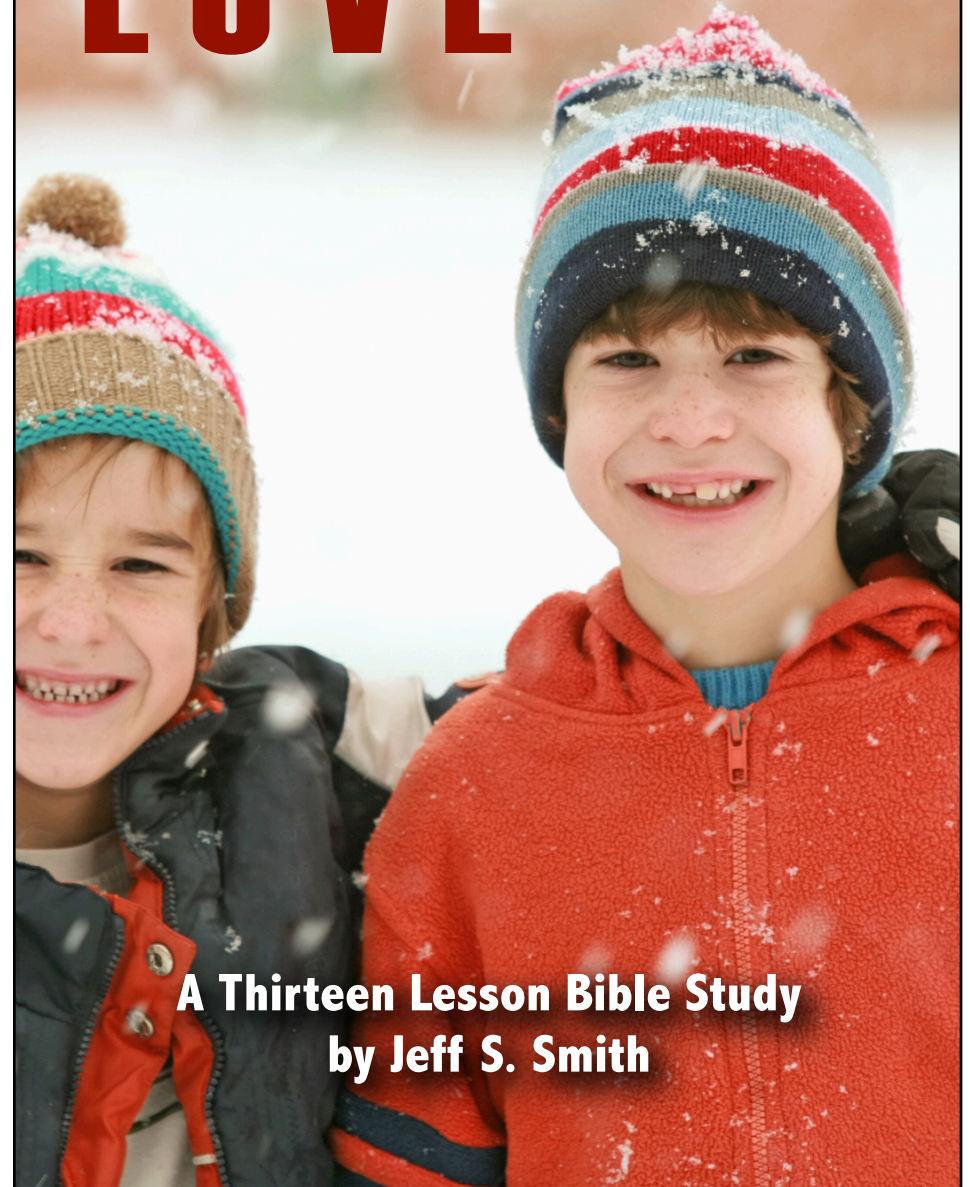


BROTHERLY LOVE



**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study
by Jeff S. Smith**

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1. What was Abraham’s implication when he tried to smooth over a conflict with Lot in Genesis 13, saying, “We are brethren”?

2. In what ways is the church of Christ a collection of brothers and sisters?

3. If we are brethren, how should we greet one another and what should our attitude be toward one another as the church assembles (Hebrews 10:24-25)?

4. Consider First Peter 1:22. What makes love “sincere” love? What makes love “fervent” love (see First Corinthians 13:1-13)?

5. Why is it sometimes hard to rejoice with those who enjoy good fortune?

6. Why is it sometimes hard to weep with those who weep over some loss?

7. What might be involved in bearing another’s burden?

8. What are some marks of false brethren?

9. What are some marks of a true brother?

Introduction

Within families and churches, brotherhood is an important concept, which lends itself to a proper relationship and a wonderful closeness, described by the Holy Spirit, as being “knit together.” From the fleshly brothers and sisters in the Bible, we learn both positive and negative lessons on the subject of brotherly love. The Hebrew writer exhorts us to “Let brotherly love continue.” In a world filled with malice and indifference, it is vital that the people of God learn to love one another and act like it. This series of lessons focuses on fleshly families and attempts to extract from them various lessons that will apply to both the home and the church.

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Lesson 13: *The Household of God*

When the servants of Abraham and Lot disputed over land, the uncle told his nephew, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren” (Genesis 13:8). Strictly speaking, they were not brothers, but both enjoyed a special relationship defined by more than just family.

The church of Jesus Christ is described as a family, or the household of God in the New Testament (First Timothy 3:15). We share a Father and Christ is not ashamed even to be called our brother (Hebrews 2:11). Clearly, God intends for us to behave like brothers and sisters. We are related by blood (Christ’s) and marriage (Christ wed to the church).

