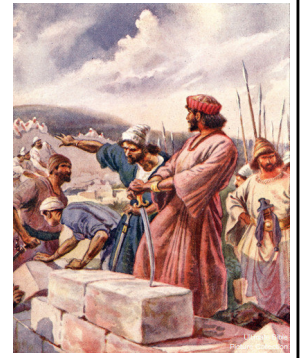


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Special Issue: Great Characters Of The Bible

Moses *The Lawgiver*

T. Sean Sullivan

The record of Moses is a true picture of providence. We begin with the legislation of a corrupt Pharaoh, who plotted against God's people. This law meant that Moses, along with all other male Israelites, was to be killed at birth (Ex. 1:15-22). This evil plan ultimately resulted in the exact opposite of its intended purpose. This law was designed to reduce the population of Israel. Moses, however, was preserved by his family and was found among the royal family in Egypt. It is ironic that the child who should die by a corrupt law became the deliverer of a law that would give life—God's law.

As we walk with Moses through his days as recorded in the Scriptures, we need to consider the important practical point for our own life. Moses, when faced with a difficult task, was like many of us. He was looking for every excuse to refuse responsibility. He first claimed to be too insignificant for the role saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). It would have been so easy if God would have just listened and Moses could have kept tending flocks. However, God knew that Moses was capable of doing what He needed him to do. Some would classify this as humility, but the reality is when the occasion is presented we need to rise to it. Life continues to offer challenging circumstances—things that would be a lot easier to skip out on—we need to take strength and trust in God to achieve

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Abraham *The Friend Of God*

Daniel N. Sanders

Abraham is known in James 2:23 as being a friend of God. Abraham was a man after God's own heart. It was his desire to follow God. He left us an example that we should follow so we may also be known as a friend of God. It was counted to Abraham because of his righteousness.

We may ask ourselves "how we can be known as a friend of God?" All we have to do is look at the example of Abraham. Abraham was a man who lived under the law, but it was not the law that justified Abraham as being a friend of God it was his righteousness (Gal. 3:1-9). He was a man who desired to follow what God commanded.

Notice in James 2:14-25 leading up to Abraham being called a friend of God. James is pointing out the need for faith and works together in order to be pleasing in the eyes of God. Without faith we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). Without works how can faith be justified (James 2)?

Abraham was a man after God's own heart. It was his desire to trust God in helping him through all things. He left his home land not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8-12). How many of us would do this? Leaving our home, packing up what we could, and not knowing the destination. This is what Abraham did. Why? Because God told him to do so (Gen. 12:1-4)! Abraham placed his faith (trust) in God and proved it through his works, by doing what God commanded of him.

This is not all that Abraham did, he

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Jeremiah *A Fire In My Bones*

Terry Sanders

The Jeremiah, one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, had moments of reluctance. When the Lord called him Jeremiah said, "Ah Lord! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (Jer. 1:6). The Lord assured him that he would be able to speak due to the deliverance of the Lord (Jer. 1:7-10).

Jeremiah would still have a difficult time because the kingdom of Judah was involved in much sin and depravity. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, due to their idolatrous sins, had been conquered by the Assyrians. Yet Judah learned nothing from this. Now the Babylonians were poised to punish Judah. God sent Jeremiah with a message of repentance, but Judah did not want to hear it.

Jeremiah's message was not well received and actually angered the hearers. They took out their anger on the prophet. Jeremiah was, at first, ignored, but he continued unabated. Later they mocked him and, finally, openly persecuted him. It was enough to bring him a brief moment of discouragement. Jeremiah said, "O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!' Because the word of the LORD was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my

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success. God told Moses, "I will certainly be with you" (Ex. 3:12).

Moses continued to make excuses (Ex. 3:13). This angered the Lord and His solution to the excuses was help. This brings us to another practical point. God is aware of our need for the immediate and direct help that can be supplied by our brethren. When Moses tried to excuse himself God presented him with his own literal brother Aaron. God knew that these two together would be able to encourage one another, even as He encouraged them both (Ex. 3:15). This supply of a helper was enough to embolden Moses and both he and Aaron went to face the task. On occasion in this life we are called upon to face "big things" and it is a blessing that God has designed a network of help for us in our brethren (Rom. 12:9-15).

