be sure God doesn’t want them in our lives! Know that the Holy Spirit will enable us to identify what is hindering us and guide us through specific Scripture.

There are so many accounts in the Bible of people who made a choice to disobey God and died; and people who made a choice to obey and lived. One riveting record covers both in the book of Ruth. The last verse in Judges, right before Ruth, described a dark day: Judges 21:25—*“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”* But, we may ask, what if our world, our nation, and our family are going through a really dark time, will we get a pass? Many are there; but be very sure, **God will hold us accountable for dark-day-decisions!**

Ruth 1:1—*“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.”* Elimelech made a choice to move to Moab to save his skin and that of his family; he put the physical above the spiritual. Here he was from Bethlehem, the place where Jesus would be born—central to the heart of God—and he decided to go over to the enemy. Psalm 37:25—David, also from Bethlehem, had said, *“I was young and now I am old, yet **I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.**”*

God had not told Elimelech to go to Moab for relief—(Moabites are descendents of Lot through incest with his oldest daughter). Elimelech left off trusting God for provision, not exhibiting believing faith, which led him to his wrong decision! What is going to happen? In Ruth 1:3 we read: *“Now Elimelech, **Naomi’s husband, died,** and she was left with her two sons.”* The sons married, and after about ten years they also died, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law destitute in the land of Moab.

Look at some wise decisions—choices to do the right; hope for dark days—and what that led to: Naomi made the decision to return to Israel! Ruth 1:7—*“With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would **take them back** to the land of Judah.”* Literally, Naomi made a choice to return to the God of Israel. Yes, she had heard the good report that *“the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them”*—but she made the right choice to turn back. Remember that **it is decision that determines destiny.**

And then Ruth, the Moabitess—remember Deuteronomy 23:3 said that *“No Ammonite or **Moabite** or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation”*—made the decision to go with Naomi, to make her mother-in-law’s people her own, and **to make Naomi’s God her God.** Is it any wonder that these decisions were honored by God, and that His great provision of a kinsman-redeemer came to signify Christ’s coming to redeem us all? Ruth, married Boaz and they had a son named Obed, and he became the near ancestor to Israel’s King David and to the whole world’s Redeemer—*Jesus!*

History records that Persia's King Xerxes divorced Vashti in the third year of his reign (Esther 1:3) for her choice to disobey an order to appear; he married Esther in the seventh year (2:16). Vashti's refusal to obey the summons of her drunken husband has been admired as heroic in many feminist groups. Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and pre-Civil War abolitionist, called Vashti's disobedience "the first stand for women's rights." But we need to remember that her choice to rebel cost her everything!

Andy Andrews said, "What we do or do not do will matter forever!" A wrong choice can lead to a cursed life, a crushed life, and a condemned life, but a right decision can make all the difference! Look at Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Without changing meaning or implication one bit, doesn't this verse say the following?

1. **If** you ask **then** it will be given to you;
2. **If** you seek **then** you will find;
3. **If** you knock **then** the door will be opened to you?

♥In the fall of 2013 the *Faslodex* injections I received for my cancer stopped working to the point that my oncologist wanted me to start a chemo pill—3,000 ml per day—and sent me to *Freeman Cancer Institute* to be educated about the medicine's benefits and side-effects. Do I have a desire to save-my-skin? Yes, I do, and who would blame me? But there was something else involved here. In April 2008 God had called me to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through the discipleship ministry of *Women & More*. We were in our sixth year, and the study, preparation, writing and speaking take up a considerable amount of time and energy. Matthew 6:33—"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In receiving the education, and coming home and praying through all the material, I couldn't get passed the fact that to save-my-skin—which this med made no claim to be able to do—I would suffer side effects which would take me right out of God's will and work for me. The material said, "Many will suffer side effects which include," followed by a debilitating list. Some would argue that, of course, they have to list all the possible effects, which may or may not affect a particular patient, but understand that **God did not give me a 'peace' about abandoning His call on my life to 'save' it.** I had to make a spiritual choice to follow Christ implicitly and use an old standby estrogen suppressant which my doctor was not sure would effectively stabilize me.

I'm writing this on March 3, 2014, and waiting in faith for the end of the story: I must trust God who made the following promise in Deuteronomy 30:19-20—"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that **I have set before you life**

**and death, blessings and curses.** Now **choose life,** so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup>and that you may **love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.** **For the LORD is your life,** and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” In choosing life, I must choose the LORD, for He is my life! †On Friday, March 14, I learned that God had indeed stabilized me through the ‘lesser’ medicine—my tumor marker was now at 106, down from 129. This is none other than our great God at work; I praise Him!

Look carefully at Proverbs 2:1-5—“My son, **if you accept my words and store up my commands** within you,

<sup>2</sup>**turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,**

<sup>3</sup>and **if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,**

<sup>4</sup>and **if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,**

**then** you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”

And Proverbs 9:10 summarizes: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

God planned punishment for Israel’s disobedience in Leviticus 26:14-17 (and again in 18 ff)—“But **if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands,** <sup>15</sup>and **if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant,** <sup>16</sup>**Then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life.** You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. <sup>17</sup>**I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies;** those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.” And through Scripture we saw this take place for Israel because of their ‘wrong’ choices of idolatry and infidelity.

In the same way, God has warned us today that **if** we choose His Son, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; **if** we follow His way, His truth, His life, and make Him first in our lives, **then** we will be making the wise choice. The safest place for the Christian is in the very center of God’s will. But **if** we decide to abandon or disregard or disobey Him, **then** we will bring about His discipline as well as enduring the consequences to our choice. Solomon championed integrity and then warned in Proverbs 10:9 “The man of **integrity** walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.” And Proverbs 11:3 “The **integrity** of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.”

Rev. Charles Stanley ends his preaching program with the following statement: “Obey God and leave the consequences to Him” often adding:

**if** we disobey God,  
**then** the consequences are ours!