Paul reminded his readers many times to greet one another with a holy kiss, although other greetings can also be employed and are equally authorized (First Thessalonians 5:26, Galatians 2:9). Christians are to pursue the things that make for peace and that quest is hampered when we are unable even to greet each other with civility and love (Romans 14:19, First Peter 1:22). Moreover, we encourage one another as we assemble in worship with those of similar and very precious convictions (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Brothers and sisters can depend upon one another in hard times and good times; therefore, we find it wise to rejoice with those members of the body who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15, First Corinthians 12:26). Their pain or exultation is not somehow detached from us because it does not directly affect us, nor is it an occasion for our envy or bitterness to prevail. We are brethren and what affects a brother affects us in an empathetic manner. We gladly bear another’s burdens (Galatians 6:1-2).

True brethren can be counted upon to come to the rescue. James reminds us faith without works is dead and uses as an example a brother who loves in word but not in deed (2:14-26). John picks up the analogy and forces it to a conclusion: “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (First John 3:17-18).

There are some who are false brethren and this fraud usually appears in time. Paul was often in peril of such impostors, those more dedicated to themselves than God or brother (Second Corinthians 11:26). The apostle John was shut out by one such false brother, Diotrephes (Third John 9-10).

Gossip is a mark of false brotherhood. Why would my brother spread embarrassing stories about me, if he really loves me? The Thessalonian and Corinthian saints should have loved their brethren but some were becoming meddlesome and unkind (First Thessalonians 4:9-12, Second Thessalonians 3:11, First Corinthians 6:7-8). Brotherhood means putting another ahead of oneself (Romans 12:10). “Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1).

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1. How was Jesus's situation much like Joseph's?
2. Why did Jesus want to avoid Judea? What did his brothers say? Why?
3. Many people worshipped Jesus, fell at his feet, kissed them, washed them with their tears and dried them with their hair. Why didn't the Lord's siblings do the same (Matthew 13:57)?
4. How did Jesus handle this situation when his brothers seemed so bitter and resentful? How can we handle brethren who seem to resent our good fortune in some things (First Corinthians 13:4-5, Galatians 5:26)?
5. What was Jesus trying to teach in Mark 3:31-35 (Matthew 10:37, First John 1:3)?
6. What changed their disbelief about their brother's claims? What does their conversion teach?
7. What was James's role in the Jerusalem church? How can brethren in Christ who are of different races learn from the things that James said?
8. What did the Lord's brother Judas (Jude) do?

Lesson 1: *Cain and Abel*

The original case of sibling rivalry involved the first two sons born to Adam and Eve. These were the world's first children and they immediately established some of the problems that brethren—by flesh or by Spirit—would create. Their brotherhood involves jealousy and a lack of love. In homes and churches, a sense of family is destroyed by either.

Cain was Adam's firstborn son and Abel followed soon after. As is common, the brothers had disparate personalities: Cain was a tiller of the ground while Abel was a shepherd. From these choices of occupation, they developed separate interests, but Cain and Abel had different ideas about their relationship to God as well. Their heavenly father required an offering of worship from each and apparently had made the means known, for one brother sacrificed "by faith" (Hebrews 11:4) that only "comes from hearing ... the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Cain brought a fruit offering, perhaps because it was the most convenient for a man in his line of work. Abel, however, brought a flesh offering from his flock. God judged Abel's sacrifice to be from faith in what he had heard while rejecting Cain's offering, apparently because it was not from faith. When Cain realized God had rejected his offering but received his brother's, he grew angry and his countenance fell. Most likely, Cain was angry at God, but understood there was no way of punishing his Creator. God did not completely push Cain aside, but spoke to him in reproving tones. God told Cain all he had to do was obey and he would be approved.

While Cain could not punish God, the object of his envy, resentment and bitterness was in the field with him. He arose one day and killed his brother. When questioned by God about his brother's fate, Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper? In some sense, the reply from God was affirmative.

Sibling rivalry can be a problem in the church as well. Some Christians forget that we are all part of the same body and begin to compete with one another for prominence or influence. Some churches are so infected by sibling rivalry that brothers and sisters spend their time biting and devouring one another instead of battling the devil. Gossip, slander and destructive criticism are often the weapons of a brother who grows resentful of another.

We have a responsibility to our brethren. We must live to exhort one another (Hebrews 10:24-25) and uplift each other (Hebrews 12:12-13). We are to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-5) and be willing to give the gift of reproof when necessary (James 5:19-20). We must make intercession for each other (First Timothy 2:1). We should be looking out for one another's welfare and not wrapped up in our own (Philippians 2:1-4).

We must also remember not to become a stumbling block to a brother or sister in Christ (Matthew 18:6-7). We should be willing to sacrifice our own desires so that we do not offend a brother (Romans 14:19-21). Two sisters in faith from Philippi illustrate the danger of such rivalry (4:2-3).

1. Why did Cain kill Abel? What about Abel did Cain envy? To what does envy lead (James 3:16)?

2. Could Cain have attained the same status with God that Abel enjoyed? How or why not? What prevented him?

3. Was God arbitrarily partial to Abel? Is God arbitrarily partial to Christians?

4. Why do brethren sometimes envy one another and grow bitter?

5. Were Cain and Abel in competition with one another? Are Christians in competition with one another? What is the value of different saints having differing abilities, talents and personalities (First Corinthians 12:12-27)?

6. How should a church react when one member is suffering or rejoicing?

7. Some engender envy by flaunting their abilities and making others feel weak. If love is not the motivation, what is its value to God and us (First Corinthians 13:1-3)?

8. What are often the weapons of an envious, angry brother or sister?

9. In what ways are we our brother's keeper?

Lesson 12: *Jesus and His Siblings*

Many young people grow up in the shadow of their older brothers or sisters, but imagine growing up in the shadow of an older brother who literally works miracles and never does anything wrong (Luke 2:7, First Peter 2:22). Your older brother might have gotten all A's, but the brother of James, Joses, Simon, Judas and their sisters would put that to shame (Matthew 13:55-56).

