

# The Deception of a People..



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## Introduction

These lessons will bring to light a sinister plot devised against the human race since the beginning of time. We will begin by introducing scenarios that reflect the unredeemed heart of man from the present back through remote Biblical times.

Scenario 1:

Johnny bursts through the front door excitedly proclaiming, "Mom, Mom, I bought a gift for you. Hurry and see what I got you!!!"

The mother excitedly makes her way down the steps of their second story home to see her son hiding a crumpled brown bag behind his back. The son's enthusiasm is obvious and with the biggest smile he can muster, Johnny asks his mom to guess what he has hidden for her. She starts the guessing game. "Is it flowers?" she inquires.

Johnny shakes his head, no. Mom proceeds to guess wildly only to have Johnny get more and more excited as the suspense builds. Finally, he unveils the treasure hidden behind his back. His mom reaches into the crumpled bag only to find three of Johnny's favorite chocolate bars. With a puzzled look, she asks, "How did you get the money to pay for these candy bars?"

"I used the change that I forgot to give you the other day when you sent me into the store for milk," he said a little sheepishly, knowing that he was told to bring any change from the transaction to his mom. He searched her face hoping to find the joy and gratefulness that he was expecting. Johnny's mom hid her disappointment and patted Johnny on the head thanking him for being so thoughtful and giving him a hug as she affirmed his "good deed." Johnny's mom is a diabetic and unable to eat sugary foods. Johnny goes off to play after asking his mom for one of the candy bars on the way out the door.

Scenario 2:

Johnny is left at home with a list of chores that need to be done before his end-of-the-year pool party that evening. Mom sets out for the grocery store to purchase the necessary items. Johnny is told to sweep the patio, hose down the pool area, mow the lawn and weed the garden. Several hours later with her arms balancing the groceries, Johnny comes to her rescue, opening the door so she can enter. She wonders why the lawn wasn't cut and glances in the backyard to see that none of the other chores were even started. With a tinge of annoyance in her voice, she asks what he has been doing while she was gone. Johnny takes her hand and brings her out to the garage. With a proud grin, he says, "Mom, I washed and waxed the Buick for you. Doesn't it look great?" Johnny's mom tries to hide the disappointment in her voice as Johnny is so proud of his waxing job and obviously looking for mom to give him affirmation for a job well done. Betraying the feelings of anger brewing inside of her, she opens her mouth and compliments her son on the marvelous job he has done. She tells him how delighted she is that the car looks so shiny. She silently wonders if he was doing this to impress his friends, who all knew that he

would soon be inheriting the old family car in two weeks on his 17th birthday. Mom wonders how the jobs will get done before the party that evening, and fretfully goes about planning how to make up for the lost time.

#### Scenario 3:

Johnny's wife is hesitant to open the gift laid before her on the table. It is their third anniversary, and too often, throughout their relationship, she has opened gifts only to find out that the thoughtfulness she expected from her husband didn't materialize. Why would this time be any different? Her husband's cheesy smile and little boy excitement made her wonder if this time would be different. She cuts the ribbon and rips open the beautiful paper. As she lifts the box lid, she wonders if this is finally what she had been asking for since they were married. On several shopping excursions to The Fine China Store, she had pointed out a special plate that was part of a set she began collecting as a young teen. It would complete her collection. Maybe this time, he would give her what she wanted. Her brows wrinkle as she opens the tissue paper. She looks down at the fanciest spring-form cheesecake pan you would ever want to see. He proudly exclaims that the neighbor is a dealer in some new kitchen products that she guaranteed would be good for a lifetime. Johnny loves cheesecake. She has no doubt that the gift she received was to please himself and the neighbor who often comes to entice Johnny with the latest marketing scheme. Johnny's sensitivity to others always far exceeds his concern for his family. She throws the box on the ground and cries, leaving Johnny stunned and wondering how she can be so ungrateful.

Another time, another place. Different scenario, same dilemma...

#### Scenario 4:

In the course of time, two young men bring an offering to the Lord. These offerings will reflect the condition of their heart and reveal their depth of affection for the One to whom they are bringing their gift. One young man brings the best and choicest parts from his flock. He carefully chooses the firstborns from among the lambs. The brother of this man brings some crops brought forth from the soil he tends. One offering is accepted and one isn't. How could the receiver be so cruel as to refuse one of the gifts and accept the other? Isn't every gift good and worthy to be received?

