

Bible Women (Old Testament)

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Eve: The First Woman Day Share for 03/01/2021

Eve is the first woman in the Bible - the first wife and the first mother. Eve has gone down on Bible record as the one who was first tempted by Satan in the Garden of Eden. We want to consider three things about Eve in this Day Share.

1. She was made in the image of God - just as much as her husband, Adam.
Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." [Genesis 1:26 NET] Some translations of this key verse use the word 'man' and this may make people think that only men were made in God's image. This translation helpfully uses the term 'humankind' which includes both men and women. This makes it apparent that both men and women are made in the image of God.

This is not referring to physical appearance because God is invisible and is spirit. This must refer to something which distinguished humans from animals. Animals do not have a conscience or a sense of justice or a desire to worship God. Humans are made up of body, soul and spirit and so they are capable of worshipping God. This is a very important principle because it establishes that in God's purpose, men and women were both like God in their righteousness, their knowledge of God and their desire for holiness. There is no thought of superiority for men in terms of their spiritual understanding or their capacity for holy and righteous conduct.

Both men and women are equally capable of worshipping God and serving Him. Both have a conscience which has been implanted by God. Both are moral and ethical creatures – unlike the animal creation.

2. Eve was made from the same 'material' as Adam. Adam was given the task of naming the animals which God had created and this was God's way of establishing the authority of the human race over the animal kingdom. God established a principle that it was not good for man to be alone and there was no animal who could take the role of helper for the first man - Adam. And so God created Eve from Adam's flesh. While Adam was in a deep sleep, God removed a rib from Adam and from this he made woman. So there is a close affinity between the man and the woman - as Adam himself said, "She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." It was clear that Adam, the first man, was pleased with the first woman and welcomed her as his companion. Germaine Greer the feminist writer points out that of the 48 chromosomes, there is only one different between a male and a female [Germaine Greer: The Female Eunuch p 361]. She is critical of the Bible but yet in her attempt to play down the difference between men and women, she is agreeing with the Bible - they are both made from the same stock. I would like to add a quotation from an old commentary on the creation of the first woman. Eve was "*not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.*" [Matthew Henry: The Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible.]
3. She was a helper or companion for Adam. The Hebrew word for helper is 'ezer which means the one who supplies strength in the area that is lacking in the 'helped' [ESV Study Bible]. This does not suggest that the woman was inferior to the man or was superior to him. It does, however, suggest that the man needed the woman because there was something lacking - whether this is a physical or a psychological or an emotional need on the part of man is not made clear. I would like to look more closely at the word used to describe the role that Eve would play in Adam's life.

Many Bible translations translate this Hebrew word 'ezer as 'helper' but this is not really the best word to use. If I am doing a DIY task which involves two people, I would often have a 'helper' - someone to hold the ladder or to steady the workpiece. In other words, my use of this word implies that I am taking the lead and doing the more demanding tasks and my helper is there to assist me. Was Eve's role in life merely to act as an assistant or a helper to Adam? Does this imply that women have a secondary role to men? I have looked at all the times this Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament and this has been very useful to finding out the true meaning of the word. The word is used a total of 19 times in the KJV and 15 of these

usages are referring to God. This makes it clear that the word 'ezer does not suggest someone to take a subservient role as a helper. If we look at one example, we see that the writer of this Psalm is desperate for God's help. He is imploring God to help him

*But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay! [Psalm 70:5 ESV]*

It is clear that he really needs God. Only God can meet the needs of the writer of this Psalm. He cannot live without God. So this gives us a better understanding of the real significance of this word - Adam would not function without Eve. This is much more than a need to procreate or to satisfy his sexual appetite. The NET Bible provides a translator's footnote which suggests that the word implies an "indispensable companion" - he cannot function in life without her. It implies that there is something lacking in the man's psyche and so he needs the help of a woman to meet that need. The NET Bible suggests that "the woman would supply what the man was lacking in the design of creation." It is interesting that it is the man who has the deficit - if I could use that word. The NET Bible note suggests that 'logically the man would supply what she was lacking.' However, this is not stated in the Genesis account. It is the man who is needing the help of a woman - not the woman who is needing the help of a man. This is interesting because Peter's letter in the New Testament describes the woman as the 'weaker vessel' or the 'weaker partner' [NET Bible] - 1 Peter 3: 7. This verse probably refers to the fact that in general terms men are physically stronger than women and the man should not exploit this physical advantage over his wife to bully or intimidate etc. Is it possible that psychologically women are stronger than men or am I being controversial?

To sum up, the first woman Eve as well as the first man were made in God's likeness and Eve was as capable as Adam of communicating with God. She was made from Adam's rib and so men and women are made from the same physical material. God made Eve to be a companion to Adam because Adam was incomplete without a woman. Interestingly enough, it is the man and not the woman who is regarded as requiring companionship. Of course, many men live on their own without a woman and so do many women live without a man in their lives. This is the ideal picture - in God's plan. The reality in today's world is very different.

This was before sin came into the world. In the next Day Share we will see the role played by Eve when Satan attacked God's creation. We will see the devastating effects of sin in the world as a result of this sin.

Eve : Tempted by Satan Day Share for 05/01/2021

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. [Genesis 3:1- 7 ESV]

Eve does not come out of this passage well. She was deceived by the devil disguised as a serpent. Did he target her rather than Adam? In spite of all that I said in the previous Day Share, am I suggesting that women are more likely to sin than men? I am not going to discuss these matters in today's Day Share - I am too much of a coward. Instead, I want to look at some lessons for all of us in dealing with Satan.

Notice that the passages acknowledges that Satan is crafty. In the New Testament the apostle Paul warns us to beware of Satan's craftiness.

so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. [2 Corinthians 2:11 ESV]

Paul warns us that Satan is devious and crafty. He has a wide variety of 'designs' or 'schemes' or tactics. He will not always approach us as the roaring lion - a predator attacking us and making us afraid.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [1 Peter 5:8 ESV]

In this passage in Genesis, Satan comes disguised as a serpent. It seems that this was not a

loathsome reptile and that Eve is not afraid of him. Instead, she is taken in by his smooth talking. He immediately casts doubt on the Word of God. This is a popular tactic with Satan today. When I was a young student, I lived in rented accommodation in Gibson Street, Glasgow. I shared a room with an evangelical Christian but in the same lodging there was a divinity student and every time we met him he cast doubt on the accuracy of the Bible. I was not well enough read to be able to argue against him and this was an attack by Satan on the Word of God that I had always relied on.

So Satan says, "Did God actually say?" This is a well-known tactic today used by followers of Satan. Does the Bible actually say such and such? Can we really rely on the text of the Bible? We need to be sure of the Bible teaching and that's one reason why it is important to study the Bible. So Satan cast a doubt about God and His Word because if God's Word cannot be relied on then it throws doubt on God Himself. Can we trust God?

Eve was wrong-footed with this line of questioning from the cunning serpent (Satan in disguise). In her reply, Eve was not fully accurate in stating what God had really said. Look carefully at what God really said (A) and compare this with what Eve said to Satan. (B)

(A) What God's instructions were to Adam and Eve

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." [Genesis 2: 16-17 ESV]

(B) What Eve reported back to Satan

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." [Genesis 3: 2-3 ESV]

Firstly, notice that Eve knew that God had said that that they would die if they ate the forbidden fruit. So she could have disputed with Satan right away when he had first cast doubt on the word of God. She could have said, "No Satan, you are wrong. I heard God say that we would die if we ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Satan noticed that she had missed this opportunity. When she does reply, she makes some subtle changes to the text of God's instruction and this is encouragement for Satan. You might think that I am reading too much into this.

- She dropped the word 'every.' God had emphasised the positive - there was an abundance of trees available to them - "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden"
- She made no mention of the significance of the tree - it was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- She added a restriction "neither shall you touch it" which God had not stated. This was probably her voicing her resentment at this prohibition. She is making it more negative than it actually was. God had said the fruit was not to be eaten but Eve adds that it was not to be touched.

This might seem trivial but Satan is observing her lack of enthusiasm for God's command and he has seen her weakness. He then goes for the jugular. He then suggests that God is hiding something from her - the effect that eating will have on her. She will know good and evil and be like God. Satan does not tell her the whole truth. He does tell her that she will pass from a state of innocence to a state of knowledge of good and evil - but he does not tell her of the harmful effects of sin on her life and on the human race. And so, with Satan's prompting, Eve looks at the forbidden fruit longingly and see its attractiveness and desirability. Satan continues to do this today. He is good at presenting sin in an attractive light and not highlighting the consequences. I could think of many examples of this but I do not need to spell this out.

What should Eve have done to avoid being tempted by Satan? She should have made a clear rebuttal to Satan right from the start and not entered into a negotiation with him about the extent of the prohibition. Here is how the dialogue should have read

Satan: "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Eve: "Absolutely yes. He made it clear that we should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Get behind me, Satan. "

The longer she engaged in dialogue, the more her doubts and weakness became apparent. There are those who will try to engage in conversation with us in the shopping malls etc and try to weaken our faith and to encourage us to accept their false doctrine. We should state clearly that we have a strong faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and they have absolutely nothing to offer us.

Adam comes back and finds that Eve has eaten and he follows her - maybe out of love for her because he knows that she has sinned and he joins her in her state of sinfulness. Paul interprets this event and states that Adam was not deceived by Satan. It was his wife who was deceived. (See 1 Timothy 2: 14).

It is interesting that both Adam and Eve change their behaviour after this sin. Firstly, they are aware of their nakedness and make a covering for themselves. Secondly, they are ashamed and they try in vain to hide from God. Thirdly, they blame someone else for their sin - Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the serpent. This is so typical of us today. We are reluctant to face up to our sin. We try to cover it up and hide it even though it affects our fellowship with God. We play down the seriousness of our sin and blame someone else or something else for our sin.

Eve: Consequences of Sin (1) Day Share for 07/01/2021

*To the woman he said,
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you."* [Genesis 3:16 ESV]

Sin always has consequences. After this first sin in the Garden of Eden there were several serious consequences. Adam and Eve were driven from this earthly paradise in the Garden of Eden and a cherubim (angel) with a flaming sword was put on guard to prevent them from returning there. This was the end of the state of innocence. This event is known as the Fall. The effects of this event have been passed down from one generation to another even until now.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— [Romans 5: 12 ESV]

Immediately following our first parents' sin, God spelled out specific consequences for Satan the serpent, for Eve and for Adam - Read Genesis 3: 14-19. For our purposes in Day Share, we are going to focus on the consequences for Eve. This verse in Genesis 3:16 is very controversial and there are many different interpretations.

After Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and listened to Satan disguised as a serpent, God pronounced a judgement upon her and upon all women since then. This judgement contained four elements

- I will greatly multiply your pain [labour] in childbearing
- In pain [labour] you shall bring forth children
- yet your desire shall be for your husband
- and he shall rule over you.

The first two consequences relate to childbirth. Painful childbirth was the consequence of sin coming into the world. It is made clear that childbirth will be a painful process and it still is today despite the advance of medical science. However, there is a clear statement that women will bring forth children - which has been a blessing for many women - despite the pain associated with childbirth. This is speaking in general terms and as you read this you will be thinking of exceptions to this. There is a bond created by childbirth - in most cases. I know that some mothers find it hard to bond with their babies and that some women go to great lengths to avoid conception for various reasons. This includes abortion which has sadly become accepted in our western society. There is a Bible verse which highlights this compensation for the rigours of childbirth.

When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. [John 16:21 ESV]

Watching a mother who has just given birth, illustrates the truth of this verse.

The last two bullet points in the list refer to the relationship between a man and a woman.

We are going to look at the fourth of these elements in God's judgement – *"he (your husband) shall rule over you."* There is now a change in the relationship between man and woman – this change involves the subjection / submission of the wife to the husband. The word *masal* means "to rule" and implies subjection. Women's position after the fall is one of subjection to her husband. Eve had influenced her husband and caused him to do what she wished and the divine punishment for this was that she and her female descendants would be subservient to their husbands. However, I do not want to leave it there.

The word *masal* meaning "to rule" is not the same word as is used earlier in the book of Genesis when speaking of the rule of human beings (men and women) over the animals. In Genesis 1:26 and 28 God spoke about humankind ruling over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle etc. In these verses the word translated "rule" is not the word *masal*. Instead a much stronger word is used – *radah* meaning "to tread down or have dominion over." Human beings have tamed wild animals and tamed them in order to control them for their benefit. This is not the word used in relation to the rule of man over the woman. Although the verb *masal* does imply submission, subjection or dominion, it does not imply tyranny or abuse of power by the husband over the wife.

It has been suggested that there are many passages where *masal* is used with the connotation of "rule" in the sense of "comfort, protect, care for, love."

The relationship described in Genesis 3:16 of subjection/submission does not imply that women are to be regarded as less important than men in society. It is specifically in the context of the marriage between the husband and the wife. There is no justification for extending this beyond the confines of the marriage.

Man's treatment of woman was not what God had intended. It is not long before the Bible records men having more than one wife. This was just one of the many ways that men have tyrannically treated women. Instead of two becoming one flesh – men regarded woman as an object of lust and interpreted the divine instruction to be fruitful and multiply to mean that the man should have more wives in order to produce more children.

I want to make a generalisation. The treatment of women throughout history has been disgraceful. Of course, some will be quick to point out that many men have been shamefully abused and vilified. It is true that there are instances in history where men suffered worse than women - for example, in the First World War, for example, large numbers of men lost their lives.

However, there is no doubt that historically women have been treated as second class citizens. Men have been in positions of power and they have abused their authority to subjugate women. The fight for equality for women has been fought over centuries and is still being fought in the 21st century. The reluctance of men to grant women the right to vote provoked the suffragette campaign prior to the First World War and it was only after women proved their worth by their engagement in the war effort that some women were granted the right to vote. Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1970, women generally earn significantly less than men as they are much more likely to work in lower paid jobs. Glasgow City Council is facing a huge compensation payment to its female employees on account of way they had been discriminated over the years.

Men tend to be physically stronger than women and instead of protecting women they have used physical violence as a vent for their anger or frustration or as a means of subjugation. Domestic violence is an ongoing problem in Scotland with an increase reported following Old-Firm matches (football fixtures between the two Glasgow rivals - Rangers and Celtic). Alcohol is often associated with this violence.

This violence takes at least three forms though sadly some women have suffered all three types of abuse in the same relationship

- Physical abuse and violence
- Sexual abuse – including rape instigated by a husband or a partner
- Psychological abuse – this may be more difficult to prove but is nonetheless real and demeaning for the victim.

I need to get down off my soap box and bring this discussion to an end. I will speak about the third bullet point in the next Day Share.

Eve Consequences of Sin (2) Day Share for 09/01/2021

In the last Day Share we concentrated on three of the four parts to God's pronouncement of judgement on Eve and her descendants. Here is the list again

After Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden and listened to Satan disguised as a serpent, God pronounced a judgement upon her and upon all women since then. This judgement contained four elements

- I will greatly multiply your pain [labour] in childbearing
- In pain [labour] you shall bring forth children
- yet your desire shall be for your husband
- and he shall rule over you.