Jesus was put in a situation similar to that of Joseph in the book of Genesis. He had a bright and glorious future and his siblings were forced to carve out their own, much smaller, niche. They, too, had grave doubts about the accuracy of Christ's extreme claims, and like the eleven brothers of Joseph, they were little concerned for the safety and welfare of their brother.

Mary and her children traveled together to the wedding in Cana of Galilee where Jesus worked his first miracle (John 2:12). Mother believed, but many were not moved. Later the Jews were seeking to kill him around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-5). Jesus chose to walk in Galilee instead of Judea to avoid this threat, but his brothers urged him to go into the dangerous territory instead, arguing, "your disciples also may see the works you are doing." The trouble was they did not believe the works he was doing and they were sarcastically trying to persuade their brother into harm's way with their ridicule. Jesus was not moved to put God to the test and remained in Galilee a while longer. At every provocation, Jesus brushed away the disdain and disbelief of his brothers as temporary and somewhat understandable under their special circumstances.

Jesus did not push away his human family, but he constantly reminded his disciples that the brotherhood of shared faith offered a closeness that was preferable. On one occasion, his mother and brothers tried to interrupt his teaching before a multitude (Mark 3:31-35). He was told that they were outside seeking him but Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, or my brothers? ... Here are my mother and brothers! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother."

Throughout the savior's upbringing, adult years and ministry, it is evident his brothers did not believe he was the Messiah. They lived with his perfection and supernatural ability for more than three decades and were less impressed than someone confronted with his healing and teaching for the first time. Perhaps this is somewhat understandable, for "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Matthew 13:57).

His death and resurrection changed their minds and their lives. Paul says Jesus appeared to his brother, James (First Corinthians 15:7) and indeed we find the siblings among the gathering of disciples between the ascension and Pentecost (Acts 1:14). As a leader in the nascent Jerusalem church, James's career is particularly devoted to his brother's legacy (Acts 12:17, Galatians 2:9).

1. What is praiseworthy about Martha's attitude as a guest entered her home (Romans 12:13, First Peter 4:9, Hebrews 13:2)? In what ways can we show this praiseworthy attribute?

2. Why did Mary make the better use of this time, though (First Timothy 4:13, Colossians 2:22, John 4:13-14, John 6:32-33)?

3. What should Christians do instead of telling God about other people's faults (Luke 18:9-14, Galatians 6:1-2, James 5:19-20, Matthew 7:1-5, 12)?

4. Jesus never reacted to anyone's death as he reacted to that of Lazarus. What about the three siblings made Jesus weep (Philippians 1:3-8)? How can we strive to feel that closeness with Christ?

5. What did Mary do wrong when she used a pound of costly oil to anoint the Lord's feet? Why did some of her fellow disciples object?

6. How do brethren sometimes make the same wrong objection concerning the treasury of a local church?

8. What lessons should have filled that house like the oil's fragrance (John 13:12-17, Galatians 5:13)?

9. How could learning this lesson lead to peace among brethren (James 3:17, Philippians 2:1-4)?

Lesson 2: *Shem, Ham and Japheth*

Noah was 500 years old when he began to have children (Genesis 5:32). Shem, Ham and Japheth were his sons born at least a century before the ark began was floated on its voyage.

In the genealogy of Noah given in Genesis 6:9-10, the historian remarks that he was "a just man, perfect in his generations." Perhaps this turn of phrase means that all his children were born to his wife and not a concubine or mistress. Perhaps it has to do with the way he raised the boys. We know that all three were included on the ark's passenger list, along with their wives (Genesis 7:13). Whatever the precise meaning, it must be understood that Shem, Ham and Japheth were being raised in a godly home.

There is very little history regarding these three young men given in the Old Testament. None of them is remembered as fondly as the patriarchs, nor as their father. One event regarding their lives is mentioned, but it serves to show the difference in the three (Genesis 9:20-27).

Noah found God's grace, not because he was a sinless man, but because he sought it despite his shortcomings. On the occasion in question, Noah was failing the principles of righteousness. He had become drunk on wine made from his vineyard and as often happens, drunkenness led to a downfall in vigilance and propriety. Noah became physically exposed inside his tent, without the ability to conceal his nakedness if necessary.

It was his son, Ham, who came first to Noah's tent and, having entered, saw the nakedness of his father. Instead of regretting the incident, Ham was amused and thought it a good opportunity to ridicule his father. He decided to tell Shem and Japheth who were outside, perhaps with glee and derision.

Shem and Japheth did not join in the embarrassment of their father, but sought instead to conceal his shame. They averted their eyes from the man as they entered his tent with a garment to conceal him, making certain that they did not take advantage of Ham's gossip.

Eventually Noah was revived from his self-induced stupor and discovered what Ham had done. He pronounced a curse on Ham's offspring and blessed the descendants of Shem and Japheth. Ham's descendants reflected this incipient sexual deviance and it was this tendency toward promiscuity that made the Canaanites abominable in God's sight (Leviticus 18:3-18). Japheth's descendants lived primarily north and west of Canaan and spoke the Indo-European languages. Shem's descendants, the Semites, included the Israelites. Abraham was a direct descendant of Shem (Genesis 11:10-26). Thus, Jesus, was also numbered among the Semites.

When we discover something shameful or sinful in another person's life, our impulse should not be to spread the news to others as fast as we can. It is not brotherly love to rejoice in a brother's fault. The Bible instructs us to overcome the urge to gossip and use that energy to attempt to rebuke and reclaim the wandering friend.

1. How many sons did Noah have? What benefits could he have given them?

2. Was Noah sinlessly perfect? What sin of his causes so much trouble for Ham?

3. Was Ham at fault simply for coming upon his father's nakedness? What was Ham's error?

4. Should we rejoice when our enemies commit sin? Why or why not?

5. Sometimes a brother or sister is caught in some embarrassing situation and the temptation is to be wagging our tongues. Can you find a passage in the New Testament that speaks about gossip? What does it say?