The success of God's plan for Moses and the people was clear. The Egyptians were punished and the Israelites were freed. The people of Israel had never been an independent nation. They entered Egypt as a band of 75 people and now they are leaving as almost a million people. They now needed some structure and guidance. They needed a system of law that God, through Moses, would provide. In Exodus 19 and 20 the people are camped in the wilderness of Sinai and God instructed Moses to come to the Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:20). It is here that God instructs Moses in His law. Often it is assumed that God provided only the Ten Commandments and with these the law was complete. That is not the case. The Ten Commandments were very much part of the law, but Moses continued to explain the finer points of proper worship, human interactions, and treatment of animals. Moses provided the people with a scheme of living that would bring them into a promised relationship with their Creator.

Moses was a great man with abilities beyond his own expectations. He overcame the obstacles and did what God expected from Him. We can gather courage from Moses. He was a man who by law should have died, but by law delivered the people of God from Egyptian bondage and into a promise relationship with their Creator God.

Moses was one who needed a little
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also offered his son Isaac, the son of promise as a sacrifice (Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham was told that through Isaac the inheritance would come (Gen. 18:1-15). Then God commanded Abraham to offer his son as a burnt sacrifice (Gen. 22:1-2). How can any of this make sense? Offer the son of promise, yet he was the chosen one of Abraham's seed. How would we respond? Would we be willing? This is a great question and a very hard question. It is difficult to answer! Is there anything that we would put ahead of Christ?

How did Abraham respond? Isaac asked where the sacrifice was and Abraham responded, "The Lord will provide" (Gen. 22:8). Abraham knew in his heart that God would take care of him as long as he heeded God's word. This says a lot about the character of Abraham. There was nothing that he would put in front of him and his devotion in obeying God's will in all things.

Abraham demonstrated his faith and works together by obeying God. In all this he was known as a friend of God. He devoted his life to obeying God and it was actions like this that we see how God took care of Abraham and his family.

Abraham was a man that put God first in his life (Gen. 22:12). He is a man after God's own heart. It was his desire to put God first in all things. Why, we may ask? The reason is that God will provide and Abraham trusted God. Thus he in return is remembered by all as a faithful man. He, as well as we, should fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). This is our whole duty. This was Abraham's duty in life. This is how he was recognized as being a friend of God.

We have the same opportunity to be counted as a friend of God and receive blessings just as Abraham. We have to obey God and his will and we can do this through baptism (Gal. 3:26-29). We then can be counted as a friend of God and receive an inheritance just as Abraham received his inheritance. Are we desiring to obey God's will?

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heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:7-9).

Though he was ready to quit due to the indifference of the people, he could not quit. He did not like the scorn and mistreatment, but he found he could not stop delivering God's message. Did you notice how he said that when he tried to hold back it was "like a burning fire shut up in my bones"?

Let me speak on behalf of preachers for a moment. I remember the first time I ever stood before a group and preached. I was scared to death. I could not wait for it to get over. I was fearful that I would "fall on my face." Yet, when it was over I felt a compelling desire to do it again. The fear soon vanished away, but that desire to preach has never diminished. It is a fire in the bones and I am sure there are others that would say the same. However, this fire in the bones should not just be in preachers. I see where it was in the New Testament. After all Paul said, "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). I also see where there were many brethren, not all preachers, driven out of Jerusalem after the persecution of Stephen. They "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1-4).

What Jeremiah had, what Paul had, what the brethren in Acts 8 had, and what we all should have is a passion for the word of God. Without this passion we will not obey ourselves and we will not teach anyone anywhere. We will be come dry branches fit only to be gathered up and burned (see. Jn. 15:6). This passion is what makes for stimulating teaching and discussion. It is what allows one to persevere in time of trial. Is there such a fire in your bones?

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more encouraging and we will need that from time to time as well. Do not be afraid to seek help with your burdens. Ultimately the law delivered by Moses set in order the events by which we can be set free. Our bondage is sin and our hope is through someone greater than Moses (Heb. 3:1-6). The law of liberty through Jesus is our hope today. Take courage and seek God.