We have considered the first two bullet points (very briefly) and the last bullet point (in some detail) in the Day Share for 07/01/2021. Today we want to consider the third bullet point. I want to outline the traditional interpretation of this expression - "yet your desire shall be for your husband" and then I would like your permission to offer another interpretation. The word translated "desire" is only used on 3 occasions in the Bible and this makes it difficult to determine its meaning in this context.

I will begin with the traditional interpretation. The most common interpretation is that when the Bible says, "*your desire shall be toward [or contrary] your husband, but he shall rule over you,*" this was implying that the woman would be unwilling to accept the rule of her husband and would seek to undermine his authority. This suggests an ongoing struggle between the woman and the man for leadership in the marriage relationship.

According to this interpretation, the husband was given the role of leadership and they describe the role of the woman as complementary - that is, her role is to complete her husband - a successful

marriage involves a partnership with the husband taking the lead and the wife accepting his authority and completing the partnership. He needs her and she needs him for a successful marriage. This was the divine plan for human society before the fall but sin has caused an imbalance and into the perfect relationship has come conflict. On the one hand, the wife has a conflicting desire to rule which makes her unwilling to accept her husband's authority and the husband has a desire to control and to dominate his wife.

The leadership role of the husband and the complementary relationship between husband and wife that were ordained by God before the fall have now been deeply damaged and distorted by sin. This especially takes the form of conflicting desire (on the part of the wife) and domineering rule (on the part of the husband). Those who argue this way have based their argument on the use of the word translated 'desire.' The Hebrew word *teshugah* is only found three times in the Old Testament. It is the word translated in the phrase we are considering 'your desire will be toward your husband.' The second time the same word is used is in Genesis 4:7 when the Lord is addressing Cain who is very upset that his offering has not been accepted and he is angry with his brother whose offering has been accepted by God. The Lord says to Cain that 'sin's desire is contrary to you' - this is the word *teshugah* and that Cain must "rule over it" - meaning that Cain would need to control his evil desire for revenge. As you know, Cain was unable to control his desire and he murdered his brother.

So this interpretation uses the context of the events leading up to the first murder to provide assistance with the meaning of this word. The argument is that Eve has a similar desire to her son Cain's 'desire' which needs to be mastered. This is the desire to oppose Adam in his role of leadership in the marriage and to claim that she is the leader in the marriage. This will result in Adam and his male descendants not following God's intention for them as the one to guard, protect and care for his wife. Instead the man will try to dominate his wife and to 'rule' over her not in the way which God intended. So this interpretation sees ongoing marital conflict as the consequence of the sin in the garden of Eden. This wrong view of marriage is corrected with the Christian ideal of marriage which is portrayed in the New Testament - see Paul's letter to the Ephesians 5:21-32.

There is another interpretation which is less common but it is less negative towards women. This takes the word 'desire' to refer to sexual desire. In the Song of Solomon 7:10 the bride speaks of her lover as follows "*I am my beloved's and he desires me!*" This is the same word as is used in Genesis 3:16 when it says literally "and toward your husband [will be] your desire." According to this interpretation this wholesome sexual desire would be compensation for the pain of childbearing and provided the possibility of a strong union between husband and wife. "A divinely ordained sexual yearning of wife for husband will serve to sustain the union that has been threatened in the rupture relations resulting from sin. "[Robert M Davidson p129]

What has made me consider this alternative explanation? My perception as a historian (even though not a very good one) is that throughout history there is a pattern of women being dominated by men. If I could take one example from life in 21st century Scotland. The incidence of domestic violence and abuse is a major disgrace. The vast majority of these incidents are men abusing their wives or partners sometimes using violence or verbal abuse or increasingly commonly psychological abuse. There are also instances of men being abused by women but these represent a small percentage compared with the domestic abuse perpetrated by men. What is noticeable is that women are reluctant to leave their partner - even though they are suffering despicable abuse. What is more it is common for women to expose their children to such violence in order to maintain the relationship with the domineering male. This seems to me to fit in with the second interpretation.

Sarah: An Unlikely Mother Day Share for 11/01/2021

Sarah was married to a famous man, Abraham. Her name was originally Sarai (which means "My Princess") but it was changed to Sarah (Princess) at the same time as Abram (her husband) became Abraham, the name by which he is better known. It is good to find out about the wife herself. As with all wives of well-known figures, there is a danger that they fade into obscurity. Sarah receives two commendations in the New Testament. Firstly, she is commended for being a good wife to Abraham.

For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. [1 Peter 3:6 ESV] So she is submissive to her husband. I do not think this is implying that all wives should call their husbands 'lord.' We must understand this from the standpoint of the cultural norms of the time. The lesson we could apply is that a Christian wife should follow the leadership and direction of her husband.

Secondly, Sarah features in the distinguished list of the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* [Hebrews 11:11 ESV]

This refers to the miraculous conception of a baby called Isaac to a woman aged 90. What is

interesting is that the New Testament writer commends Sarah despite the record in the book of Genesis showing up Sarah in a less-favourable light. It is amazing that God's promises to Abraham depended on a wife who was too old to have children - her menstrual cycles have finished and her productive years have ended.

In chapter 16 of Genesis, Sarai clearly believed that she was too old to have children and she arranged for Abram to have sexual relations with her maid, Hagar which resulted in her maid giving birth to a son. This is discussed in the next Day Share. It is interesting that Sarai is the dominant partner in this episode and Abram merely complies with his wife's misguided wishes.

When Abraham receives three very important visitors he recognises that one of them is the Lord Himself. The Lord makes a specific promise that Sarah will give birth to a son 12 months later. Sarah overhears this conversation and she laughs at it and then denies laughing when she is challenged (Genesis 18:12) She does not seem to believe in miracles and her faith is not evident. She laments that she is 'worn out' and her husband (whom she refers to as 'my lord') is also old. The Lord has to point out the truth of divine omnipotence - "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" This incident does not show Sarah in a very favourable light. It is amazing that the inspired writer of the letter to the Hebrews refers to her faith in the promises of God. My comment on this is that Sarah is like most of us - we have our highs and lows. We have our off-days. Sarah had one that day but the New Testament rightly assesses her character - she did have faith in God's ability to cause her to conceive a child - even though it was biologically impossible. Interestingly enough, Abram had earlier found the idea of Sarah giving birth to a son as laughable (See Genesis 17: 17). He does not set her a good example.

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. [Genesis 21:1-3 ESV]

It seems that, despite her initial scepticism, Sarah did believe that God would cause her to give birth to Isaac - just as he had said.

Before leaving the story of Sarah, I want to refer to a previous incident in her life. She seems to have been a beautiful woman - even when she was in her sixties. When Abram (as he was known then) was travelling through the country of Egypt, he was concerned that some Egyptian would find her attractive and would even stoop to killing Abram in order to have his wife. Abram then goes in for some deceit. He stops treating Sarai as his wife and says that she is his sister instead. This leads to a very undesirable situation where an Egyptian prince decides he likes the look of this lady and he takes her into Pharaoh's house. We are not told if there was any relationship between the prince and Sarai. However, Abraham is handsomely rewarded for giving his beautiful wife disguised as his sister to this prince. The compensation was lavish indeed - sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants and female servants. This story is distasteful to our 21st century minds. Abraham was being less than honest and he was treating his wife as a commodity. Is he being paid for her granting sexual favours? It is possible that his deception resulted in his wife being violated by an Egyptian prince.

Perhaps, the overall lesson that we need to take from the story of Sarah (the princess) is that nothing is too hard for God. Even a 90 year old woman is able to give birth to a son.

Hagar: God sees me Day Share 13/01/2021

*And the angel of the Lord said to her,
"Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.
He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."
So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.
And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. [Genesis 16: 11-16 ESV]*

In one sense the story of Sarai's poor maidservant is tragic and does nothing to enhance the reputation of Sarai (or Sarah.) In another sense, the story displays God's concern for a poor mistreated servant girl. It also becomes clear that Hagar was not blameless and that she undermined the authority of her mistress.

This incident shows the dangers associated with impatience. Sarai is concerned that she has been

unable to give Isaac an heir. Abram had lamented to God that it was a stranger who would inherit his possessions after his death and God promised that Abram's own son would be his heir. God also told him that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. It says that Abram believed God's promise. [Genesis 15: 1-6] But Sarai is having some difficulty with this. She looks on this situation from the human viewpoint. She knew that her womb was barren and that she was getting too old to conceive (she is 76 years old). She begins to rationalise this. If Abram has a child to my maid, this will still be his son and so God's promises will be achieved. So she suggests to Abram that his problems will be solved by this solution. She says to him that the Lord has stopped her from bearing children. This was a custom in the Near East at this time for a husband to father children from his servants but the servant would not be regarded as his wife. Abram listens to his wife and he has sexual relations with the Egyptian maid by the name of Hagar. This is a form of surrogacy that we find unacceptable. Sarai was going to regard any child born to Hagar as her child [Genesis 16:2]

Sarai and Abram are not following God's will in this course of action. God had given clear instructions for a marriage between one man and one woman. [Genesis 2:24] The idea of multiple partners was not part of God's plan for procreation involving a man and a woman becoming one flesh. There are dire consequences.

And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. [Genesis 16: 4 ESV] When Hagar becomes pregnant, she regards the unborn child as her own and in her eyes this has given her an advantage over her mistress who is still barren. [Genesis 16:4]

There are tensions between Sarai and her maid and we are not excusing Hagar for taunting her mistress for achieving what she had failed to achieve. This rivalry is the product of not following God's plan. It leads to tension and discord between Sarai and Abram. Strangely enough she blames Abram for this situation. I find this hard to explain. Is she suggesting that Abram should not have followed his wife's advice? She tells Abram that he will have to answer to the Lord for this. Sarai does not accept the blame for this unhappy situation. Abram is again very weak. He more or less gives Sarai permission to abuse her maid. So Sarai takes her anger out on her maid - she bullies her. And poor Hagar has enough of this and runs away from the whole situation.

God sees all of this and takes note of the injustice done to this poor Egyptian girl. He sends his angel to protect her and the angel finds her by a spring of water in the desert. It is interesting that she has found this spring and has vital refreshment which she desperately needs for herself and her unborn child. The angel speaks to Hagar and addresses her as Hagar, servant of Sarai. The angel asks her a question, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" The location of the well is identified in verse 14 and this would indicate that Hagar was on her way back to her homeland in Egypt. No doubt, all of this was known to the angel as it was known to God. This question is to get Hagar to articulate what has happened. Hagar says that she is fleeing from her mistress and the angel tells her to return to Sarai and to submit to her again. This might seem unfair - is she being told to go back to an abusive situation? This is probably correcting the wrong attitude which Hagar had been displaying towards her mistress.

The angel makes a promise to her that she will bear a son, named Ishmael. This name means "God hears" and its significance is obvious. God has heard the cries of this girl and all the dialogue taking place in Sarai's household. Hagar who comes from a country with many false gods is made aware of the presence of the God of Abraham. This is a God who hears everything and in fact, Hagar becomes aware that He sees everything.

So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." [Genesis 16: 13 paraphrased]

Good has come from this undesirable situation. Hagar will bear a son to Abram and Hagar will have many descendants [See Genesis 17:20] Ishmael will be more independent than his mother. He will need to be a 'wild donkey' to survive in a hostile world. Another blessing which came despite the sin committed by Sarai and Abram is that Hagar 'called on the name of the Lord.' She recognised God's hand in her situation and that he had preserved her and he would continue to look after her in the future.

You are a God of seeing. That might act as a deterrent to us sinning or a reminder that God sees our every action even though we might hide them from our neighbours and our closest friends and relatives. In this context, it is a reminder that God is a God of justice and that he sees injustice and takes action to defend the defenceless and the vulnerable. It is sad that God has to act to preserve an Egyptian from a man and his wife who both knew God and should not have been acting as they did. Although Hagar did return to Sarai, she had to leave again because her son, Ishmael was treating the new baby Isaac badly. So Hagar had once again to flee to the wilderness. But again she experienced the truth that God sees us and preserves us when we are in danger.

Lot's Wife and Daughters Day Share 15/01/2021

This is not a pleasant story. Like so many other passages of the Old Testament it describes some practices which we find out of sync with our current values and thinking. Lot was Abram's nephew

and the two households with their cattle and other animals travelled together from place to place through the Southern Desert. Abram was very wealthy and he had huge flocks of cattle, sheep and goats. Lot also had his own stock of animals and soon quarrels broke out between the herdsmen of the respective flocks because grazing ground was so scarce. Abram and Lot decided to split up and to go their respective ways. Abram kindly gave Lot the first choice and Lot chose to go to the Jordan Valley because this looked ideal for grazing. This was not a wise choice for Lot and his family. The area where Lot settled had two cities named Sodom and Gomorrah which were notorious for their wickedness. A war broke out and Abram had to rescue Lot from captivity.

The first incident involving Lot's daughters occurred when two heavenly visitors paid a visit to Sodom. Their arrival was observed by some local inhabitants of the city who wanted to have sex with these men. A very nasty scene developed when these predatory homosexuals attacked Lot's house and demanded that Lot would immediately hand the two men over to allow them to satisfy their lusts. Lot tried to reason with these men and offered them his virgin daughters instead. This seems disgusting to us. Lot is demeaning his daughters and is treating them as a commodity. He is not showing the love and respect for his daughters that we would expect.

Lot and his family are miraculously rescued from Sodom by God's intervention. God protected Lot even though Lot had chosen to make his home in such an evil place. Lot's wife died tragically because of disobedience. When they were instructed to flee from Sodom because it was going to be destroyed, they were warned not to look back. She disobeyed God's solemn instruction and looked back to witness for herself the destruction of the city. She was turned into a pillar of salt.

The other incident involving the two girls shows up these daughters in a less favourable light. After the rescue from the city and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the two of them plot to become pregnant by committing incest with their father. They made sure that he was drunk and then carried out their plan. This was repeated the next night to allow the second daughter to become impregnated with her father's sperm. And so Lot unwittingly fathered two children to his own daughters.

This shows that these girls had adopted the values of the society they lived in. The problem started with Lot and not with the girls. He was living in an evil Godless town and he was compromising his principles on a daily basis. He had to be rescued by these heavenly visitors in a miraculous way. His attempt to protect the heavenly visitors shows him up as a hypocrite. He knew what was going on around him - there was a complete denial of God's authority. The people of Sodom were living without God and their sexual licence was evidence of this. They had no respect for Lot either. This is the result of compromise with the world. Chapter 19 of Genesis does not make for pleasant reading. As I was making up the subjects for Day Share, I was sorely tempted to omit these incidents involving Bible women. However, if this chapter is included in the inspired canon of Scripture, we must not accept this as the Word of God which is 'profitable for reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness.' [2 Timothy 3:16]

This incident provides a challenge for all Christians bringing up a family in our post-modern age where Biblical values are seriously challenged. The challenge is to remain in the world but to keep ourselves pure from the evil influences of the world. Like the Pharisees, some Christian sects have majored in separation but this has come at the expense of witness to the world. Our children are attending school in a society which promotes ideas and values which are non-Christian. I would not advocate home-schooling or segregating our children from their peer groups in the community. But we must pray that they will be protected from pernicious evil that is prevalent in our world today. We must also guard against taking any action which will be harmful to the spiritual wellbeing of our family.