6. How might consideration of the golden rule (Matthew 7:12) have changed Ham's decision?

7. What is the best way to put a stop to gossip about a brother or anyone else?

8. If we discover something sinful in a brother's life, how should we handle the knowledge?

9. A garment finally covered Noah's shame. What will love cover (James 5:19-20)? How? How can gossip ruin the future for the one telling the gossip?

Lesson II: *Mary, Martha and Lazarus*

Mary, Martha and Lazarus may be bit players on the New Testament stage, but they prove very important to the heart of the Master nonetheless.

Jesus spent time in their home and enjoyed their company and hospitality (Luke 10:38-42). The two sisters chose to spend this time differently, Martha serving and taking care of the physical needs of the company while Mary simply knelt at Jesus's feet and listened to the Lord teach. Luke says that Martha was distracted with her work; the implication is that she should have let such things wait for an opportunity like this one was rare and wonderful. Instead, she begged the Savior to rebuke her sister's apparent idleness and get her to work. Very gently, Jesus showed her the wisdom of her attentive sister: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." The Lord did not find fault or forget Martha's assiduous hospitality, generosity and service. The chance, however, to listen and learn eternal truths outweighed the need for food and drink. Physical things fade but spiritual things are forever.

Much of the eleventh chapter of John's gospel account is consumed with the death and resurrection of their brother, Lazarus. John tells us that Jesus loved the three siblings and went to see sick Lazarus in Judea despite the threat from the Jewish persecutors. When the Lord arrived, Lazarus was already dead and the villagers had gathered around Mary and Martha to comfort them in their mourning. Again Martha is blunt with Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Christ promised to resurrect Him from the tomb that day, and when Mary was summoned to his side, she fell again at his feet and repeated her sister's entreaty. This sorrow touched Jesus and he himself wept. Then he raised his friend from the dead.

Soon after, Jesus returned to their house and dined with the godly family. Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus while Martha again served them. We find complex, insightful, Mary back at the feet of her Lord, anointing them with costly oil and wiping them with her own hair. John says that the house was filled with the fragrance. Those who read and appreciate her faith recognize the scent has filled the earth with glory for "wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" (Mark 14:9). Judas and some of the others, like Martha before, criticized Mary's action as wasteful. It takes true faith to recognize no expense is too great when sowing to the Spirit (Galatians 6:7).

When Jesus raised Lazarus, he also put Lazarus at great risk (John 12:9-11). The same thing happens figuratively when a great sinner obeys the gospel. His former friends and all those disappointed in his conversion may conspire to overthrow his faith and return him to the pit of spiritual doom. Brothers and sisters in Christ that share the contrasting personalities of Mary and Martha understand how difficult it can be to get along with one another. Finally, some Christians tend to get distracted by more tangible concerns.

1. How does the Bible imply James and John had wealth? What problems can wealth make (Mark 10:23-25, James 5:1-6, First Timothy 6:10)?

2. What would it take for these two men to leave their lucrative nets to follow Jesus (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)?

3. How do brethren lose vigilance in serving Christ as James and John did in the garden (First Peter 5:8, Second Timothy 4:5, Hebrews 13:17)?

4. Why were James and John nicknamed “sons of thunder”? How does the Bible caution us against reacting the way James and John did when the Samaritans rejected Jesus (Acts 13:51, Romans 12:17-21, Matthew 13:24-30)?

5. How can desire for preeminence harm all the brethren (Third John 9-12)?

6. How did Jesus express his closeness to John? Is there anything wrong with being closer to some in the church than others? What is the danger?

7. To what extent did James go in defense of the faith (Acts 12:1-2)? To what extent did John go (Acts 4:18-21, 5:40)? To what extreme should we be willing to go for Christ (Revelation 2:10, First John 3:16)?

Lesson 3: *Isaac and Ishmael*

Isaac and Ishmael were half-brothers, sharing the same father, but different mothers. Whereas Isaac was the son of God’s promise, Ishmael was the product of Abraham’s presumption and weak faith. It is not surprising that problems developed in the family because of this arrangement.

In Genesis 12, Jehovah called Abraham out of his homeland and made him three solemn promises: a new homeland, a large family and a blessing through his seed on all the nations of earth. With little more encouragement, Abraham left his father’s house and his inheritance and began the sojourn God prescribed, but while the promise on all nations seemed distant, the hope of having a family was near to his heart and life. God was, in effect, promising him at least one child.

This blessing and hope, however, also caused Abraham to stumble. He and his wife were both beyond a reasonable age to conceive. Sarah persuaded him to take matters into his own hands and offered her maid, Hagar, to be the surrogate for God’s promise (Genesis 16). Abraham conceived a child with the Egyptian girl, and trouble was conceived in Abraham’s house. Hagar now felt superior to her mistress. Sensing this, Sarah responded with bitterness and resentment, harshly mistreating the maid until she could only flee the estate.

God renewed this promise to Abraham and Sarah and eventually fulfilled it in Isaac (Genesis 21). Immediately, Isaac ascended above Ishmael in Abraham’s estimation. When their father threw a feast for the younger lad, Ishmael, now about 15 years old, scoffed at the event, perhaps in pride over his superiority in age. Sarah saw this and instructed her husband to cast both Ishmael and Hagar out of the home. Abraham knew it was wrong to disinherit his first-born, no matter who the mother was. He did not want to send his son away until God told him that it was allowable. God protected Hagar and made Ishmael a great nation also.

Isaac and Ishmael are used prominently in the Galatian letter to illustrate the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Hagar and Ishmael represent bondage and the law of Moses; Sarah and Isaac represent freedom and the law of Christ. Through obedient, faith, we become children of promise ourselves.