Our God is depicted in James 1:17 as a "Father of lights" who gives good and perfect gifts from above that contain no darkness or shadows. Is it fair and reasonable for Him to expect His children to do the same? This book is not about gift giving. However, if we will take the time to examine the gifts we are giving to others and to God, that evaluation may lead us to quite a surprising conclusion. What we offer to Him and to others can be very telling. Do the gifts we bring to God speak of a life of heartfelt dedication to our Lord and Master, or are they a reflection of a heart tangled up in idolatry? This book is about a mixture. The mixture of good and evil. It is the same mixture offered to Eve in the garden of Eden. Satan convinced her that what God had to offer her was not enough. Villainous, yet disguised as an angel of light acting according to her well being, Satan enticed the woman to partake of something forbidden. Since that time, mankind's tendency has been to stretch their hands out to reach for the forbidden and mix it with the good and perfect things of God. The problem: The good and perfect things of

God can never mix with what the adversary has to offer any more than oil mixes with water. We will examine Biblical texts that speak of individuals, tribes, rulers and nations that succumbed to this mixture and the resulting consequences. The Bible warns us that the compromise coming from this mixture can cost you your life. The same enemy that promises fulfillment from partaking of the mixture is also a thief who devours our soul and leaves us in spiritual bankruptcy.

**This booklet is about recognizing the devious schemes of this villain, the devil, as he goes about touting his wares. If we recognize his disguise and refuse the mixture, he will have no power over us.**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. **John 10:10(ESV)***

## Chapter 1: He Has Shown You, O Man, What Is Good

*With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? **Micah 6:6-8 (New King James Version)***

Scenario 4 of our introduction was the Biblical account of the story of Cain and Abel as recorded in Genesis 4:1-8. As we look at the passage in Micah, we will see clues as to why the Lord would have rejected Cain's offering.

It is clear as we read Micah's message that God looks past the gift and into the giver's heart. Hebrews 11:4 indicates that faith inspired Abel to offer a "better" sacrifice. His faith in a redeeming God led him to give an acceptable offering. His offering did not make him acceptable, his faith did! God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Would he not also give Cain the opportunity for doing what is right? Does this passage not indicate that man has been shown what is good? Cain's offering was not received because he failed at one or all of the requirements expressed in the passage:

1. Do justly.
2. Love mercy.
3. Walk humbly with your God.

This passage in Micah also indicates that Abel's offering could have also been refused if his actions and character were marred with wrong motives.

The heart of unredeemed man is the same. In all of these scenarios, whether speaking of the Johnnys of today or the Cains of yesterday, we can see a similar pattern. A selfish motivation is evident, to gain what we want our own way, all under the guise of "good works." From his youth onward, Johnny evidenced a desire to please others in his own way. This ended in a futile situation with his wife finally becoming the one who rejects his feeble attempts at pleasing others. How about Cain? Can we see evidence of self-serving intentions with the offering that Cain brought to the Lord?

As we look a little closer at the story of Cain and Abel, it is obvious that the motives of Cain's heart were not pure. The King James Bible tells us that Cain became wrath after the Lord rejected his offering. The Hebrew word for wrath is *charah*, which is defined as "to be hot, furious, burn, become angry, be kindled." After looking deeper into this definition, it is easy to understand why we describe an angry person as *burning up*. If we are not careful, we will side with Cain in this story. At a superficial glance, it appears that the Lord is being unfair and ungrateful towards this benevolent giver. If this is your response, this may be an indication that you might be tempted to question God's integrity. Much like Eve, you, also could become easily deceived.

Was it right for Cain to burn with anger when God rejected his gift? If the motive for gift giving is to truly please the person receiving the gift, why would we become angry if we find out that the gift is offensive to the one we wanted to please? If our heart condition is pure, wouldn't we desire to make the adjustments necessary? For some people, writing a check to a missionary is a fairly simple act, but if we are writing that check because we have failed to respond to God's calling in our heart, it becomes a gift that displeases the Lord. The missionary may well benefit from the gift, but the giver may become miserably discontent as he finds that God will not allow this gift to erase the guilt he feels from disobeying God. In this case, the gift may have been valuable and even useful, but the giver's impure motive taints his offering before a Holy God. Would it make sense for this man to become angry with God because his conscience has not been appeased by this offering? The giver is assisting someone's calling at the neglect of his own. Is this the right thing to do? Only a loving God would reject this type of gift. He knows how fulfilling it would be for this person to respond to God's call and come into right alignment with the plan God has for his life. The individual could never discover that plan if God continually allowed his conscience to be washed with impure offerings. When God refuses our tainted gifts, it is never because God is difficult to please. On the contrary, it is because He is mercifully exposing in us a heart condition that without correction could become our demise.