Rebekah: Wife for Isaac Day Share 17/01/2021

Read Genesis Chapter 24

This Day Share deals with a very important subject which is just as relevant today as it was when Abraham gave orders to his servant to find a wife for his son. This was an arranged marriage. Abraham and Sarah were not prepared to allow Isaac to follow his heart and find a wife locally with a girl whom he found attractive. We associate arranged marriages today with other faiths and Christians would not agree with this practice. I have to be honest and admit that this practice of choosing a wife for a son or a husband for a daughter still persists in Christian Church circles. Sometimes, there has been social pressure put on a couple to get together because it pleased the parents. The boy came from the right family - he had good credentials. This usually means that the father is respected in church circles as a preacher and it is assumed that his son or daughter will make a good spouse. Sometimes this has disastrous consequences and results in an unhappy marriage or the breakdown of the marriage.

Abraham is getting very old and he knows that his days on this earth are limited. Abraham wants to arrange for his son Isaac to be married to a good woman before he dies. He does not want Isaac to marry one of the local girls. He is not going to allow Isaac to be influenced by the appearance of attractive women living in Canaan. Abraham was concerned that Isaac would choose a wife who

would lead him astray and cause him to serve and follow other gods. So he entrusts his old trusted servant who has been in the household for a very long time with a very important mission - to find a wife for Isaac from away back in the area where Abraham had come from originally - a place called Haran in northern Mesopotamia. This was a very long journey - approximately 550 miles or 900 kilometres. So this servant would have to 'walk 500 miles' to quote the Proclaimers' song - in order to find a suitable wife for his master. This journey would have taken 21 days at least - allowing for an average of 25 miles per day across ancient routes. Are you not going to too much bother, Abraham? What does it matter? Would it not be better to let Isaac find his own wife - someone whom he meets one day in the local village?

This servant wanted to be sure that he got the right woman for his master's special son. He was not taking this task lightly. He was a trusted servant who could be relied upon to follow his master's orders. It is very interesting that this servant was guided to find the right wife for Isaac. The servant prayed for guidance from the Lord.

And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master." [Genesis 24: 12-14 ESV]

Abraham had advised his servant that God would send his angel before him to guide him in his search for a wife. Here he prays for God's help and guidance. He sets up a test to identify the right girl for Isaac. The test that he has set up is significant. He has arrived at the well in this city of Nahor and he has chosen the time when women go out to draw water. He is going to request a drink and the response of the women will identify the right one. The identifying characteristic of this woman will be her generosity and her loving kindness. She will do more than she is asked - she will not only give the old servant a drink, she will also give a drink to his camels. It is well known that camels are able to travel for long journeys because they have a store of water in their humps. The right young lady will be prepared to take the time and effort to supply the servant and the camels with water. In his prayer, the old servant refers to a divine feature which we observed when we were studying the Psalms - *cheched* or *hesed* - God's loving kindness or as it is translated in this translation - 'steadfast love.' Any woman who showed this god-like feature in her everyday conduct met the criteria for being a wife for Isaac.

And Rebekah passed the test with flying colours. She even offered hospitality to this stranger and invited the servant to stay in their home and provided fodder for his camels. She was a young woman - a virgin and was attractive looking. But the servant wanted to be sure that she was the right wife - and it was her conduct which would identify her. The record in this chapter shows that there is a real attempt to find a suitable wife and the decision is not based on outward appearance or material possessions or her intellectual ability. The servant thanked the Lord for guiding him in the choice of a suitable wife for his master's son.

Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. [Genesis 24: 48 ESV]

What lessons are we to learn from this incident which is described in considerable detail in Genesis Chapter 24? Let me make it clear, I am not advocating that parents take similar steps to this today. In fact, from my limited personal observations, any attempt to 'arrange' a marriage in such a way often leads to an unhappy marriage. I do think that there is one lesson which emerges clearly from this story is that parents should take this seriously enough to pray that their son will find a godly wife or their daughter will find a godly husband. I also think that we should be intentional in our churches about the importance of seeking God's guidance in marriage. This is a generalisation - but I feel that we have not taken this matter seriously enough and we have not stressed the importance of seeking God's will in this important aspect of our lives. It is important to share our lives with someone who not only knows God's grace (the New Testament equivalent of *hesed* or *cheched* - steadfast love) but demonstrates that grace in everyday conduct. I also believe that we need to provide opportunities for young people to meet partners who will share their outlook and values. During my ten years of volunteering at Keswick Convention I met several couples who were serving the Lord together as part of the children's team or the youth team and their relationship had begun as fellow team members or when they were attending the youth events themselves (or maybe earlier!). I believe that we need to add this whole topic to our prayer list in general and to pray specifically for young people in our church that they will meet a suitable partner and be guided by the Lord in their decision. My observation is that there are single people who have not met a suitable partner because of their loyalty to the Lord or their restricted circle of contacts.

Rebekah's Favourite Day Share 19/01/2021

Read Genesis Chapter 27

Rebekah makes a long journey from her homeland up north in Mesopotamia down to Canaan where she marries Isaac. She is unable to conceive at first but then she gives birth to non-identical twin boys. Esau is the elder and he is noted for being hairy - possibly red hair. He is the rugged outdoor type and when he grows up he becomes a hunter. He wins over the affection of his father because he kills game and brings the carcasses back home to provide delicious meals. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach - so they say - and the stews cooked from wild animals killed by Esau make him very popular with his meat-loving father, Isaac. Rebekah finds the younger twin more to her liking - he is not interested in hunting. He is a tent dweller - quite happy to stay at home. (Genesis 25:21-27) He seems to have been interested in cooking and he has a temperament more suited to his mother's liking.

There is an incident, which might seem strange to us, recorded in Genesis 25:29-34. Esau comes back from a hunting trip and he is ravenously hungry. His brother is cooking a delicious lentil stew and the smell coming from the kitchen is too much for him. He asks for some of the stew. Seems straightforward enough. But Jacob is cunning. He notices that Esau is really desperate for the stew - I guess that his hunting expedition has been unsuccessful and he has gone a long time without a meal. Jacob decides to make a bargain with his older twin. If you really want this stew, you are going to have to pay for it. He names his price - his birthright. This was considered very important in the Old Testament and is really important in connection with this family. God had made a promise to their grandfather Abraham that from his offspring would come many nations and that the whole world would be blessed through his descendant - by this we know that it referred to Jesus Christ, who would bring salvation to the world. All these promises were tied up in this birthright - the privilege of being the firstborn. Esau shows that he did not value all these future promises - he was only interested in the then and now. He accepts the deal and hands over to Isaac the privileges associated with being his father's heir.

Chapter 27 recounts an incident when there is a conversation in the tent between Isaac and his favourite son, Esau. Isaac is getting old and he has lost his eyesight. He has not lost his appetite, however. Isaac requests Esau to go out hunting and bring back some game to provide him with a last special meal before he dies. He promises to give Esau a special blessing on his return. This conversation is overheard by Rebekah and she comes up with a cunning plan. She talks to Jacob and suggests that he kills two good young goats from their flock and kill them. She will cook a special meal and he will go to his old, blind father and serve him a special meal - and he will never know the difference. Jacob points to some problems with his mother's plan - the father will know the difference - Jacob is smooth skinned and Esau is hairy. So the mother has to make her favourite son more hairy like Esau and she uses the skin of the dead goats to cover Jacob's skin. She also gets him to wear his brother's clothes so that the old father will smell the distinctive smell of the hunter. The ruse works - although Isaac is sceptical at first because Jacob's voice is different from Esau's. Isaac gives his second son the blessing that was reserved for the older twin, Esau.

What lessons can we learn from this incident?

- Parents must not be partial - that is, they should not have favourites in their family. They should love all their children equally. This sad story highlights the dangers associated with partiality - favouring one child at the expense of another. I could tell you many stories from my working life. about the harm caused by that in families.
- Wives should be honest and should not seek to deceive their husbands (and vice versa). Although the Bible does not criticise Rebekah, it is clear that she is acting unwisely in plotting to deceive her husband.
- Family rivalry can have serious consequences. This incident provoked a violent reaction on the part of Esau who blamed his brother for cheating him out of his father's blessing. Jacob had to flee from the family home and Rebekah had to advise him to take refuge in the home of her brother, Jacob's uncle away back in Mesopotamia. So Rebekah's plotting did not bring her peace and family bliss. She lost her favourite son.
- It is wrong to exploit a person's physical infirmities. Rebecca was taking advantage of her husband's loss of sight. This was prohibited in the Old Testament law. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. [Leviticus 19:14 ESV] It is possible that Isaac was not as discerning as he was in his younger days. Rebekah knew that she could pull off this deception.
- Rebekah paid a heavy price for this act of deceiving her husband. She probably died while her son was away in Paddan-aram and she maybe never saw her favourite son again.

Rachel and Leah Day Share 21/01/2021

Jacob is many miles away from home. He is in a place called Haran in Mesopotamia. You remember that his mother had advised him to flee there to get away from his brother Esau because Rebekah was concerned that Esau would take his revenge on Jacob for the nasty trick that mother and younger son had played on him. Rebekah herself had been born in this city and her brother Laban still lived there. [Genesis 27:41-45] Before he left home, his mother and father both advised him to find a wife from Haran rather than one of the local Hittite women of Canaan. Again, Abraham had sought a bride for Isaac from this area and that was how Rebekah came to be Isaac's wife.

Read Genesis Chapters 29 and 30

So Jacob has just cheated his brother out of his father's blessing and he has also cheated him out of his birthright. It is ironic that he discovers that his mother's brother is a master at deception and cheating. Uncle Laban has a doctorate in cheating and dishonesty! It all relates to finding a wife. Jacob falls genuinely in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. She is good looking and has an attractive figure. There is an older sister called Leah but she has weak eyes and this seems to have affected her appearance. Jacob does not find her attractive at all. Laban agrees for Jacob to marry Rachel and he is prepared to work for Laban for seven years in order to pay what was known as the bride-price. This is a high price to pay but Jacob is convinced that Rachel is worth every day of the seven years of free labour.

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. [Genesis 29:20 ESV] This is a lovely statement of love and affection on the part of Jacob for his wife Rachel.

Jacob was severely double-crossed by his crafty uncle. At the end of this seven years of hard labour, he spoke to Laban about marrying Rachel. Laban seems to be happy with this and a wedding feast is arranged. At the end of the feast Jacob is looking forward to consummating his marriage to Rachel. It is really dark - there was no artificial lighting and Jacob has sexual relations with his new bride - but in the morning he discovers that it was not Rachel (whom he loved dearly) but Leah. Jacob deceived his father and cheated on his brother so there is some justice in this. However, we can understand Jacob's anger. He was very angry when he went to complain to his uncle who is still slippery. Laban persuades Jacob to complete the week's honeymoon with Leah and then he will agree to giving him Rachel. Laban has some sort of excuse that it was customary in this country to marry off the older daughter first. So Jacob has two wives instead of one. However, Laban is not giving two for the price of one. Jacob agrees to serve another 7 years to pay the second bride-price or dowry. I would not like to buy a second-hand car from this man.

The irony is that Leah is fertile and gives birth to several children - Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. This is a very sad story and highlights again the effects of sin in the world and the perversion of the divine ideal of marriage. God was compensating Leah for being hated and despised by her husband and treated as a commodity by her father. These sons were all given by God to a woman who was suffering in a loveless marriage. Leah's comments after the birth of her six sons are instructive.

Leah's six sons (she also had a daughter named Dinah but Leah made no comments about her).

Name	Meaning / Sounds like	Leah's comments after the birth
Reuben	See, a son	Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me
Simeon	Sounds like Hebrew for heard	Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also
Levi	Sounds like Hebrew for attached	Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons
Judah	Sounds like Hebrew for praise	This time I will praise the Lord
Issachar	Sounds like Hebrew for wages or hire	God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband
Zebulun	Sounds like Hebrew for honour	God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honour me, because I have borne him six sons

This is not a happy family home. There is rivalry and tension between the two sisters. Rachel is envious of her older sister because she is unable to bear children and sees Leah having one child after another. The situation becomes even more complex because both sisters encourage Jacob to have sons by their respective maids. Rachel has two sons by surrogacy - her maid, Bilhah gives Jacob two sons named Dan and Naphtali. Just to even things off, Leah arranges for her maid to give birth to two more of Jacob's sons - named Gad and Asher. Leah also had more children to Jacob despite the fact that he did not really love her - Leah had two sons - Issachar and Zebulun. Leah also has one daughter named Dinah.

You will notice that until now Rachel has not been able to have any children of her own and the jealousy of her fertile sister must have been intense.

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!" [Genesis 30: 22-23 ESV] Later Rachel would give Jacob another son called Benjamin.

What lessons can we learn from this confused family situation.

- Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [Galatians 6:7 ESV] Jacob is reaping what he has sowed. He was deceitful to his father and his

brother and now he is reaping the effects of deception and cheating.

- God's ideal relationship is the marriage between a loving husband and wife who are loyal to each other. Where there is unfaithfulness in the marriage it leads to bitterness and rivalry. It was never God's plan for a man to have more than one wife.
- God compensates Leah for being stuck in a loveless marriage - God gave her the ability to conceive sons but sadly this did not make her husband love her more. There are many broken relationships in today's world and many women are living with an abusive husband. They need our prayers.
- This unhappy home had a profound effect on the personalities and conduct of the sons of Jacob. The story of Joseph shows the hatred and animosity they had towards their brother because he was Rachel's son and was regarded as his father's favourite. In today's world there is often a link between an unhappy home environment and the behaviour of a child in school or nursery. Breakdown in family life can also lead to criminal behaviour. This is not being judgemental. It is being factual.

Dinah: A Shameful Story Day Share 23/01/2021

Read Genesis Chapter 34.

This is not the sort of Bible story you will find in a children's book. It is violent and brutal. Again, we do not want to dwell on such an incident for any other reason than to learn lessons from it. We have the story of a girl who was violated or raped by a man from another tribe. It starts the way many such incidents start with a lustful look by a man named Shechem who is described as a Hivite. There are four verbs which list the course of actions leading to the defilement of this young girl - he saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. Shechem is described as the son of a prince of the land and the story shows that his father is a man of influence and Shechem has been taught to expect to get his own way. In the 21st century we have seen celebrities behaving in a similar fashion - and they expected to get away with their actions.