The difficulties experienced in this family seem to stem more from the mothers’ antipathy than anything between Isaac and Ishmael. They don’t even have much of a voice in the matter, save for the elder’s scoffing. From Ishmael, we learn lessons on resiliency and the danger of pride. From Isaac, we learn about the difference between godly meekness and dangerous weakness. We also learn that no one who desires to live justly should be unwelcome among the family of God.

1. Who was born first, Isaac or Ishmael? Why wasn't the older son the child of promise?
2. What caused Abraham to take matters into his own hands with Hagar?
3. How did Ishmael react when Abraham threw a party for Isaac? Why?
4. How did Hagar and Sarah feel about each other now?
5. What becomes of Ishmael (Genesis 21, 25)?
6. What lesson can we gain from Ishmael's prideful scoffing?
7. What is impressive about Isaac's role in nearly being sacrificed (Genesis 22)?
8. What are the dangers of being as soft-spoken as Isaac (Genesis 24:62-67)?
9. How can partiality be shown in a local congregation? How can this cause problems?

Lesson 10: *James and John*

James and John were the sons of Zebedee, brothers and fishermen like Peter and Andrew. Luke and Mark imply that James and John were also partners with the other pair. It is possible they had considerable means for they owned several boats and hired servants (Mark 1:20).

Jesus called James and John early in his ministry, just after Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:16-20). These four became closest to the Lord. James and John were mending their nets when the Lord walked by and called on them to follow him and they left their father and their business on the spot to go after Christ. This was a true test of faith, to give up routine for a way of life in serving a carpenter from Bethlehem who claimed to fulfill prophecy.

Unlike Peter and Andrew, there seems to be extreme sibling rivalry with James and John. Still, John will become the more prominent of the two in the history of the church.

On one occasion, a synagogue captain named Jairus approached Jesus with the sad news that his daughter was dying (Mark 5:21-43). The Lord went to his house to find the girl already expired. It was only Peter, James and John whom Christ permitted to follow him to the house. Perhaps it was the emotion of the situation that caused Jesus to desire their companionship.

These same three were present exclusively again on the mount of transfiguration. Unlike Peter, no speech is recorded from James and John. A third momentous event in Christ's life found the three apostles with him alone again. As Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, James and John were instructed to watch with Peter. The sleepy men failed him and dozed off.

James and John were nicknamed sons of thunder by Jesus (Mark 3:17) and we know why. They were as loud and forceful as that which shakes the sky. On one occasion, a village of Samaritans refused to receive Christ (Luke 9:51-56). "And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Christ rebuked their reversion to a former time and reminded them that the gospel was about saving lives, not destroying them. They simply went to another village and tried again.

Perhaps it was pride and ambition that were the lowest qualities of Zebedee's sons. On the road to Jerusalem, they took Jesus aside and requested the highest seats in the kingdom for themselves (Mark 10:32-45). Jesus rebuked them but the other apostles were incensed that these two would so blatantly seek preeminence over them. Their error gave the Lord the opportunity to teach on service and self-sacrifice.

James had sealed his fate by agreeing to be baptized with the death Christ foreknew. He was the first apostle to be martyred, slain by Herod Agrippa I about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1-2). John is identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved about whom the fourth gospel speaks. John wrote of himself in his gospel account in which Jesus entrusts his mother's care to the man and friend. In the fourth gospel, John reclined upon Jesus's breast, raced Peter to the empty tomb and recognized Christ at the Sea of Tiberias.

1. So many of the Bible brothers and sisters were at odds with one another. Is there any indication that Peter and Andrew disliked each other? How did Andrew feel about Peter?

2. What lessons can we glean from Andrew's short biography? Andrew is noticeably less prominent than his brother. What qualities of Bible love especially help a brother know that he is not inferior in God's eyes because he is not as prominent as some (First Corinthians 13:4-8)?

3. What lessons should we gain from the Lord's miracle with Peter's net in Luke 5:1-11 (see Matthew 6:25-34, Second Timothy 1:8-12)?

4. Peter's faith failed when he began to sink in the water in Matthew 14 as our faith will sometimes falter under great pressure. How can we avoid complete apostasy in those terrible times (Second Corinthians 12:7-10, Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 12:12-13, Romans 12:2)?

5. Brethren often divide over their opinions, being more concerned with man's will than God's. How can we avoid this (Hebrews 12:14, Ephesians 5:17, 21; Romans 15:1-2)?

6. How can unfettered zeal sometimes cause problems (Romans 10:1-3, Matthew 17:1-8, John 18:10)?

7. What is commendable about Peter's refusal to heed the Jewish authorities (Acts 4:18-20, 5:29)?

Lesson 4: *Jacob and Esau*

Brothers are often completely different from one another. That is certainly true in the case of Jacob and Esau. In proceeding with His scheme of redemption, God needed one of them to carry on the thread of promise that began with Abraham and continued through to Isaac. Of the twins, the younger was deemed to be best suited in temperament and nature to fill the role. God did not arbitrarily favor one, but chose one as best suited for a certain occupation. Esau possesses some noble qualities Jacob lacks.

Jacob and Esau were the answer to Isaac's prayer (Genesis 25:19-28). Rebekah conceived but the twins seemed to battle in her belly. God explained that two nations – Israel and Edom – were beginning there and that these nations would be at odds. He also explained it was the younger son who would rise to prominence rather than the firstborn.

The twins were not identical. Esau was the firstborn, red and hairy all over. Jacob was born second, lacking these distinctions. Jacob took hold of Esau's heel and earned his name. As they grew, the contrast increased. Esau was a skillful hunter and man of the field where a certain amount of aggressiveness is practically required. Jacob, on the other hand, was mild-mannered and dwelt inside. The diversity of the two boys led their father and mother to select personal favorites. Isaac, though meek and quiet himself, favored the rough Esau, because Esau provided him with game to eat. Rebekah favored Jacob. The differences only increase over time. Jacob proves to be cunning and farsighted; Esau is impetuous and shortsighted. First, Jacob takes advantage of his older brother's flaw and buys his birthright for a pot of stew (25:29-34). Esau exaggerated that he was dying of hunger, and so sold something far more valuable than a bowl of lentils.