In view of the Scripture passage in Micah, what is a good gift to bring before the Lord? This is the question the prophet is asking. There are some very valuable offerings listed here that would seem to be good choices. Each one mentioned would have required a great sacrifice to the giver. However, the prophet concludes that the gift most pleasing to the Lord is a life of devotion and humility before God. In other words, offering an expensive gift to God at the neglect of mercy, compassion and justice would not impress Him at all. Yet, we see Abel's offering accepted. Was it because Abel followed a detailed list of what kind of gifts would delight the Lord? This passage in Micah clearly indicates that if Abel was not walking humbly before God, no matter how precious his offering appeared, he, too, would have received a rebuke instead of an affirmation of pleasure from the Lord.

Cain apparently had the opportunity to make some adjustments. God gave him another chance by exhorting him to do what is right. Was God looking for another gift, or was he looking for a heart change from the giver? We can safely determine by looking at Cain's response that he is an angry man, unwilling to acknowledge his selfish and impure motives. I wonder if Eve, like Johnny's mother, failed to teach her son the truth about gift giving, that it is supposed to be an unselfish action intended to bless the receiver. I wonder how many times Eve might have feigned approval of her son's meager attempts at pleasing others instead of teaching him to do what is right. How many parents of the Johnnys and Cains may fear that they will damage their child's self esteem by not accepting everything they have to offer? Since when does teaching our children Truth damage their self esteem? This thought is the result of partaking of the mixture that this book speaks about. It is the mixture that creeps in unaware, poisoning our lives and inspiring us to offer up unacceptable offerings. It is the lie that we accept because we don't truly trust that God's design for our life is what is truly best for us.

## **Chapter Questions:**

Analyze the Scenarios given in the introduction portion of this book. Ask yourself the following questions:

*Do I relate more to the givers or the receivers in the Scenarios given?*

*Do I find myself frustrated with the wife who refused the gift her husband gave her, or can I relate to the pain she experienced?*

*Knowing that the receiver in Scenario 4 was God himself, do I find myself questioning His integrity and equity in this situation?*

*Do you see yourself as a sincere giver or do you find your gift giving practices tainted with impure motives?*

*We can see a relationship between Cain's unwillingness to accept God's correction and his lack of acceptance for God's design for his life. As you examine your own responses to God's correction, especially in the area of giving, can you honestly say that you accept the design God has for your life?*

## Chapter 2: Will You Shut the Door?

*Oh, that there were even one among you [whose duty it is to minister to Me] who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar to no purpose [an empty, futile, fruitless pretense]! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hand. **Malachi 1:10 (Amplified Bible)***

Though Johnny's wife may not have had the same righteous intentions for rejecting her gift as God did in the story of Cain and Abel, it is clear that her discernment of Johnny's motives was accurate. In this passage in the Amplified Bible, we can see another example of gift giving gone awry. It helps us to understand very clearly why God wanted the priests of the day to shut the door on sacrifices that were being offered on God's holy altar. The priests were polluting the altar with sacrifices from those whose hearts were wicked. This principle is confirmed further in the New Testament as we look at what the first epistle of John says regarding the story of Cain and Abel:

*This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. **1 John 3:11-12 (New International Version)***

Cain's actions were evil. God shut the door on Cain's sacrifice in order to confirm the principle that it is the heart condition that concerns Him. No matter how great the sacrifice that we bring, God cannot be appeased with gifts.

God shut the door on Cain's sacrifice, but He also opened another door for him. That door came in the form of an opportunity to do what was right. If Cain had looked to God in humility and repentance, his countenance would have changed. Remember that one of God's requirements according to Micah 6:8 is to walk humbly with our God. He had choices to make: self-righteousness or redemption, fear or faith, his way or God's way. God was offering a way for Cain to respond to Him in faith. Rather than looking to God, the only One who could change his heart and restore his joy, he looked to his brother. Jealousy and fear gave way to hatred and murder. He despised righteousness and now all he had to offer God was the blood of his innocent brother, Abel. We have many Cains and Johnnys to contend with today. It is no wonder we see such a rise in violence. Like the priests of the post-exilic times, we see many authority figures refusing to shut the door on sacrifices that reflect a selfish heart.