Shechem and his father Hamor did not acknowledge or worship the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They would be pagans who would worship other gods. Their morality is of a lower standard. But that does not excuse Shechem's actions. Interestingly, however, he seems to change his attitude to her after the deed is done. Instead of rejecting her or continuing to treat her as an object of his lust, he develops an affection for her and 'spoke tenderly to her.' However, Dinah is never given the choice in the relationship with Shechem. It is expected that she will become his wife. Shechem merely instructs his father to "Get me this girl for my wife." He is used to getting what he wants and, despite his claim to love her, he is not treating this young girl with respect. Although Jacob and his sons have not given permission for the marriage to go ahead, the chapter indicates that Dinah has been taken to live with Shechem [Genesis 34: 26]. This male domination was discussed in an earlier Day Share this year - Eve: Consequences of Sin 09/01/2021.

Dinah's big brothers have other ideas. They are rightly angry at what has happened to their little sister. They come back into the tent when Hamor is appealing to Jacob to grant Shechem's request to marry Dinah.

The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done. [Genesis 34: 7 ESV]

I have quoted this verse because it shows that the Bible disapproves of the behaviour of Shechem. There are dreadful incidents recorded in the Bible as description of the effects of the sin which was rampant in the world after the sin of Adam and Eve. "Such a thing must not be done" is true today as much as it was in the year in which this incident occurred. We should be totally outspoken in our condemnation of rape or any form of sexual abuse of women. For example, Isis used rape as a weapon of war to degrade women and to humiliate their enemies. There are many examples throughout history of such disgraceful conduct.

However, the revenge of Dinah's brothers was equally inexcusable. The Bible reserves the act of vengeance to God. Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; [Deuteronomy 32:35 ESV] This is quoted in Hebrews 10:30. Dinah's brothers were not prepared to leave punishment for this crime to the Lord. They acted in anger and took on the role of God to punish the Hivites for Shechem's treatment of their sister. They were deceitful. This lack of honesty is becoming a regular feature in the incidents we have studied this year.

The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. [Genesis 34: 13 ESV]

Shechem's despicable behaviour does not give them the right to be deceitful. They pretend to agree to the marriage of Shechem and Dinah (and there is a broader agreement for cooperation between them and the Hivites allowing intermarriage). However, they insist on a condition and cloak this with moral authority - the males must be circumcised because they claim that it is a disgrace to give their sister to any uncircumcised man. Then when all the males are incapacitated following this operation conducted without sterile implements or anaesthetic, Simeon and Levi take the opportunity to attack all the Hivite men with their swords and slaughter them all - including Hamor

and Shechem. They then rescue their sister Dinah.

What lessons can we learn from this sad story?

- Beware of the deadly consequences of lust. The Lord Jesus made it clear that looking on a woman to lust after her was condemned as much as the act itself. (See Matthew 5:27-28)
- Christians should condemn any form of sexual abuse of women which is sadly still too prevalent in our society. We should pray for victims of rape.
- As Christians we should follow the example of Jesus in his respect and care for women - especially the marginalised.
- Our desire for justice is evidence that we were made in God's image but we should not stoop to violent revenge. The command of the Lord Jesus is to turn the other cheek and to love our neighbours - even those who have committed atrocities. This is a hard lesson to learn. I recommend a book on the Rwandan Genocide - called Beauty from Ashes by Callum Henderson. This shows that Christians from the two opposing tribes (Hutus and Tutsis) were able to forgive the atrocities which had been committed against them and to practice reconciliation.
- God may be calling us to stand against the tide of hatred and violence in our society but at the same time to defend the vulnerable and the abused.

Job's Daughters Day Share 25/01/2021

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days. [Job 42: 10-17 ESV]

It may seem strange that I have taken you away from the book of Genesis to this book of the Bible called Job. Some scholars reckon that Job lived at the time of the patriarchs - that is, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob even though the book with his name is placed much further on in the Old Testament. Why did I choose this passage and decide to focus one Day Share on Job's daughters?

Janie and I have friends who have a daughter named Keziah and one of the Keswick Convention volunteers had the name Keren (she corrected people when they called her Karen). Apart from that I have never thought much about Job's daughters. We don't have time to study this whole book which deals with a very important subject - human suffering. I want to focus on this passage from the end of this book and highlight some lessons from it.

Let's remind ourselves of the story of Job. He is described as blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. Job was concerned about the conduct of his seven sons and three daughters. He was also a very wealthy man with large numbers of livestock. His wealth consisted of 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys. He had a large number of servants. You and I might think that he had everything going for him when suddenly disaster struck. He received a series of messengers with unwelcome news. Enemy tribes had stolen his oxen and his donkeys and they killed the servants looking after them. Then he had word that all his sheep and the shepherds had been destroyed by 'fire from God.' Then the message that another enemy tribe had stolen all 3,000 camels and had slaughtered the servants. Then he got the worst news of all - his seven sons and three daughters had been at a party at the home of the oldest brother and they had all been killed when the roof collapsed in a storm.

Surely things cannot get any worse. They do. He gets a very distressing skin condition usually translated as boils or ulcers all over his body. One scholar suggests that Job was suffering from a leprosy known as elephantiasis because the swollen limbs look like animals. This had quickly spread to his whole body. Job's wife offers no comfort to him and merely suggests to him that he should curse God and die.

The reader of this book knows more than Job. We are invited to spectate at two meetings between God and angels and Satan is in attendance. It is Satan who suggests that Job's good conduct is only because he is protected by God - in other words everything is going well for him. God gives Satan permission to put Job to the test and it is Satan who has inflicted all these miseries and calamities on Job. God has allowed this to happen. Job has three 'friends' who visit him at this time. They may have originally intended to console him and support him - but instead they spend the next 40 chapters debating with him because they believe that God is punishing him for some sin and that Job is not being honest with himself and with God. They are not prepared to accept that Job is not

himself to blame for his suffering.

And so we come to the passage which is quoted at the beginning of this Day Share. Job has finally surrendered to God's will and he has been reconciled with his friends. He is still broken and bereaved. He admits that he has uttered what he did not understand and that he has discovered things too wonderful which he did not know. He has come to know God in a much deeper way through his sufferings and he has come to repent and he says that he despises himself [See Job 42:1-6]. God now acts to restore Job to where he was before Satan's attack. In fact, God gives him twice the livestock he previously possessed. He has the comfort of his friends around him and he lives to a really old age - twice the allotted span for the human race - 140 years.

You might remember that in his valley experience he suffered the tragic loss of all his seven sons and three daughters. But God gave him a new family of seven sons and three daughters. Notice that the names of the seven sons are not recorded but we learn the names of these three daughters. We also know what their names mean in the Hebrew language. The first daughter's name Jemimah means 'dove.' The dove was the second bird to be sent from the ark when Noah was testing to see if the waters had subsided enough for them to return to dry land. The first time the bird came back because there was nowhere for it to rest. Noah sent it out again and this time it came back with a freshly plucked olive leaf. The dove is a bird which returns home. I grew up in an area where many men kept pigeons or as we called them 'doos.' They were famous for their instinct to return home. No matter where they were released they found their way back home. This daughter was maybe like that - she was happy to get back home to see her father and she even brought good news in the form of an olive leaf - a sign that better times were ahead. I have to say that my two daughters and my son have encouraged me many times in my life. The second daughter was named Keziah and her name means a kind of perfume. It is a variation of the word cassia. This was one of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil mentioned in Exodus 30: 24. It is mentioned in Psalm 45:8 when it is describing the wonderful aroma which came from the king dressed in all his finery. Keziah would speak of a lovely fragrance or aroma. She was pleasant to be with. The third daughter has a much longer name - Keren-happuch. The name consists of two parts. The first part *qeren* which means something which radiated and was applied to the horn of certain animals. The second part of the name is identical to the word *puk* which means a black mineral powder used for eye make-up. All three daughters were renowned for their beauty. However, they were not identical and their names suggest their personality. Jemimah's name, a dove, the bird which loves to return home suggests that she possibly she was a home-lover. The dove is also a symbol of peace. Keziah was associated with fragrance - her presence brought a pleasant atmosphere. Keren-happuch was distinguished for her striking looks.

These three daughters provided comfort and consolation for Job in his advancing years. This is a great ministry - in their different ways, Lot found that they compensated for his former suffering and loss. God gave Job these daughters to bless this faithful man in his old age. They would mean more to him than the wealth associated with his livestock.

Jochebed: Mother of Moses Day Share 27/01/2021

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. [Exodus 2: 1-3 ESV]

I want to introduce you to a woman whose name is not often mentioned in church. In the passage in Exodus chapter 2, she is anonymous. She is only described as a Levite woman. It is only when we look at Exodus 6: 20 and Numbers 26:59 that we are given the names of Amram (Moses father) and Jochebed (his mother). Jochebed's name means "whose glory is Jehovah." She does not want to hog the limelight. She wants to ensure that God will receive glory from her life. That is a great ambition for all of us.

It is not a good time for Jochebed to bring a wee boy into the world. Pharaoh, the new ruler of Egypt has decided that the Israelites who are living in the land of Goshen are a threat to his nation. There are too many of them and they are too powerful. They are the descendants of Joseph and his brothers whose story is well-known. There is now a new king in Egypt who is not interested in the history of how these Israelites came to be in his country. It is not unusual for a minority race to be seen as a threat. There are many examples in history of racial conflict and oppression which started because of fear or envy. One recent example was in Myanmar in 2017 when the minority Rohingya were violently persecuted by the government forces. In Egypt the new Pharaoh summed up his attitude to Jacob's descendants - the Israelites

- The people of Israel are too numerous - there are too many of them
- The people of Israel are too mighty - they are a powerful threat to us.
- We need to stop them from multiplying
- If war breaks out, there is the danger that they will side with our enemies and fight against us.

He started off his anti-Israel strategy by forced labour and oppression. The Israelites were forced to build two cities - called Pithom and Raamses. They appointed taskmasters to treat them with

brutality and force them to work as slaves. The Egyptians were afraid of the Israelites and they imagined that if they make their lives bitter with hard service such as brick making and all sorts of hard agricultural labour. This was unsuccessful. The more they oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied.

Pharaoh then decided that he needed to be more direct in his attack on the hated incomers. He devised a brutal policy of insisting that the two Hebrew midwives should only allow baby girls to stay alive. They were instructed to kill off every baby boy at birth. The book of Exodus records the names of the two midwives - Shiphrah and Puah and says that they feared God and "did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them." These midwives were being courageous and God-fearing but God blessed them for their faithfulness to him. They had families of their own and the Israelites continued to have many healthy baby boys and girls.

Pharaoh then decided on a course of infanticide. This was extended beyond the two midwives and he made a pronouncement to the whole country that every son born to the Israelites was to be drowned in the River Nile. This was when Jochebed had a baby boy and with tremendous faith she came up with a plan to keep him alive.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. [Hebrews 11: 23 ESV]

The New Testament credits both parents with the faith to defy Pharaoh and to keep baby Moses alive. The record in the book of Exodus highlights the actions of Jochebed in particular. She successfully hid the newly born child for three months but then she made a very courageous decision. She decided that the place designated for the death of the children should in fact be the place of preservation. She made a basket from bulrushes and made sure it was completely watertight with bitumen and pitch. She placed her wee baby boy in this basket and hid it among the reeds by the river bank. Moses' older sister was given the task of being the lookout to report back what had happened to this baby in the basket.



Picture of reeds from Helix Park in Falkirk (Grangemouth), the nearest I could get to the vegetation of the Nile delta.

The basket containing the baby was discovered by no less a person than the daughter of Pharaoh. You might think that this is an amazing coincidence. I believe that this was divine providence. Jochebed was trusting her baby's life to God who had clear plans for Moses. This was no accident. This was no coincidence. God had a plan which included Moses being brought up in the Egyptian palace and being trained in the ways of Egypt so that one day he would be used to deliver all God's people from the land of slavery (See Acts 7:22). So the timing of the walking of the princess along the bank of the river was all according to this divine plan. The location too was ordained by God so that she would spot the basket and ask her maid to fetch it for her. It was also divinely arranged that Jochebed would become the nurse for her own son so that he had first-hand experience of the misery of his own people. He also learned about the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

I wonder how Jochebed felt as she placed her three month old son in a basket and placed him among the reeds in the bank of the Nile. I am sure that as she did so she was praying to the Lord. She was committing the welfare of her child into the Lord's hands and her prayers were answered. What an example of faith she is. We need men and women like Jochebed in 2021 - ready to commit their future to the Lord.

Miriam the prophetess Day Share 29/01/2021

Miriam was the older sister of Moses, God's leader who led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert to the promised land of Canaan. There was another brother called Aaron who was a priest. We were introduced to Miriam in the previous Day Share - she was the young girl who watched what would happen to her baby brother who was sheltering in the basket in the bulrushes at the Nile bank.

In Exodus Chapter 15 she is described as a prophetess [Exodus 15:20]. There are many male prophets in the Old Testament but not many prophetesses. Most prophets have a book named after them and this is the record of their ministry and the actual prophecies they made (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos etc.) We tend to think that a prophet's role was to predict the future and that was indeed part of their task but that was not the whole picture. The English word prophet comes from classical Greek and means one who speaks for another (and it is usually applied to speaking for a god) so it suggests that the prophet's role was to interpret God's will to humans. One writer highlighted three aspects of the work of a prophet.

- Prediction - telling what is going to happen in the future
- Singing under the influence of the Holy Spirit
- Understanding and making sense of the Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It was the second of these activities which Miriam is associated with in Exodus Chapter 15. Most of this chapter is taken up with a song which Moses and the people of Israel sang to the Lord. The song celebrates the great deliverance they have just experienced when they crossed the Red Sea on dry land and the Egyptians who were pursuing them were drowned. This was a miraculous deliverance and the people are overjoyed and singing this song from the heart.

*"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. [Exodus 15:2 ESV]*

If we look further down the chapter, we find a reference to Miriam who is described as a prophetess and she is leading worship using tambourine and lots of women are worshipping along with her [Exodus 15:20]. This shows the powerful effect of music and singing in inspiring worship. This is confirmed in the New Testament - Ephesians 5:19 Colossians 3: 16.

Exodus Chapter 15 and Verse 21 informs us what Miriam and the other women were singing. And it is the same as Moses and all the people were singing - or at least it is the first stanza of the song which appears earlier in the chapter. Did Miriam only sing one stanza of the song? Did she repeat it over and over again? This is possible and you could make the case perhaps more likely that this whole song from verse 1 to verse 19 of Exodus Chapter 15 is Miriam's song? If we accept this possibility we have the only record of her 'prophecy' recorded in the Bible. This would make her a singer-songwriter.

There are some lovely expressions in the song of Moses (or Miriam).

*Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? [Exodus 15:11 ESV]*

The song reminds us of the uniqueness of God, His holiness, His majesty and His power.

*You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. [Exodus 15: 13 ESV]*

This verse reminds us of God's *cheched* or steadfast love and His divine guidance. The song rightly gives the credit to God not to Moses. The song is a declaration of the power of God.

*Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.
In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.
At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. [Exodus 15:6-8 ESV]*

Although there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in Exodus Chapter 15, it is clear from comparison with other Old Testament passages that Miriam's song was inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is clear evidence from other references to prophets that they were moved by the Holy Spirit and that music and dancing were involved. For example, Samuel prepared Saul, Israel's first king for an event which was going to happen when he would experience the presence of the Holy Spirit.

After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place

with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. [1 Samuel 10: 5-6 ESV]

Notice that there are several musical instruments mentioned - harp, tambourine, flute and lyre and notice that these instruments are associated with prophesying. The Spirit of the Lord is linked clearly to this activity as Saul is filled with the Spirit before he begins to prophesy. In 2 Samuel Chapter 6, we read of David dancing before the Lord when the symbol of God's presence, the Ark of the Lord returned to Jerusalem. He was responding in worship to what God has done.

So Miriam, the prophetess is associated with praise and worship and is displaying the presence of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, Miriam did not continue in such a high note. Her name means 'Rebellion' and she and her brother Aaron took the lead in a protest against her brother Moses when he married a Cushite. [Numbers 12:1-2] Not much is known about this second wife of Moses but Cush normally refers to ancient Ethiopia and there may have been racial prejudice involved. There was also a resentment against Moses and a challenge to his leadership and authority. Miriam came under divine discipline for her actions and she developed leprosy. Moses had to intercede to God on her behalf for her to be healed. This is a reminder to us how easy it is for us to wander from God's pathway for our lives. It is also a reminder for us to beware of the deadly effects of jealousy and also any form of racism.

Rahab: An Unlikely Deliverance Day Share 31/01/2021

Rahab was taking a great risk in letting these two men into her home. She was committing treason by helping the enemy and she was risking her life to help two strangers. She was nearly caught because the king of Jericho was informed that Rahab was hiding the spies in her house and so he sent messengers to check this out. Rahab told a lie - she said that they had been there but they had escaped from the city before it got dark. Meanwhile, the spies were hiding under bundles of flax in the roof of her house.

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. [Hebrews 11:31 ESV]

Rahab is described here as a prostitute. She lived in a house built within the walls of the city - this gives us an idea of the width and strength of these walls. She was also an inn-keeper and this may have been a cover for her engaging in the oldest profession of prostitution. There is no mention of a husband. She lived in a city which did not worship the God whom we worship - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Her city would have worshipped other gods which they had made for themselves. They would practise many things which were against the law of Moses. And yet this lady was spared and her life was saved when the Israelites destroyed the city.

So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. [Joshua 6:20 - 25 ESV]

This is a strange battle - no weapons are used. The Israelites march round the city every day for seven days and on the seventh day they march round seven times and then they shout really loudly and the walls come crashing down. Now Rahab's house was in the walls itself so she should have perished in the rubble but she had been rescued prior to this and, along with her family, she was taken to a safe place outside the camp of Israel. Her family are the only ones to survive the slaughter that day. In the next Day Share we will look at Rahab's faith and the works which were evidence of that faith. Today I want to just focus on the unlikeliness of her deliverance from a human point of view.

Let's imagine that we were having a wee chat to some people who lived in Jericho just before the arrival of Joshua and the Israelites. We were able to tell these people what was going to happen - we have the benefit of hindsight! We tell them that the walls are going to crash down - and they would look at us with disbelief. "Aye that'll be right! Have you seen these walls?" We then tell them that one person is going to survive and her family will survive with her. We would tell them that God of Israel was going to preserve one woman from the city. Do you think they would have guessed that Rahab would survive? I can imagine the reaction - did you not say that the walls were going to collapse? She lives in the walls - her house will be the first to go down. Anyway she does not deserve to survive - and then they would mention her occupation. People always speak derogatively about

prostitutes. They are not respectable, good-living citizens. "There are many others who deserve to live. Why her?"

This is us applying the logic that we hear in everyday conversations. We imagine that heaven will be filled with people who deserve to be there. This is the big mistake that we make. Rahab did not deserve to survive - I know that she was rewarded for her loyalty - but that would not go down well with people. She survived because she committed treason and she even told lies. Not only did Rahab survive - but she became an Israelite and worshipped the one true God. More than that she was the great, great grandmother of David and Jesus was his famous descendant. So Rahab's name appears on Jesus family tree - Matthew 1:5. Her husband was called Salmon and together they had a son called Obed who was the father of David's father called Jesse. And we know that Jesus was David's greater son.

Francine Rivers describes Rahab as "a woman with a past to who God gave a future" [Francine Rivers: Lineage of Grace]. I love that - God blots out our past with his salvation and gives us a glorious future. Francine Rivers imagines that Salmon was one of the spies who came to Rahab's house and that is how they came to be husband and wife. We do not know that for sure but it makes a good story and it may have been true. [You might think that there is something fishy about it!!!!] But seriously, Francine Rivers says that Salmon learned a lesson from his experience of observing God at work through Joshua. The lesson was that "God could write His name upon the heart of anyone He chose - even a Canaanite prostitute."

Rahab: Remarkable Faith Day Share 02/02/2021

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. [Hebrews 11:31 ESV]

Rahab's faith was remarkable. It all began with reports which she had heard. She had many visitors in her home and she heard many reports of this nation called Israel and its progress through the desert from Egypt to Canaan. She knew about them crossing the Red Sea on dry land. She knew that two kings of the Amorites had been killed. She makes a very strong statement of faith in the Lord - "*I know that the Lord has given this land to you.*" She has a clear idea of the power of God - "*He is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*" She tells them that people in the city are very afraid. *And as soon as we heard it [the report of the defeat and slaughter of the two Amorite kings], our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.* [Joshua 2: 11 ESV]

But Rahab is not acting out of panic or fear. She has a clear perception of God's power and she is prepared to trust her future to him. This is remarkable - because she was not brought up in a city which worshipped God. The Canaanites had their own gods but she is not trusting in any of her gods. She makes a deal with the men and they tell her that she will be spared when the city is attacked and destroyed. She asks the men to swear by the Lord that they will spare the lives of her family and save them from death. The deal is "our lives for yours." They promise that if she helps them to escape and does not inform the authorities about their whereabouts, they will make sure that she and her family are kept safe when they conquer the city. She lets them down by a rope in the window. There was a visible sign of the covenant that had been made. The two spies instructed Rahab to hang a scarlet cord from her window and this would be the sign that would guarantee her safety and protection.

So after the spies have left her, Rahab was only left with a scarlet cord hanging from a window and a promise made by a stranger. Rahab's faith was truly remarkable. Here is a quotation from Francine Rivers on the subject of Rahab's faith as seen from the perspective of the two spies who had met her.

'Out there in the darkness, across the Jordan inside the wall of a pagan city was a woman of contemptible reputation who'd never seen a miracle, tasted a bite of manna (the food from heaven which kept the Israelites alive every day they had travelled across the desert), or heard a single word from the Law. And yet her faith was strong enough that she had greeted, welcomed and protected those who were coming to destroy her and her people. "The Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below," she had declared.' [Francine Rivers: Lineage of Grace]

James the writer of the New Testament letter which bears his name, has a reference to this lady from Jericho as evidence for his argument that faith without works is dead.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [James 2:24-25 ESV]

James's argument is that it was clear from her actions that Rahab had faith in God. She was trusting a God whom she had only recently heard about and she was an outsider looking at the God of the enemy who were about to destroy her own city. She believed the reports that she had heard and she realised that the God of the Israelites was powerful - her own gods of wood and stone or metal

were hopeless compared to the Omnipotent One. Her treatment of the spies is evidence of her belief in their God. She was taking a huge risk. She was committing her life into their hands. She was trusting in the promises made by a spy whom she had only recently met. She was depending on the symbol of the scarlet cord as the promise that the promises would be fulfilled.

Some people claim that there is a contradiction between some books of the New Testament. For example, they argue that the letter to the Hebrews emphasises that faith is essential in the Christian pathway. James, on the other hand, seems to place more emphasis on works - our conduct and our behaviour as a Christian. The answer is that both are essential. We will never please God by our good works but our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross is demonstrated by our deeds. In other words, people should see some proof of our faith in the way we live our life. Rahab clearly demonstrated her faith. Anybody can say they believe and have faith. But genuine faith will be seen in our works - what we do and how we behave.

It was because of her faith that Rahab was delivered from the destruction of the city of Jericho. Other people in that city were trusting in the strength of their walls. She put her faith and trust in the one true God. We need to learn lessons from the remarkable faith of this woman from the city of Jericho.

The Time of the Judges Day Share 04/02/2021

In the next two Day Shares I want to focus briefly on a very bleak time in the history of Israel - the period of the Judges. In the last Day Share, we got a brief glimpse of the nation of Israel under their leader Joshua at the conquest of the city of Jericho. With God's help, this city was wiped out (and Rahab and her family were saved) and the people went on to conquer the land of Canaan. So the book of Joshua is largely a story of victory. But the next book in the Bible (Judges) tells a very sad story of repeated failure on the part of the nation.

The time of the Judges is the name given to a period of 350 years from the death of Joshua to the appointment of Israel's first king. During those three and a half centuries Israel did not have a king. This was because God was their ruler. So Israel's ruler was invisible but He was very real. The other nations around them had kings but Israel had none. There were a number of judges appointed and their role was to represent God and to remind the people of their obligation to serve the Lord (Jehovah). These judges were acting on behalf of Jehovah. They were representing Him to the people. Very often they were raised up by God to deliver the people from the mess that they were in and to rescue them from their enemies.

If only. This was a great opportunity for the nation to be ruled by God Himself. Unlike many of the kings of the other nations, Jehovah is righteous and holy. He is not corrupt. He is not in the business of government to benefit Himself. He does not need anything. He is totally self-sufficient. Kings tended to be very selfish and very often exploited the people for their benefit and advantage. So the fact that this experiment in the rule of the nation by God - the Theocracy - was unsuccessful was not because of any weakness in the ruler. The blame for the failure was on the people. They were sinful. They were weak. They were selfish. They did not learn lessons which God was teaching them. The nation of Israel had first-hand experience of the amazing deeds which the Lord had done in delivering them from Egypt. If only they had trusted fully in God, they could have experienced amazing spiritual victories.

Why was the period of the Judges such a time of failure for the Israelites?

- The first verse of the Book of Judges reads like this: After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, "Which of our tribes should attack the Canaanites first?" [Joshua 1:1 CEV] Each of the 12 tribes had been allocated a portion of the land of Canaan as their inheritance. Under Joshua many enemies that lived in the land had been defeated and there was a period of victory. But it was necessary for each tribe to move into its appointed area and dwell there.
- The Book of Judges shows the failure of God's people to press into the inheritance that God has for them. Even worse, they did not manage to hold on to what had already been conquered. This is a warning of what can happen to us spiritually if we fail to go on trusting completely in God.
- We can also be like the 12 tribes of Israel away back in the Judges. They did not really see the other nations with all their evil practices as their enemy and began to compromise with them. Because of their disobedience and lack of faith, they did not enter into the inheritance God had prepared for them. We are warned not to love the world - it will only bring us spiritual ruin [1 John 2: 15-17]. We try to have the best of both worlds - to be a Christian but to continue to be popular with the world
- Christians have an inheritance in Christ that is to be grasped and possessed by faith. [1 Peter 1:3-4] Peter tells the Christians, who have lost their homes and are fleeing persecution, about the inheritance that is waiting for them in heaven, but we can begin to appreciate this inheritance here and now [See Ephesians 1: 11 which speaks about our inheritance but the chapter also talks about blessings we can enjoy just now - e.g. redemption through his blood, forgiveness of our trespasses, (verse 7) ; the Holy Spirit (verse 13).
- The nation of Israel did not really want to be ruled by God. They did not love Him as they

should have done. They wanted to be the same as the nations around them.

- The problem is clearly summed up in this verse from Judges 2:18-19 Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. [Judges 2: 18-10 ESV] Sometimes the people repented as a result of the work of one of the Judges - but the improvement did not last and soon the people were just as bad as they had been before.

There is much more could be said on the lessons we could learn from the book of Judges. This was intended mainly as an introduction to the next Day Share. Are we living in a day that is similar to the times of the Judges? Are we failing to experience all the inheritance that God has for us - the many blessings he is longing for us to enjoy to the full if we are prepared to trust him fully and to obey His commands?

Deborah: Prophetess and Judge Day Share 06/02/2021

Read Judges Chapter 4 and 5.

Most judges were men - maybe largely because they were expected to be warriors as well as judges. In fact, Deborah is the only female judge recorded in the Bible. She was also a prophet - and that was a male dominated profession too. Why did God choose Deborah to do this important work for him? The answer becomes clear when we read these two chapters. The men at that time were not doing the work which God had called them to do. There was a clear failure of leadership among the men. So God does not hesitate to use a woman to serve Him in this capacity as His representative to a nation that had turned its back on him.

Bleak Times

The first three verses of Judges Chapter 4 highlights the situation when Deborah comes on to the pages of Israel's history.

- People of Israel doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord after the death of the last judge - a man named Ehud.
- The Lord is displeased - He allows a king of Canaan by the name of Jabin to rule over the people of Israel.
- The commander of Jabin's army is a man named Sisera who was cruel and ruthless. He oppressed the people of Israel for 20 years.
- Sisera had 900 iron chariots - the ancient equivalent of tanks. These would be deadly in an attack on infantry.
- The people cried out to the Lord for help. They were poorly armed - they were almost without weapons compared to the heavily armed Canaanites. In Judges Chapter 5 we read about the scarcity of weapons in Israel - hardly a shield or a spear among 40,000 in Israel [Judges 5:8]

What was Deborah's role?

Deborah was described as a prophetess and also a judge. Here is a description of her in action as a judge - in the sense that we understand the word.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. [Judges 4:4-5 ESV]

She was the person to go to when there was a dispute to be settled. She had an office - it was outdoors but it was clearly identifiable as the place to go to find her - the palm tree even bore her name. She is described as a 'mother in Israel' (Judges 5:7) - that was a neat way to describe her caring role for God's people. She has another role in these two chapters. She is a prophetess - giving God's message to the people. In chapter 4 she speaks with a degree of authority as the mouthpiece of God. When she is speaking to Barak, she uses terms such as these - *"I will draw out Sisera;" "I will give him into your hand."* [Judges 4:7] She is careful to acknowledge God as the supreme powerful one. She acknowledged that it was God who would defeat Sisera [See Judges 4: the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman - Barak might have thought that this was referring to Deborah herself - but this was predicting the role of a woman in the death of Sisera - but it was all according to God's plan] When she is encouraging the reluctant Barak to attack Sisera, she tells him - *"this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand."* [Judges 4:14 ESV] She adds, *"Does not the Lord go out before you?"*

She is a strong leader who inspires the people to attack Sisera, even though the odds are humanly speaking stacked against them. She does not doubt that Sisera will be defeated.