Some years later, Jacob and Rebekah find an opportunity to take advantage again (Genesis 27). As Isaac was dying and about to pronounce his blessing on Esau, Rebekah learned of it and decided to trick him into giving Jacob the blessing instead. Esau hated Jacob for this and promised to kill him after his father died. Rebekah sent her favorite away and he managed to elude Esau for quite some time. Eventually, the two met again (Genesis 32). Instead of pursuing his angry oath, Esau makes peace with the brother who had cost him so much. His mercy is both amazing and admirable.

In both families and churches, members can have wildly different personalities and backgrounds. It is important to learn to appreciate the differences and make use of them to God's glory, rather than letting them bear distrust and hatred. Every church is going to have members with little education and much. The local church will have poor members and some better off. The church will have introverts and extroverts. The church may have both sophisticated and simple members. In all this diversity, each must remember that we are all God's children and brethren to one another.

1. How did Jacob get Esau's birthright?
2. What does this event show about both men?
 - Jacob:
 - Esau:
3. How did Jacob get Esau's blessing from Isaac? Was it right for Jacob to do this?
4. Explain the differences between the personalities of Jacob and Esau.
5. Jacob's tactics indicate that he thought of Esau more as a rival than a brother. Did their parents do anything to encourage this feeling?
6. Explain the teaching of First Corinthians 12 and how it relates to the twins and problems in churches today.
7. According to Romans 14, how should we treat brethren with whom we differ in background and personality when it comes to matters of judgment on harmless things?
8. How should a man with a Ph.D. treat a brother with no education at all?
9. How should we treat rich brethren versus poor brethren (James 2:1-9)?

Lesson 9: *Peter and Andrew*

Andrew and Peter were brothers and both became disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. History, however, resounds with the character and humanity of Peter while remaining next to silent about Andrew. Nonetheless, it was Andrew who first found the Messiah and led Peter to him.

Andrew was with a friend and fellow disciple of John the immerser when Christ appeared before them (John 1). John had taught them well for they confessed immediately that they were seeking the Messiah. Andrew and his friend began that day to follow Jesus. Andrew first found his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus, and from that day, Peter and Andrew shared something even deeper than fleshly brotherhood; they shared a faith.

This is Andrew's claim to fame. Peter's character, on the other hand, is the most fully developed in the gospels, save for Christ's. He is no secret disciple like Nicodemus and Joseph, but an obvious follower of the carpenter who claimed to be King. Simon learned his first lesson from Jesus on self-abasement and trust when the Lord broke his net with a great draught of fish after the man had caught nothing (Luke 5:1-11). On this occasion, Jesus told him that he would be a fisher of men. This event, if properly applied by all saints, would teach us to bury our selfish pride and human limitations, allowing us to trust the Lord in every way.

Peter's trust is tested, proven, then weakened when he sees Christ walking on the water (Matthew 14:27-32). His faith seems great to us, but Jesus recognized so much potential for growth in Simon Peter. His faith on the water is indeed but little compared that of the man who served Christ until his death many years later.

We see Peter respond to a frustrated Jesus in John 6:68, as the Lord contemplates the departure of some false disciples who were only interested in a social gospel. Will you leave as well, he asks. "Lord, to whom shall we go, for you have the words of eternal life?" Peter had the ability that lacks in so many today, to see through the material and yearn for the spiritual.

His zenith and nadir come within a short time of one another. Upon confessing the deity of Jesus in Matthew 16, Christ blesses his courage and promises him the keys of the kingdom of God. From this height, it is not long before Peter is selfishly rebuking the Lord's prophecy of his impending death. Jesus replied, "Get behind me, Satan!"

Soon after, he has another humbling experience on the mount of Christ's transfiguration. He is worshipful but offends God by seeming to deem Christ only equal to Elijah and Moses. God rebukes the apostle Himself: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him" (Matthew 17:1-8)! Peter was still impetuous and given to speaking and acting on every whim without full consideration. There was a youthful zeal that led him to great endeavors but also misdirected him to act without careful thought (John 13:1-10, Matthew 26:33-75).

1. How was Naomi severely afflicted?
2. How were Ruth and Orpah related? How is their closeness shown?
3. What are some dangers for young widows? What does Paul suggest as a remedy or preventative (First Timothy 5:11-15)?
4. What would Ruth have to give up to keep her vow to Naomi? Did Christ teach anything similar (Matthew 10:37-39)?
5. What is the difference between Ruth and Orpah?
6. Many have the idea that women can do nothing within the church, but the Bible teaches differently. Ruth was a laborer and is the mother of women who add much to the churches of which they are members. What can a woman do in service of the local church?
7. Ruth could learn much from her strong mother-in-law. What character traits should older women impress upon younger women (Titus 2:3-5)?
8. When we make a promise, to what lengths should we go to keep it?

Lesson 5: *Rachel and Leah*

Darkness and Laban conspired to fool Jacob into taking the wrong sister as his wife. Laban was supposed to give Rachel to Jacob after seven years, but instead passed off Leah in the night to him (Genesis 29:9-30). While Laban thought he was doing right by his eldest daughter, his deceit engendered strife between them.

Jacob went home with two wives, Rachel and her sister Leah. He loved only the younger, however (Genesis 29:31). God blessed poor Leah with children by Jacob while withholding them from Rachel's womb, but even after bearing him four sons, Jacob's only affection for Leah was physical; his heart belonged to Rachel.