Why do we feel the need to affirm and compliment those whose hearts are self-serving? It may seem entirely innocent when a young child gives something that is selfishly motivated, but the sinful nature of mankind needs to be exposed, corrected and disciplined. We are not talking about imperfect offerings. It is not the quality of the gift that we are looking at here. Who wouldn't be delighted when a child brings them a masterpiece designed by their own precious hands, no matter what it looks like? If that same child brings an offering to manipulate an adult into giving them something that they want, this is a subtlety that should be handled delicately, not ignored. These are the scenarios that when not handled correctly over time, can feed the monster of selfishness. The worst part about this type of gift giving is that it comes disguised as a noble task worthy of praise. Why are we so hesitant to expose a heart that is bent on its own

way? Why did the priests have to receive a command from the prophet to shut the door on the self-serving givers? Didn't they know better themselves - or did they?

Under the system of priesthood, these ministers of God would receive a benefit from the gifts that were being brought to the altar and offered up to God. To shut the door to these gifts would mean that provisions for them might become awfully lean. Could this be what was affecting their ability to do what was right? Could this be what affects our ability to correct and expose this type of heart? Is it possible that we, the receivers, are just as selfishly motivated when we fail to do what is right? Exposing the obvious wrongs in a society might be perceived as noble, but rarely will someone be honored for correcting someone who doesn't at all appear as an evil-doer. As a matter of fact, there may be persecution ahead for those who would heed the advice of Malachi 1:10.

We were counseling a couple who were having tremendous marital struggles. The tension of these challenges was escalating, and the more they sifted through the baggage of past unresolved issues, the more the tension mounted. Both of these individuals were serving at their local church and very active in various aspects of ministry. They seemed compelled to continue their involvement in ministry, even though the cost of their service meant a lack of time with one another to work on their failing marriage. The children of this union looked on as the parents furiously served at church only to experience the undercurrents of hostility between their parents whenever they were at home. We advised the couple to set ministry endeavors aside for a season to focus on the need to resolve past hurts, invest in one another and the children, and get their marriage and family on solid ground. What was their pastor's response to this advice? He emphatically declared that backing up from "God's service" would be the sure destruction of their marriage. They took his advice and continued to serve at church. They are divorced today, and every one of their children are non-believers. Though we could never blame one person for the destructive patterns that ensued in this couple's life, we must examine what could have inspired this shepherd to encourage his sheep to continue to give at the neglect of their own spiritual and emotional health.

The church had re-routed all the phone calls to their home so that they didn't need a church secretary on site. The wife of this union was answering calls for the pastor. The husband was serving in children's ministry and involved in the men's prayer team. The wife was also on the worship team. Were the voids that would have occurred if they pulled out too difficult to fill? Was this pastor overwhelmed at his tasks and unwilling to release this couple though it would have given them a better chance at survival?

The influence of our adversary has encouraged many to accept those doing wrong while ostracizing those whose desire is to truly please the Lord. Sometimes truly pleasing God may not look so good to others. As a matter of fact, it may appear selfish or unloving. This couple could have laid down their offerings to the church and appeared like inactive pew sitters, yet it might have been the catalyst that helped to repair their marriage. God may have been wanting this pastor to shut the door on their sacrifices, but only to help them open another one. As God offered Cain the opportunity to do what was right, this pastor could have shown them the way to establish true and sincere giving within the context of their own marital relationship. Examining their priorities and making the adjustments necessary would have been the right thing to do. Building a proper foundation in their family would have resulted in birthing the fruit of righteousness.

Why do we see all the scenarios previously mentioned in the book playing out in homes and churches all across America and all around the world? To understand this more fully, we need to go back to the garden, not Johnny's untended garden, or the garden where Cain picked his sacrifices for God, but the first garden ever created, the Garden of Eden.

### **Chapter Questions:**

Let us briefly re-visit the scenario with Johnny that was discussed in the introduction.

*What did Johnny's wife have to lose or gain by refusing his gift?*

*Shutting doors on gifts also involves opening others just as God did with Cain. How could she have opened another door for Johnny rather than just closing one?*

*What did the priests have to lose or gain by refusing the sacrifices brought to God's holy altar?*

*Read over the command given to the priests in Malachi 1:10. If the Lord asks you to "shut the door" to unacceptable sacrifices, would you be willing to obey Him?*

*Are there individuals you are responsible for that need your gentle correction to expose a selfish heart?*

*Do you sense God's displeasure at any of the sacrifices you are offering at this time (e.g. time commitments, ministry endeavors, monetary offerings, co-dependent relationships)?*

### Chapter 3: You Shall Surely Die!

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 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 (New King James Version)**

You all know the story in Genesis 3:1-8. God had given clear boundaries to mankind and Satan comes to challenge them. The Serpent contradicts God's Truth to accomplish his purpose. God's Truth stated: "...you shall surely die."