Here are Deborah's words of worship to God recorded as part of Deborah's song in Judges 5
Lord, when you went out from Seir,

*when you marched from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled
and the heavens dropped,
yes, the clouds dropped water.*

*The mountains quaked before the Lord,
even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel [Judges 5: 4-5 ESV]*

Chapter 5 is really Deborah's song which she sings along with Barak. She is like Miriam (Day Share 29/01/2021) - a worship leader. There is no mention of musical instruments with Deborah although that does not mean that they were not used.

Failure of men to take leadership. Deborah is married but we know nothing about her husband apart from his name - Lappidoth. There is no record of him saying anything or doing anything. He seems to have been like Dennis Thatcher - quite happy to leave it all to his wife and let her make a name for herself. There was another man who was not acting as a leader. His name was Barak. Deborah summons Barak to come to her and she says to him, *"Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded you to gather your men at Mount Tabor."* She tells him to take 10,000 men and to attack the enemy - this man Sisera with his chariots. The narrative shows Barak to be a coward and a wimp. He is not too keen to lead this army. He needs a great deal of persuasion. He will only take up this challenge if Deborah goes with him - and Deborah tries to shame him - this will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman. Barak might have taken this to mean that Deborah will be the warrior and the leader of Israel's army but we discover further down the chapter that God had another woman who was used in a powerful way to kill Sisera. Barak does follow Deborah's advice and there is a great defeat of the enemy. We are not given details of how this was achieved - it may be that the chariots were of little use in the rough hilly terrain. The writer makes it clear that it was the Lord who *"routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword."* - this is interesting given the scarcity of swords in Israel. When God is involved, the statistics do not matter.

Most people reading chapter 4 of the Book of Judges will be left with a vivid picture of the death of this cruel man, Sisera. He abandons his chariot - maybe he was discovering that it was not as useful as he had thought. He flees away on foot and takes refuge in the tent of an ally - a man name Heber the Kenite. This Heber had made a peace treaty with the Jabin, the king of Hazor. So Sisera is sure that he will be safe in this tent. He did not reckon on Heber's wife, a woman named Jael. She is so helpful to the fleeing commander. She invites Sisera into the tent and covers him with a rug. She tries to calm him by telling him not to be afraid. He asks her for water and she gave him milk instead. He asked her to act as lookout in case he was being followed by the Israelites. Sisera falls asleep and Jael calmly takes a tent peg and a hammer and hammers the tent peg into the man's temple. This may seem brutal and violent. Before we get too sympathetic for Sisera, I would like to point to one verse in Deborah's song where it refers to Sisera's mother wondering why her son was taking so long to return from the battle. She and her princesses assume that Sisera will have been successful and he will be busy dividing up the booty or the plunder. He will be getting hold of specially embroidered materials as spoil of war. [Judges 5:30] There is another horrifying reference in this verse - "a womb or two for every man." Notice the callous way this woman refers to other women as "wombs." She is depersonalising them. She is speaking about them as objects. This is how many women have been treated throughout history - as objects to satisfy men's lusts. The footnote in the NET Bible suggests that Sisera's mother is using obscene language alluding to the sexual brutality which was expected after a battle. It was customary for the victorious soldiers to celebrate their victory by raping young girls of the defeated people.

However, it is important that we take the main point of this recorded incident in God's word. God uses women powerfully to accomplish his will - especially when the men are lacking in commitment and leadership. God used two women - one named Deborah to act as leader to shame and inspire a cowardly man to lead an army against the enemy. The other named Jael who was prepared to do what her husband would not have done - to execute a ruthless enemy who was out to harm God's people.

There are lessons for men and women in this chapter

Men - are we prepared to serve God in the way he wants us to or are we too afraid or too comfortable?

Women - are you prepared to follow God and to serve Him in whatever way God intends you to do - not for your glory but always giving the glory to God?

All of us - we need to have the faith and courage of a Deborah - 'a mother in Israel.'

Elimelech: A Foolish Decision Day Share 08/02/2021



In July 2008 Janie and I took our motorhome to Iceland (on a ferry from the North of Scotland) and travelled round the east of the island. There was greenery and vegetation on the lower levels but as we climbed higher the terrain was very rocky and barren. As we were climbing one day, we found some alpine flowers growing in an unexpected place. The book of Ruth is like these flowers. It is a story with a happy ending in a bleak and barren period of Israel's history. The book is set at the time of the book of Judges. The book does not start on a happy note.

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. [Ruth 1:1-5 ESV]

- The time of the Judges is a time when the nation kept disobeying God and suffered the consequences of their actions. It is a time of lawlessness and rebellion. It is a sad time of repeated sin and failure.
- This famine was symptomatic of a time when the people have turned their back on God.
- Elimelech from Bethlehem makes a decision to leave the promised land and try his luck in the land of Moab on the other side of the Dead Sea from Judah. He is leaving the town whose name means 'House of bread / food' and he is going to be staying in the territory of Israel's enemy - the Moabites [Numbers 22:1 - 25:9]
- Elimelech takes his wife with him and also two sons. The meaning of their names is interesting. Elimelech means "my God is king" so you would have thought that he understood about the power of God to deal with the famine. One son was named Mahlon which means "sick" or "sickly." Maybe he was sick at the time of his birth but his name was an accurate prediction of his future. He was the son who married Ruth. The other son named Chilion was married to Orpah and his name means "pining" or "sickly" - again maybe a reference to poor health in his infancy - maybe this child cried a lot.
- Tragedy struck in the land of Moab. Elimelech is the first to die and this leaves his wife Naomi without a husband. Then Mahlon marries Ruth a girl from Moab and Chilion marries Orpah also from Moab. They should not have been marrying foreign girls although this was not strictly forbidden under the law. Because the Moabites followed other gods, this was not seen as a desirable. [See Deuteronomy 23:3-6 and Ezra 9:1-2] But the marriages did not last long - both sons died from circumstances about which we are not told.
- So the three women are left without husbands and this is serious because it seems unlikely that the family name will continue and there will be no heirs.

What lessons can we learn from this story. I am reminded of my great grandfather who had a sudden urge to emigrate from Ireland to Philadelphia and then he instructed his wife and two young children to join him across the Atlantic. This was a mistake and the family had to return a year or two later with another baby but poorer off than they had been when they left Ballymoney. He was not a Christian and with the benefit of hindsight we can see that he had made a big mistake - he thought that this move would bring the family prosperity but he was wrong. This decision had a big impact on his wife especially who had to follow him out there even though she might well have been opposed to the decision.

As Christians, we need to be sure of God's will in our lives. We need to pray to the Lord for guidance before taking such steps. It is not easy to find out what God's will is for our lives but we must seek it

and pray for clear guidance before making such decisions. There is always the temptation to think that the grass is greener in another field.

By the way, the story does not end in tragedy because our God can bring good from a bad situation. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers many years later after they had sold him as a slave. Joseph told his brothers, "*As for you, you meant evil against me, But God meant it for good etc.*" [Genesis 50:20 ESV] God had a plan for Naomi and Ruth and his plan was implemented fully in God's time.

Ruth: Loyalty to her Mother-in-law Day Share 10/02/2021

Read Chapter 1 of Ruth - especially verses 6 to 18.

Naomi had a very close relationship with her two daughters-in-law. Both Orpah and Ruth seemed to have a real genuine affection for Naomi. While she was working in the fields of Moab, Naomi heard a report that things were much better back home in the land she had left with her husband many years before. Elimelech and Naomi had left Bethlehem in Judah because of famine and made their way to the other side of the Dead Sea to the land of Moab. Now, Naomi hears a rumour that there has been rain and they are expecting a good harvest this year. So she makes the decision to go back home. We can easily understand Naomi's decision. She may have been homesick living in Moab - it was not her homeland and they worshipped false gods. It is more surprising that Orpah and Ruth decide to go with her. There is nothing in it for them. From chapter 2 we learn that Ruth was leaving a father and a mother and her native land to make her way to an unknown land and an uncertain future. [See Ruth 2:11] There is no mention of Orpah's father but we know that she had a mother still alive. Both girls were taking a huge step into the unknown with a woman who was not related to them - she was the mother of their deceased husbands.

In those days, a big priority for a young girl was to find a husband and to have children. They had none it would appear from their marriages to Mahlon and Chilion. They were unlikely to get a husband from Naomi as she pointed out to them, "Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands." (Ruth 1:11) She is making a very valid point which fits in with the cultural norms of the time. There is no mention of the possibility of them finding a husband in Bethlehem or in the wider area of Judah. The Israelites were not supposed to marry foreigners and the Moabitesses would not be seen as suitable partners for young Israelite men.

Naomi addresses her daughters-in-law and makes a strong argument for them turning back home. It is interesting that she suggests that they return to their mothers. This was probably because it was the mother's duty to find a husband for her daughter. This is primarily Naomi's concern - these girls are missing out on child-bearing and the journey away from their homeland is preventing their mothers from seeing them married again. Naomi gives them credit for being good wives to her two sons - she says, "May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead (referring to their dead husbands, Mahlon and Chilion) and with me." (Ruth 1:8) She is also saying that they have been good to her as a mother-in-law. She wants to make sure that they find a husband. Naomi goes from addressing them as 'daughters-in-law' to 'daughters.' This is a lovely touch. Janie and I have only one daughter-in-law but we often feel that she is more like a daughter to us because we have such a good relationship with her. She has her own mother and father and we have our own two daughters - but it is lovely to have a special bond with your daughter-in-law. My mother died away back in 1997 but Janie was very close to her mother-in-law and still speaks fondly of her memories of my mother.

Orpah listens to Naomi and takes her mother-in-law's advice and with deep sadness and regret she parts company with her and makes her way back home. She decides to return home - this is a keyword in this chapter. The Hebrew word 'shub' is used over and over again in this chapter - sometimes it is translated as 'turn back' or 'go back' or 'bring back' (Verses 6,7,8,10,11,12,15 (twice), 16,21,22 (twice)). This is the big decision both girls have to make - to go with Naomi or to return home to their own family and their homeland. What about Ruth? Will she take her lead from her sister-in-law and follow the advice given by her mother-in-law?

No. Ruth makes a firm decision to accompany her mother-in-law, Naomi on her journey to Bethlehem. The speech she makes is poetic and powerful. It shows real commitment and genuine affection for her mother-in-law. It shows an amazing faith on the part of this young girl to leave her home and go with Naomi to a strange land.

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." [Ruth 1: 16-17 ESV]

Naomi got the message and accepted Ruth's decision. I feel that to comment on these verses would undermine their impact. I have read verses 16 and 17 many times over the years in various translations - especially the King James Version. I always get a thrill from reading them. Ruth is showing her loyalty not only to Naomi but to Naomi's God - she was a Moabitess who did not

worship God - she had been brought up to worship other gods such as Molech. She was embracing the God of her mother-in-law. This was because the character and conduct of Naomi had made a deep impact on Ruth. We can make a positive impact on our relatives who do not know God - not so much by our talk as by our walk.

Naomi: Bitterness or Sweetness Day Share 12/02/2021

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" [Ruth 1:19-21 ESV]

Names in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament are very significant. God often teaches us lessons from the names given to Bible characters. Sometimes God gives a person another name to indicate that there is a change of circumstance. One example of this is Jacob. His name means 'supplanter' and the origin of this name is interesting. The Hebrew word Ya`acob which comes from a word which means 'heel catcher.' This refers to the circumstances of Jacob's birth. He was the second twin to be born and he grabbed hold of his brother Esau's heel as if to hold him back from being born first. This was indicative of a strong characteristic in Jacob's nature - he was cunning and determined and he cheated on his brother and got Esau to hand over his birthright (i.e. the status of first-born son) to him. He also cheated his brother out of his father's blessing. However, Jacob had a personal experience with God (See Genesis 32:22-32) and his name was changed - he was no longer the cheat or the supplanter (someone who displaces another by deceit) and he took the name Israel which means 'he will rule as God.' So Jacob's descendants take this name too - they are the Israelites (recognising the rule and authority of God).

You might be wondering where this is leading. What has this to do with Naomi? She was changing her name on her own initiative as an emotional response to her situation. She did not want to be known as Naomi which means 'pleasant' but wanted to be known as Mara which means 'bitter.' She is feeling low. She is recalling her bitter experiences as she is returning to the town which she left with her husband many years earlier. The local people have come out to meet her and this reinforces the sadness which she is experiencing. She is acutely aware of the dramatic difference from how she was when she left and how she is as she returned. She left with a husband and two sons and they have all tragically died in the land of Moab. "I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty." She is recognising that God has been dealing with her in judgement. The Lord has 'testified against me' and 'the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.' Maybe this is how you are feeling today. You feel really low and you are blaming God. You cannot see a future. The name Marah has a hint of anger and discontent. We have all been there - we are down and we are deeply resentful of our circumstances.

But this name change was not permanent. She was still called Naomi and the name refers to her character rather than her physical appearance - it means 'pleasantness' or 'beauty' or 'grace' or 'splendour.' She was going through a bitter experience but this did not change her relationship with God. He would demonstrate his *heced* or loving kindness towards her and his providence. He had not abandoned her.

This is a word of comfort to us today. God has not abandoned you. Your circumstances may have been hard and you may feel bitter but the lesson from this lovely Old Testament lady is that better times are coming. God has not forsaken you and his relationship does not depend on your feelings. He still shows his loving kindness and this is not changeable like our emotions. It is steadfast and everlasting. Our God does not change.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [James 1: 17 ESV]

Our relationship with the Father of lights is not one at the mercy of a whim. Many false religions have gods who are very changeable and unreliable. They hope that their god will be in a good mood and will excuse their sinful behaviour. Notice that God is the giver of good gifts and perfect gifts. He is gracious and kind. He is a giving God. I feel a hymn coming on - another old one.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labours increase,
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men,
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

There is a video of Anne Smith playing this hymn on the Day Share website dayshare.co.uk.

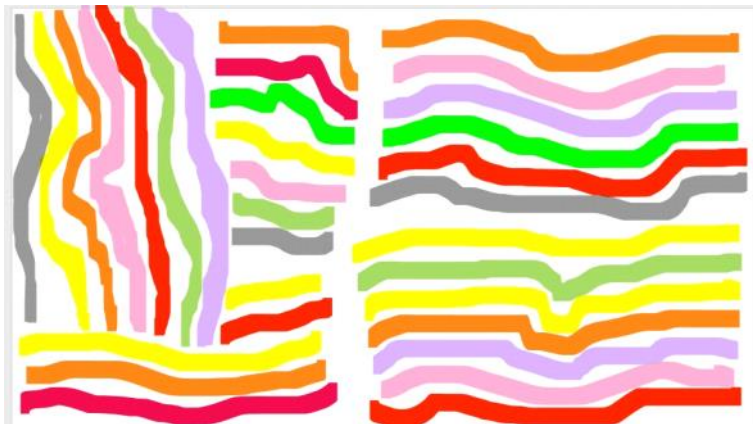
Ruth; God's Providence Day Share 14/02/2021

One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields so I can gather grain behind whoever permits me to do so." Naomi replied, "You may go, my daughter." So Ruth went and gathered grain in the fields behind the harvesters. **Now she just happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz**, who was from the clan of Elimelech.