If Leah was the unloved, Rachel still managed to envy her sister because of the children she bore Jacob. She took her anger out on her husband, demanding that he give her children, though that power was beyond him (Genesis 30:1-2). Sin increased as Rachel persuaded him to bear children by her maid, Bilhah. At first, she seemed satisfied when Bilhah gave him two sons, believing she had prevailed over Leah somehow, but Leah only rejoined the strange competition, offering her maid Zilpah to Jacob when her own womb stopped producing (Genesis 30:8-13). God kept Rachel's womb closed until it was time for Joseph, Israel's future preserver, to be born (Genesis 30:22-24).

When Jacob decided to flee Laban's house, both wives agreed to go with him, but Rachel betrayed her native idolatry by stealing her father's household idols, figurines that represented the false gods he worshiped instead of Jehovah. These idols would prove a problem for Israel in the years to come (Genesis 35:2). Israel would never fully remove them from her heart. Rachel hid the idols and then deceived her father who came looking for them (Genesis 31:26-35).

Rachel died in childbirth and was buried on the way to Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-20). Leah's death is mysterious but she was buried with the patriarchs and their wives (Genesis 49:31).

Pride is often a great problem in the relationship between siblings and brethren in Christ (James 4:6). Both Rachel and Leah entered into competition because their respective pride was hurt. Leah was hurt because Jacob loved her sister; Rachel was hurt when Leah bore children. The children became a tool in puffing up the mothers. Children should never be abused to further a parent's perceived cause (Ephesians 6:4).

Envy went hand-in-hand with pride. Each envied the other to the point that she would do anything to have what the other possessed. Envy is a work of the flesh, akin to covetousness (Galatians 5:21). It contributes to the lust of the eyes and the pride of life that sicken the soul of man (First John 2:15). Envy causes sisters in Christ to resent one another, to become bitter, and to create friction in the church.

1. Which of Laban's daughters did Jacob love? Why did he marry the other?
2. How did Jacob contribute to the strife between Rachel and Leah (Leviticus 18:18)?
3. In what ways does partiality engender strife in the church (James 2:1-9)?
4. Why did Rachel envy Leah?
5. What things sometimes cause brethren to envy one another?
6. How did Rachel further react poorly to her situation?
7. According to Genesis 2:18-24, did Rachel and Leah make the right decision when the time came to depart from Laban's house with their husband? On what New Testament principle does your answer also rest (First Peter 3:1-7)?
8. Does this principle give the husband the right to rule his wife like she is a possession?
9. How did Rachel spoil their departure? How would this haunt Israel? What are common, modern idols (First John 5:21, Colossians 3:5, Acts 19:24, Second Timothy 3:2)?

Lesson 8: *Ruth and Orpah*

Sometimes brothers and sisters are made by marriage. Ruth and Orpah were sisters-in-law because of their marriages to the two sons of Naomi during the Judges period of the Old Testament (Ruth 1).

A Jew named Elimelech left Bethlehem during a severe famine to live in Moab, taking his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, along. Before long, the Jewish husband and father died and the sons decided to get married to women of Moab. Presumably their father was too devout to allow such a thing while he lived and the sons waited for his death to marry across the racial divide instituted by God. The sons chose Orpah and Ruth, but widowed them just 10 years later. Now Naomi had outlived her husband and her sons and was alone in the world, except for two daughters-in-law of a different race and a pagan culture.

Because she heard that life had improved in Judah, Naomi decided to return to her home. Expecting no loyalty from her daughters-in-law, Naomi told them to stay in Moab without feeling guilty for they had been kind to her. Naomi wished them well and that they would remarry.

But the sisters-in-law had each grown close to Naomi and to each other and the prospect of splitting up caused them all to weep. Both Ruth and Orpah vowed to stay with Naomi and return to Judah with her, but the older widow beseeched them not to follow her, for it would be hopeless for them to find new husbands in Bethlehem, where they were strangers.

This strong invitation to remain in Moab touched both girls, but in different ways. Orpah resigned herself to bidding farewell to her mother-in-law, kissed her and said good-bye. Ruth, however, clung to Naomi and refused to consider such a conclusion to their relationship.

*Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever 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.
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.*

Ruth had made a vow of loyalty and she was determined to keep it; Naomi stopped trying to change her mind. The ladies returned to Bethlehem, where Naomi was remembered and Ruth was new.

As an older widow, Naomi was in need of help with the basic necessities of life (Ruth 2). Ruth filled that void as a good young widow, filling her days with labor rather than idleness. She worked in the field of a man named Boaz, who fell in love with her (Ruth 3). Ruth convinced him to propose and they were married after he redeemed her and her land (Ruth 4). Boaz and Ruth soon had a son, Obed, predicted to be a restorer of life and a nourisher. His grandson's name was David.

1. How did Moses find himself in Pharaoh's household?

2. What events provided proof to God that Moses would champion the cause of the downtrodden rather than live a life of ease (see Hebrews 11:24-26)?

3. No matter how rich, smart or strong we are in life, we all share one common weakness. What is it (Romans 3:23)? How does Jesus champion the downtrodden (Acts 20:28, First John 2:1)?

4. What was foolish about Moses's looking both ways before killing the Egyptian (Hebrews 4:13)?

5. How did Moses display courage? When does it take courage to be a Christian?

6. What talent did Aaron possess that Moses lacked? What lesson is this for us in the church?

7. What could cause a Christian or an eldership to give in to brethren who are advocating something unscriptural, as Aaron acquiesced in the Israelites' demand for a golden calf?

8. How do Christians form a royal priesthood in the church age?

9. When we have our difficulties as brethren, of what can Moses' sin at Kadesh remind us (Romans 3:23, Philippians 2:1-4, First Peter 4:11)?

Lesson 6: *Joseph and His Brothers*

When he was 17 years old, Joseph brought his father a bad report on his brothers who were supposed to be feeding the flock with him (Genesis 37:2). No one likes a snitch and Joseph only aggravated his brothers more by telling on them. They actually hated their brother and could not even speak peaceably with him.