Ruth 2:2-3 NET

<https://bible.com/bible/107/rut.2.2-3.NET>

The story is being told from Ruth's perspective. She has recently arrived in Bethlehem and so she does not know her way about the village. She does not know anyone either apart from her mother-in-law. But Ruth knows that the situation is desperate. They must find food in order to survive. So Ruth takes the initiative and tells her mother-in-law that she is going out in search of food. And it seems like a coincidence that she just happens to go to the field belonging to Naomi's dead husband's relative - who will play a big role in the unfolding drama. What are the chances of that? Notice that it says that she just happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz. Fields were split up into sections and a landowner such as Boaz might have one or more of these sections and other farmers would own adjacent portions right across the field. There would likely be several such fields all sub-divided into sections. I used to tell schoolchildren about the old system of farming in Scotland known as the Runrig System and it was a similar idea to this. I used to draw a diagram on the blackboard to illustrate the system. This was when fields were not enclosed as we know it with fences or hedges. Here is a diagram to illustrate the way land would probably have been divided. The different colours represent the plots of ground belonging to different landholders.



I have made up a key to help understand the above diagram with some names attached - the names are fictitious - apart from Boaz.

Bethlehem's Land Holdings

Key: Land belonging to

<u>Malchi-shua</u>	
Eliab	
<u>Ahitub</u>	
<u>Doeg</u>	
Abner	
<u>Shephatiah</u>	
Boaz	

This diagram is designed to illustrate the unlikelihood of Ruth finding the strips of land belonging to her deceased father-in-law's relative. She just happened to go to that strip of land and it belonged

to Boaz, the relative of Elimelech, the deceased father of her deceased husband Mahlon. By the way, I have absolutely no idea how many landholdings there were - it is possible that there were far more than are represented in this diagram. If there were very few landowners portions in the field and say only one field, there would be no sense in the words highlighted in red - 'she just happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz.'

And Boaz just happened to come along at this time to see Ruth working in his section of the field. Ruth is following after the reapers who are cutting the barley and tying it into sheaves and she is allowed to pick up pieces that have fallen from the sheaves of barley. Boaz enquires who is this young lady who is gathering up the left-overs in his field and the overseer tells him Ruth's story. Boaz comes over as a very kind person - firstly in the way he addresses his workers (Ruth 2: 4] and secondly in the way he addresses Ruth. He could have told her to get out of his field and to go elsewhere but if he had done that he would have been disobeying God. God had made provision for poor people to do what Ruth was doing. Here is what the law of Moses said about looking after the poor.

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God." [Leviticus 23:22 ESV]

God was making provision for those who were in need. There were several groups identified who were considered at risk and needed extra protection. Two of them are mentioned in this verse but there are other categories in other parts of the Old Testament law. They were landless people and would not have the ability to grow their own crops.

- The poor - this is the catch-all word to identify those in need
- The sojourners - or foreigners. Those who did not belong to Israel because they would not be in possession of land to grow crops
- The widows - those who do not have a man to help them to work in the fields to grow crops. [Deuteronomy 24:19]
- The fatherless - those who had been left orphaned by the death of the breadwinner in the family [Deuteronomy 24:19]

Naomi came into two of these categories - she was a widow and she was poor. Ruth was in three of these categories - she was a foreigner, a widow and she was poor.

God did not want His people to be greedy. He wanted them to take care of those who were in need. So Ruth was entitled to do what she is doing. There is a word which is repeated over and over again in chapter 2 of the book of Ruth. It is the word 'glean' which means to pick up the grain (stocks of barley) left behind by the harvest workers. [The word glean appears in the following verses - verse 2, 3, 7, 8, 15 (twice), 16, 17 (twice), 18, 19, 23. - a total of 12 times.] This is key to understanding what is happening. Ruth and Naomi have no way of obtaining food. But God had provided for poor people to prevent them from going hungry. Verse 17 tells us that she gleaned or walked around behind the reapers picking up the leftovers and she gathered what is described as an ephah of barley. There are various estimates about the amount of barley this would be - probably between 4.5 gallons and 8.7 gallons. This would be as much as a single woman could carry without an animal. It was sufficient for her and Naomi to live on.



This picture shows female harvesters - it would appear to have been male and female reapers in the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

There is a higher hand at work in this situation. It says that Ruth happened to arrive at the section of the field belonging to Boaz. But God was directing her paths with her welfare in mind. She might have been mistreated and abused by the male harvesters but she was preserved. She might have been turned away by the owner but Boaz was only too eager to help her. This was not coincidence - it was God-incidence - a chain of events apparently random but controlled by the all-powerful Jehovah Jireh - the God who provides for His people.

Ruth: Foreigner made Welcome Day Share 16/02/2021

Ruth came back to Bethlehem in Judah with her mother-in-law but Naomi was simply coming back home to her own country, her own people and her own village. But things were very different for Ruth, the Moabitess. She was a foreigner - a stranger in the land of Judah. She was an immigrant from the land of Moab. The founder of this nation was born as a result of incest; he was the son of Lot and his eldest daughter [Genesis 19:30-38] The Moabites had a national god called Chemosh [See Numbers 21:29] and their worship might have included child sacrifice [2 Kings 3:27] The nation of Moab was condemned for its arrogance, pride and complacency [Jeremiah 48] and is threatened with judgement.

In the last Day Share we saw that God's provision for the poor and needy included the class described in one translation as 'sojourners' or foreigners. So God made sure that these resident foreigners were provided with food by making a law to provide for them the left-over grain or grapes after the harvest. This was spelled out in detail to avoid over-harvesting of the crops. For example, farmers were not to reap all the grain in the corners of the field. And it was stated that if they had inadvertently left a sheaf in a field, they were to leave it there for the foreigner and the poor and the orphan. [Deuteronomy 24:19]

But Boaz did not show even the slightest prejudice against Ruth, the foreign girl. Throughout history, there has always been a prejudice against immigrants. For example, after the potato famine in 1846 many Irish Catholics left their native land and crossed 'the sheugh' (the popular name for the Irish Sea) to come to Scotland. I have read the original records of the poor relief administration in the Ayrshire town of Kilbirnie, and there was a definite prejudice against the Irish incomers. They were considered to be 'spongers' who were seeking poor relief at the expense of the local Scottish population (who were mainly protestant). Very often, they were given the minimum relief and instructed to leave the area as soon as possible. Many of them then moved on to Glasgow or Paisley. The same Irish found it hard to find work in the city of Glasgow. They tended to live in the poorest housing in the city. But Boaz does not treat the girl from Moab badly even though she was not from his own people.

Boaz went far beyond the Old Testament law in what he did for Ruth.

- He encourages her to 'glean' (gather up the leftover stalks of barley) in his field
- He offers her protection - he commands the young men not to touch her.
- He offers her refreshment - he allows her to drink from the water the young men had drawn from the well.
- He offers her nourishment - roasted grain and wine. She ate until she was satisfied.
- She was allowed to 'glean' even among the sheaves and he commanded the young men to pull out stocks from the bundles for her to gather.
- She had an ephah of barley - 5,5 gallons (22 litres) which was not bad for a day's work

Here is the key verse to help us to understand the significance of this act of kindness.

And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" [Ruth 2:20 ESV]

Naomi is discussing the day's events with her daughter-in-law, Ruth and Ruth tells her that the man who took notice of her was called Boaz. Naomi then calls a blessing on Boaz for his kindness towards the two widows and she also refers to the loss of their two husbands. I have highlighted the words 'whose kindness' because it is not clear whether this refers to the Lord who is showing kindness or to Boaz. This ambiguity may be intentional - Boaz is portrayed as God's representative displaying the character of God. Naomi shows spiritual insight and observes that Boaz is demonstrating God's kindness towards her daughter-in-law.

We have spoken about this word several times in other Day Shares. It is the Hebrew word *cheded*. It is translated as loving-kindness, steadfast love, grace, mercy faithfulness etc. [See Day Share 21/04/2020]. It has been described as "the Divine Love condescending to His creatures, more especially sinners, in unmerited kindness." It is used in this situation where Ruth and Naomi are the weaker party seeking protection and blessing from the patron and protector Boaz who shows loving-kindness in his actions. Ruth and Naomi cannot insist that Boaz treats them in this way - it is undeserved.

Ruth is a picture of us. We are foreigners or aliens (See Ephesians 2:12 where we are described as 'alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise.') We cannot insist on our rights because we have none - but God lavishes blessing upon blessing on us because he treats us with loving-kindness and grace. Boaz is a picture or type of Christ the Redeemer. We will see more about this in the next Day Share.

Ruth and Boaz Day Share 18/02/2021

Read Chapter 3 of the Book of Ruth.

This might seem a very strange story described in this chapter. We read this story through the lens of our 21st century world and find it hard to fathom. Is Ruth not acting improperly in throwing herself at an older man. Maybe you are thinking that there is something obscene about Ruth's actions. You might find it strange that this wealthy man is sleeping on an open threshing floor at the end of a heap of grain. Why was he not sleeping in a bed in his house? What is a young girl doing creeping around at night and lying at the feet of her wealthy boss?

We need to explain one or two ancient Hebrew customs to make sense of the incident and to help us to understand the significance of what is happening.

Finding rest in the house of a husband. At the beginning of chapter 3, Naomi addresses Ruth as her daughter and says something that sounds strange to us. Here is what she says in a modern translation, "My daughter, I must find a home for you so you will be secure." Here is the literal translation of the Hebrew words - "My daughter, should I not seek for you a resting place so that it may go well for you?" A woman needed the protection and security from marriage in the lawless days of the Judges. Ruth was especially vulnerable - she was a widow and she was at risk of being sexually abused or exploited. She was also at risk of becoming a slave and losing her freedom - at the mercy of a man who would treat her badly. She needed a husband to be protected from hunger and poverty. So Naomi uses a Hebrew word - *menuchah* which is translated as rest. This is not the idea of having a rest after a hard day at work - it is the idea of safe shelter. This was what Naomi wanted for Ruth. She sees that Boaz is the person to provide this - even though he is considerably older than Ruth and would be more suitable as a husband for Naomi herself. She has observed how Boaz has treated Ruth and has protected her and provided for her while she was gleaning in his fields. So he is the ideal husband for Ruth. This seems alien to us - we place a lot of emphasis on physical attractiveness and there is no mention of this. We also are critical of a young girl who marries an older man who is wealthy. We must understand that this is a very different society with different values.

The Kinsman Redeemer. Naomi's dead husband had been a landowner. He had probably sold his land before leaving for Moab - to provide food for his family or to pay off debts. He had died away in a foreign land and that left Naomi in a weak financial position. There was a law in the Old Testament to deal with this situation. It is described in two passages of the Bible - Leviticus 25: 25-28; Deuteronomy 25: 5-10. The brother or close relative of the dead man (in this case, Elimelech) was expected to redeem his brother's inheritance - that is, to buy back the land that had been sold. Ruth's actions have to be interpreted in this light - she was seeking the protection of Boaz and requesting that he act as a Kinsman Redeemer on her behalf. The other relevant duty of the Kinsman Redeemer was to marry his brother's wife (in this case it was his relative's daughter-in-law) and have children to secure the inheritance. This was so that there would be a male heir to carry on the family line and own the land. Boaz clearly understood what he was being asked to do (Ruth 3: 9-13) and he was prepared to carry this out - but he pointed out that there was a closer relative who had a prior claim to be Kinsman Redeemer. Chapter 4 describes how Boaz got in touch with this man and gave him the opportunity to carry out the two tasks - but this unnamed man was agreeable to buying back the land but he refused to marry Ruth. He explains that he was unable to carry this out - in case he impaired his own inheritance. Sidlow Baxter suggests that the reason for his refusal was that he knew the family history and he saw the deaths of Mahlon and Chilion as punishment from God for marrying Moabite women. So he judges that this marriage to Ruth would be doomed to failure - he would not produce an heir from the marriage.

Boaz does, however, marry Ruth - so the story has a happy ending. More than that - despite his advancing years, Ruth has a son named Obed who in turn has a son named Jesse who becomes the father of King David. Jesus was a 'son of David' - He was a descendant from David's line. We find Ruth's name mentioned in the family tree of Jesus in Matthew 1:5-6.

There are only two books in the Bible named after women - and this is one of them. This is remarkable because Ruth was a young woman from Moab. She was from a foreign nation who worshiped the god Chemosh and practised child sacrifice. But God is gracious - he chooses this young girl with a doubtful pedigree to become the great, grandmother of our Lord.

I want to finish by quoting some verses from almost the end of the book of Ruth. They show how the situation had been reversed for the lady who called herself Mara - 'bitterness' instead of her real name, Naomi (which means 'sweetness.'). She was first in line to marry Boaz and was nearer his age but she had stepped aside for the younger girl, her daughter-in-law Ruth. The book of Ruth is a love story - but mainly because of the deep love and affection between a woman and her daughter-in-law.

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. [Ruth 4: 14-17 ESV]

Eli: Blind leading the Blind Day Share 20/02/2021

The next book in the Bible after the book of Ruth is the book called 1st Samuel and its primary purpose is to describe how Israel moved from being a theocracy - (a country ruled by God with judges acting on God's behalf) to becoming a monarchy (a country ruled by a king.) We will spend a considerable number of Day Shares looking at Israel's second king and the failure of his predecessor, Saul the first king of Israel. Of course, we have studied a number of Psalms which David wrote and they also provide some insight into the nature and personality of this man. All that is in the future, God Willing.

Before we study the next Bible woman called Hannah, the mother of Samuel, I want to spend one Day Share thinking about an old man called Eli. He was a priest at the tent of meeting or tabernacle which had been pitched at a place called Shiloh. He encounters Hannah and totally misjudges her and mishandles the situation.

There are three priests mentioned at Shiloh - Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas. Eli is an old man and his eyesight is poor. His two sons are evil and he is apparently oblivious to their conduct. He is powerless to change their behaviour. What were they doing? They are described as worthless men who did not know the Lord. They were acting as God's representatives but they did not know Him. In short, they were abusing their position as priests for their own selfish ends. Firstly, with regard to food. A large part of the priests job related to sacrificing animals on God's altar. There were extensive regulations about how animals were to be offered and it was perfectly proper for those handling the offering to be given their share of the animal. The Levites - the tribe of the priests had no land because it was expected that they would be given a share of the food which was being offered to God. However, there were specific regulations to avoid greed and excess. For example, when an ox or a sheep was being sacrificed, the priests were to receive the shoulder, the jaws and the stomach. [Deuteronomy 18: 3] In other words, the priest was being given enough to live on while at the same time the bulk of the animal was being burnt on the altar and offered to God.

By the time of Hophni and Phinehas, there were some strange practices going on. We read of the animals being boiled in a large pot. Then the two men sent their servants over to commandeer their share. He had a large three-pronged fork which he sunk into the pot and whatever came out on the fork was taken back to the priests for their dinner. This was not enough, however. They decided that they wanted the meat raw so that they could roast it themselves. This presented a problem for some people who were bringing their offering to God. They knew that it was stated that the fat of the animal had to be used as a burnt offering to God. This did not please Hophni and Phinehas who wanted the fat for themselves. They were not interested in God - they had no respect for God. It was all about satisfying their hunger and greed. It would appear that Eli also benefited from this excessive food. He was described as overweight when he fell off his seat and died (1 Samuel 4:18). Also, the Lord warned him that there were going to be consequences for the conduct of his sons and it is evident that Eli was very much part of this gluttonous conspiracy

Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded for my dwelling, and honour your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel? [1 Samuel 2:29 ESV]

In addition, these young men were having sex with the women who were servants in God's tent of meeting or tabernacle. This was considered shocking. God's temple or tent was a holy place and they were defiling the whole place by their conduct. Everyone knew what was happening and their old father, Eli even heard the reports of their conduct. He rebuked them and tried to get them to stop this disgraceful abuse of power. He made it clear that they were not only sinning against the women and their husbands but they were sinning against God. They refused to listen to the voice of their father. By this stage, there was no going back and God had determined to punish them for their evil deeds.

What is really shocking is that Eli was very quick to judge Hannah when she visited the temple. She was sitting praying to God silently and Eli, for some reason or another, decided that she was drunk. He rebuked her for this. "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you?" [1 Samuel 1:14 ESV]. He was in no position to judge other people as his own sons were behaving shamefully. He is too eager to judge other people instead of starting with his own family. There is a saying, "blood's thicker than water," which means that we are less likely to judge our family by the same standards as we judge other people. I used to have a real challenge convincing some blinkered parents of their son or daughter's behaviour in school. It was normal to blame the school, the teachers or other young people in their class. God is not partial. He treats everyone alike by the same standards. As Christians, we need to be guided by God. We need to be slow to judge others for sins of which we ourselves are guilty.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's

eye. [Matthew 7:1-5 ESV]

My reaction to this passage is "Ouch!"

By the way, God did judge Eli and his two sons. There was a battle against the Philistines and the Ark of God was captured. This was where God resided in the journey through the desert. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were both killed by the Philistines. Eli was 98 years old and his eyesight was so poor that he was sitting on a seat staring ahead of him when the news arrived of the defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The shock that the ark of God had been captured caused the old man, he fell off his seat, broke his neck and died. Phinehas's wife gave birth soon after hearing the news that she had lost her husband, her brother-in-law and her father-in-law and she called her new born son, Ichabod, which referred to the departure of the Ark of God and the loss of God's presence.

Hannah: Treated with Contempt Day Share 22/02/2021

Hannah is a lovely Bible character. She is a Godly woman and we are going to spend a whole Day Share looking at her strengths. However, life was not easy for her. She was married to a man named Elkanah and they lived in a place with a big name - Ramathaim-zophim. I guess there was a large signpost at the entrance to their village! It was located in the hill-country of Ephraim. The Israelites were tending to live in the remote hilly areas because of past failure to capture their inheritance when they came into the land of Canaan. We do not learn much about Elkanah - he is very much in the shadow of his wife who is more spiritual than he is. Hannah is not the only wife - Elkanah has another wife named Peninnah. It is likely that Elkanah took another wife because of Hannah's failure to conceive. Peninnah had children - we are not told how many - but sadly Hannah had none. This was a serious matter in those days. It was expected that a wife would bring her husband many children - sons especially to carry on the family inheritance. Elkanah favoured Hannah - when he had killed an animal to sacrifice to God, he gave Hannah twice as much as he gave to Peninnah. This might have made Peninnah bitter and jealous of Hannah. She taunted her about her inability to conceive and rubbed salt in the emotional wounds Hannah was experiencing.

There is ample evidence of the negative impact of polygamy in the Bible. God had spoken about a one-man-one-woman relationship in the book of Genesis but it was men who reacted against monogamy and introduced many wives. As far as Elkanah's two wives were concerned, the relationships were marred by rivalry and bitterness. Peninnah is described as Hannah's 'rival' (1 Samuel 1:6) and there are two words used to describe her treatment of Hannah. Firstly, Peninnah provoked Hannah or upset her. This is the Hebrew word - ka'ac which means 'to trouble.' The same word is translated 'anger' 42 times and it is translated as 'provoked' 4 times in the whole of the Old Testament (and two of these are in 1 Samuel 1:6-7). I suggest that Peninnah was deliberately seeking to make her 'rival' angry. This is a typical bullying approach.

We are not told how she did this but her tactics were brutally effective. She might have used sarcasm to remind her of her failure to bear a child. She might have taunted her with a reminder of what she is missing out on. "It is not Elkanah's fault you are not conceiving. He has no problem getting me pregnant so the problem lies with your barren womb" is the sort of taunt with which Peninnah goaded poor Hannah on a daily basis.

Hardly surprising that this had a deep effect on Hannah. This is where we have the second Hebrew word. It is the Hebrew word ra'am which means 'to be violently agitated.' It literally means 'to tumble' and the same word is often used for the crash of thunder. Peninnah bullied Hannah year after year and in a sense she achieved her desired effect - Hannah was deeply upset. The bullying was related in some way to the annual visit to the Lord's house (the tent of meeting at Shiloh). There were two symptoms arising from Hannah's upset. Firstly, she was tearful and secondly she lost her appetite.

But Elkanah noticed that his wife was upset - a good start although it was hard to ignore. However, he was awkward and clumsy in his attempt to resolve this situation. Firstly, he asked her an unnecessary question, "Hannah, why are you crying and not eating?" It was clear that there was a good reason for his wife's distress - her barren state made much worse by the other wife's bullying. But Elkanah lacks sensitivity when he adds, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" He is missing the point and he is making it all about him. There is a bit of conceit in this clumsy attempt at dealing with his wife's problem. He is lacking in empathy. This is essential in trying to comfort someone in distress - it is the ability to enter a person's circumstances.

Just to top it all. Hannah has an insensitive husband who thinks that spoiling his wife by giving her more food than his other wife will solve all her problems. Instead, this causes Peninnah to be jealous and to bully Hannah even more. Then on their annual visit to Shiloh, she encounters the old blind priest, Eli who accuses her of being under the influence of alcohol.

God was aware of this dear woman's distress. God answered her prayers in His time. Your situation might be different from Hannah but you can appreciate how she is feeling. You have been there - you have been in tears. You have maybe lost sleep or have lost your appetite. You feel that nobody

sees or understands. God sees your distress. He knows completely how you are feeling this morning. God's Son personally experienced being misunderstood and being the object of slander and abuse. He draws near to those in distress.

Hannah: A Godly Woman Day Share 24/02/2021

Hannah was far more godly than her husband and she was far more godly than the old priest, Eli not to mention his wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas. I believe that God raises up godly women to fill the gap created by unspiritual men.

Hannah was a woman of prayer. Prayer was a regular feature of her life and not just a way out when she was in trouble. She prayed earnestly from the heart.

She was very upset as she prayed to the Lord, and she was weeping uncontrollably. Now Hannah was speaking from her heart. Although her lips were moving, her voice was inaudible. Eli therefore thought she was drunk.

1 Samuel 1:10, 13 NET

<https://bible.com/bible/107/1sa.1.10-13.NET>

This is not saying prayers. This is not following a routine which we do each day - or most days when we remember. Her prayer is real. She is expressing the deep emotions of her heart. She is sharing her burden with the Lord. She was silent even though her lips were moving. Hannah has a living relationship with God. She is able to come into God's presence and completely unburden herself. There is no sham or pretence. She is sharing with the Lord the hurt which she has been feeling for so long. She is telling the Lord of the anguish she experiences each day because she has not given birth to a child.

Of course, the Lord saw her distress. The Lord was fully aware of the taunts of her rival for her husband's affection. Peninnah might have taunted Hannah when Elkanah was not present to witness, although he clearly knew that Hannah's barrenness was causing her distress. But God heard every nasty remark that Peninnah uttered and he saw the smug look on her face. But God delighted to hear Hannah share her burden so honestly and openly. Hannah was not pretending to be 'fine' - the bland, meaningless word we use when we are asked the equally meaningless question, "How are you?" Hannah was not fine - she was emotionally wrecked and she held nothing back from God.

Hannah loved the Lord. She enjoyed close fellowship with God and her prayers brought pleasure to God. Hannah is prepared to give her son back to God. She makes a vow that if God will give her a son, she will dedicate him to the Lord. This is a real sacrifice. She will not be able to enjoy watching her son grow up. There will be many miles between them and no way of communicating with him. He will not be able to take selfies while eating a meal at a restaurant and share them with his doting mother. Hannah will be away up in the isolation of Ramah up in the hillside with the narcissistic Elkanah and the sarcastic Peninnah while Samuel would be at the tent of meeting at Shiloh.

God answered her prayer. Hannah gave birth to a son and Hannah duly gave him back to the Lord after he was weaned. Although this must have been a huge personal loss for her, Hannah had the compensation of knowing that she was following God's will. Samuel was a great prophet and priest who served the Lord faithfully. Like Timothy in the New Testament, Samuel owed so much to the godly influence of his dear mother. I can relate to Samuel. I had a godly mother (and father too).

What ambitions do we have for our children? Do we want them to do well at school and get into a profession where they will achieve success in life and be rewarded with a comfortable lifestyle? Would we be disappointed if our children chose to serve the Lord in a remote location somewhere in Africa or South America or an island in the Pacific? Do we involve God in our future plans for our children? Do we have a close relationship with God like Hannah?

Hannah's Song Day Share 26/02/2021

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Here we have the text of Hannah's prayer which was really a song of thanksgiving and praise. We have seen that Hannah was bullied by her rival, Peninnah - Elkanah's other wife who was able to bear children while Hannah was barren. Hannah took the matter to the Lord in earnest prayer and her prayer was answered. This godly woman provides us with a beautiful song of praise and worship in thankfulness for God's intervention in her life.

Hannah acknowledges that the child Samuel was a gift from God but she does not mention the young boy who was serving in the temple. Instead, the song focuses on the giver of the gift and she presents the Lord as sovereign - the king of the nations in control over the affairs of the world. Here are some of the statements she makes to demonstrate how powerful God is. He is portrayed as the one who has authority over the living and the dead. Our lives are in his hands. The word Sheol is the place of the dead.

*The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.* [1 Samuel 2: 6 ESV]

The Lord is in complete control of the operation and function of the earth. Hannah's song speaks about the pillars of the earth and this should not be understood in a literal sense. Hannah is referring to the stability and reliability of the earth. It is not at the mercy of random forces - God has placed the earth on pillars so that it will not be moved or driven off its course. Remember that this is poetry - it is not a scientific description of the laws of physics which keep the earth in orbit around the sun.

*For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.* [1 Samuel 2:8c ESV]

She emphasises that there is no one like God - He is truly unique (a word which is overused today) and incomparable. Three times in verse 2, she emphasises that there is none like the Lord.

*There is none holy like the Lord:
for there is none besides you;
there is no rock like our God.* [1 Samuel 2:2 ESV]

The Lord reverses 'fortunes' - he raises those who are cast down and he brings down those who are in a lofty position.

*The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honour.* [1 Samuel 2:8 ESV]

This is similar to Luke's Gospel which we studied some time ago in previous Day Shares. One of the key themes in Luke's Gospel was the great reversal taking place in the world, in which the first are becoming last and the last are becoming first, the proud are being brought low and the humble are being exalted. Luke places great emphasis on God's love for the poor, tax collectors, outcasts, sinners, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles. [See Day Share entitled Luke's Gospel - Key Themes 04/01/2020.] Of course Hannah has had personal experience of the Lord doing just that in her life - she was very low. She was unable to conceive and bear her husband a son and that was considered a disgrace in that society. She was the victim of the bullying by the other wife who seemed to be able to have children easily with the same husband as Hannah. But now Hannah has had a son and this has changed everything. Hannah says -

*The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.* [1 Samuel 2: 5b ESV]

She is not saying that she has had seven children - seven is a symbol of perfection in the Bible. In fact, we know that after Samuel was born, Hannah had three sons and two daughters [1 Samuel 2:21] Hannah is using the number seven poetically rather than literally. The number seven is the number of perfection in the Bible and so Hannah is saying that she has the perfect family thanks to God's intervention in her life. The second half of this verse is probably referring to jealous, gloating Peninnah. It is not clear why she is forlorn. Did Peninnah experience the loss of some or all of her children which would seem to be ironic given that she had taunted Hannah with being unable to have children? There is no reference to this in the Bible but the ESV Study Bible takes the word 'forlorn' to mean that she has 'become childless' probably due to illness and death. The Hebrew word is often translated 'to mourn.' Although Hannah does not specifically mention Peninnah, there are references to God as a God of justice. She says that the '*bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.*' [1 Samuel 2: 4 ESV] I want to suggest that she is thinking about Peninnah when she says that the bows of the mighty are broken. This is a metaphor of a powerful warrior but he is suddenly disarmed and is unable to inflict any more wounds. Peninnah has lost her advantage over her. Hannah is speaking of herself in the next part of verse 4 - she is the feeble who has been given strength. The first verse of the song says - "my horn is exalted in the Lord." The horn is the symbol of strength. A bull with its horns raised is powerful and frightening. Hannah has gone from being weak and vulnerable to being strong. She gives God the credit for this transformation.

*My heart exults in the Lord;
my horn is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.* [1 Samuel 2: 1 ESV]

Notice she refers to her enemies - I have no doubt that she is talking about Peninnah in this verse. She also rebukes those who are proud - and that would apply to the other woman - Peninnah.

*Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.* [1 Samuel 2: 3 ESV]

Peninnah had been proud and arrogant but God had acted in justice and had vindicated Hannah. The Lord is a God of knowledge - He knows what is happening in his world. He sees the injustice and he always acts in justice. The scales are a symbol of justice. Here is the symbol of the best known courtroom in the United Kingdom known as the Old Bailey



The jury is required to weigh up the evidence and to decide whether the accused is guilty or innocent. The judge has to weigh up a variety of factors before sentencing a person who has been found guilty. There have been many miscarriages of justice in our legal system even though it has a great reputation. God is a God of perfect justice because he knows everything. Nothing is hidden from him.

Maybe you feel that you have been treated unjustly. It's not fair. God is a God of justice. He may choose to settle the matter in this life or it may be left to the future. But we can rely on God to act in justice. As Christians we should not seek to settle scores. We should leave matters in the hands of the Lord. Hannah took her grievance to the Lord in prayer and He answered her prayers. She had to wait a long time - but God did reverse the situation in Hannah's favour.

This is a lovely song of praise and worship from a really godly woman. We need women like Hannah today.

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I have also quoted from the New English Translation (NET) via the You Version.