Joseph was a dreamer, though not as we would think today. He had the miraculous ability to see the future in his dreams. First he dreamt that he would have dominion over his brothers (Genesis 37:5-9). When he told them about it, his brothers hated him even more. Even Jacob rebuked him, although he did not dismiss the possibility. His brothers apparently recognized it, too, for they envied him this dream (Genesis 37:10-11).

Later, Jacob sent Joseph to check up on his brothers while they were supposed to be feeding the flocks again. Once again, they were not doing their duty. When the eleven saw him coming, they conspired to kill him and tell Joseph animals had gotten him (Genesis 37:12-20).

Only Reuben dissented, although somewhat privately. He wanted them to throw Joseph in a pit so that he could rescue him when the others were not looking. They tore off Joseph's coat and threw him in a pit, but at Judah's urging and with Reuben's ignorance, sold their brother to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver. Joseph was taken to Egypt. All the brothers then put together a lie to tell their father who mourned for the son he thought he had lost (Genesis 37:21-35).

Joseph became the overseer of his master's house in Egypt (Genesis 39). He served with distinction and resisted his mistress' seduction until she too lied about him and had Potiphar imprison him. Joseph was honorable but sometimes even the just suffer. In prison, he interpreted more dreams and earned a favor from a fellow prisoner who brought Joseph before Pharaoh, where the Hebrew foretold the coming famine and the means to endure it. A grateful Pharaoh made Joseph second in command (Genesis 40-41).

When the famine became great, his brothers left Israel to beg food from the Egyptians. They came before Joseph, who recognized them. His brothers did not recognize Joseph and so he hid his identity and tested them. They began to express remorse for what they had done to Joseph (Genesis 42). Joseph continued to hide his true identity as his brothers showed themselves to be honorable now (Genesis 43-44). He finally revealed himself and the family was reunited (Genesis 45-46). A historic meeting of the leader of the Israelites and the leader of the Egyptians occurred. Because Joseph was sold into slavery, the Hebrews were preserved in famine.

Besides Joseph and Reuben, Judah's character is also well-developed. Genesis 38 shows him in the depths of hypocrisy and sexual immorality, but then in confession and restitution. In chapter 44, he bravely offers himself as a hostage on his honor to spare Benjamin and his father from sorrow.

1. Why did Jacob favor Joseph over the others? How did he express this?
2. Genesis 37:4 says that his brothers could not speak peaceably to Joseph. What do the following passages have to say about brethren communicating?
 - Romans 12:18-21:
 - Ephesians 4:29-32:
 - James 3:6-12:
 - James 4:11:
 - Matthew 18:15-17:
3. How did Joseph contribute to his brothers' dislike?
4. Do we need to tell God how rotten others are (Second Corinthians 10:12, Luke 18:9-14)? Do we need to tell others how great we are (Galatians 5:26, Philippians 2:1-4)? What can happen if we do?
5. What are the good and bad qualities of Reuben.
6. There is something painful in that 11 sons can watch their father weep and not be touched to come up with the truth. How can brethren make their Father weep (Galatians 5:15, First Corinthians 1:11, 11:17-22; James 1:27)?
7. Say something critical about Judah. Say something good about Judah.
8. What lessons can be gained from Joseph's reaction to Potiphar's wife (First Corinthians 4:2, 6:18; Hebrews 13:4, First Thessalonians 4:3-6)?
9. What do we learn from Joseph's behavior after Jacob's death?

Lesson 7: *Moses, Aaron and Miriam*

Moses's mixed culture came to a head when he was grown and witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew (Exodus 2:11-15). The Bible says he looked right and left and, finding no witnesses, killed the Egyptian in cold blood and then hid his corpse in the sand. The very next day, he tried to stop two Israelites from fighting and discovered that his crime was known after all. He was forced to flee Pharaoh's sight in fear for his life.

Moses was considerate, helping the downtrodden when he found opportunity (Exodus 2:16-25). He gained a reputation with God of being interested in the plight of the afflicted and not afraid to lead the way in making things right. God chose Moses to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery and into the freedom of the promised land; their escape from slavery is theologically typical of the Christian's escape from sin (see Romans 6).

When God appeared to Moses to announce his plan, Moses was somewhat slow to take the position (Exodus 3). Perhaps it was humility or fear, perhaps both, that caused Moses to question God's selection of him to speak to Pharaoh. He even doubted his own countrymen would believe he had talked with God (Exodus 4). God continued to answer his concerns with the ability to prove the word by miracles. Then Moses complained that he was not eloquent enough to contend with Pharaoh and inspire the Hebrews. Now God was angry and told him Aaron would be his spokesman. The brothers acquitted themselves well and won the Hebrews' release from Egypt. They showed great courage in contending with Pharaoh.

Aaron's greatest failing came while Moses was on Sinai, receiving the law from God. The people grew frightened by his absence and persuaded Aaron to make them an idol to worship instead of Jehovah. Rather than refuse them, Aaron complied and brought sin upon Israel (Exodus 32). Moses returned and asserted the truth, punishing all who had sinned.

Under the law Moses brought back, Aaron and his family of Levites were to be the priests in the organized Hebrew religion. God was recognizing the difference in ability between Moses and Aaron. While Moses was a leader, Aaron was a worthy servant. As long as Judaism was practiced with God's approval, the sons of Aaron would occupy its priesthood. The priesthood was only changed when the law was changed with Christ and his priesthood of believers (Hebrews 7:12, First Peter 2:9).

Moses's most noteworthy failure came at Kadesh. The Israelites were grumbling and complaining again because God did not fulfill their wishes quickly enough (Numbers 20). God told Moses to speak to a rock which would bring forth water for Israel. Instead of this simple method which glorified God, Moses gave a self-serving speech and struck the rock with his rod. Although the water came, God chided Moses and pronounced a decision against his personal entrance into Canaan. Moses was permitted to take Israel all the way to the border, but only to look upon it.