Satan's lie states: "You will not surely die ...".

The serpent enticed Eve through temptation, which came in the form of an indictment against God's character:

*Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* **Genesis 3:4-5 (New King James Version)**

The woman rationalized why it was acceptable to believe the lie after she listened to the reasoning of the serpent:

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.* **Genesis 3:6 (New King James Version)**

Remember that according to Micah 6:8, it is within God's character to show man what is the good and right thing to do. Would he have done any less for mankind at the beginning of the human race? He gave a clear boundary as well as magnificent opportunities for living within that boundary. Satan convinced Eve that God was withholding something valuable from man. He enticed her to go beyond God's command and defy the boundaries. He injected his wicked thoughts into mankind, and man opened his mouth to receive this deadly poison. Man now needed a redeemer. This reality seems rather easy for the church to comprehend, but in spite of being redeemed and made right with God through the blood of Jesus, can we still be under the subtle influence of the enemy?

We can observe, through these passages in Genesis, that the enemy did not convince Adam and Eve to leave the garden God created. That might have been too big a pill to swallow at that time. The garden was perfect in its beauty. They still wanted the benefits of the garden, but they wanted to exist in a world God created with their own rules to govern them. Much like the priests of Malachi's day, they wanted to benefit from their surroundings at the risk of compromise. They didn't trust that what God provided righteously would be enough.

Isn't it interesting to note that the fruit birthed after this fallen union reflected righteousness (Abel) and wickedness (Cain)? That deadly potion of Satanic lies spread from one generation to the next, infecting everyone who swallowed its intoxicating influence. The effect was a world-wide epidemic, concocted by our adversary, Satan, still plaguing man today. Unfortunately many individuals, church institutions and families still embrace this form of

manipulation that began in the garden through man's interaction with Satan. It is the self-serving attitude that we can enjoy what God has given us without accepting the boundaries that come along with those blessings. The subtle thought process behind that concept becomes more obvious as we allow God's light to expose Satan's ugly agenda: to get mankind to doubt God's best intentions and to readily accept the gifts without complete surrender to the giver.

Though we may hear many sermons on the dilemma of man's fallen nature, we may not recognize that Satan continues to use the very same tactics today in an effort to dilute the strength of God's people. Though redeemed and chosen, we can still fall prey to the lie that Adam and Eve accepted long ago: God is withholding good and we must apprehend what we are missing by mixing what he has given us with what seems good to us. Would Adam and Eve have readily bought the lie if they thought that accepting that lie would mean banishment from the garden? They were willing to mix what God offered to them with what Satan was offering and thought they could still have the best of both worlds. Immediately following Adam and Eve's act of disobedience, painful consequences resulted. They now discovered that they were naked (Genesis 3:7), and they hid from God (Genesis 3:8). Their intimate connection with God was broken, and spiritual death immediately came to mankind just as God had stated it would. The physical consequences of human suffering were also realized along with death through disease, accidents and the aging process.

Human nature is interesting. We fear what we shouldn't and don't fear what we should. What else can explain a rowdy teenager going 90 miles an hour on a motorcycle in hopes that no one else will ignore the stop signs that he is plowing through. This same teenager fears walking into church, though his heart tells him he needs to be there to hear the message. A peer might see him and poke fun at his curiosity to know more about the Creator. Eve didn't fear her Creator. Had she feared the One who gave her the commands, surely she would not have given into the lies of the enemy. Instead she chose to believe that God was unwilling to give her all she needed. She feared living by God's standards. To her it meant she would live a life that was less than fulfilling.

Does this sound familiar? It should be very familiar to anyone who claims to be a participant in the human race. Where does this fear of deprivation come from and why do we allow it so often to take root in our hearts? We are going to explore more about the concept of mixing what God has given us with what Satan has to offer. Before we explore some of these mixtures and the examples of those in Scripture that yielded to Satan's enticements, it is important for us to look a little deeper into the nature of our adversary. As we look into what the Scriptures indicate about Satan's rebellion, we will understand more about our temptation to be discontent and self-serving.

### **Chapter Questions:**

Take the time to read Genesis chapter's 2 and 3 and then answer the following questions:

*Were the boundary lines that God gave Adam clear and distinct?*

*Is there any text indicating that Eve was there at the time God commanded Adam not to partake of the forbidden fruit?*

*What excuses could Eve have made for not heeding the command of God?  
How many times do we make excuses for not obeying God's clear and distinct boundaries?*

*Have we ever questioned God's purposes in the commands he has given us through the Bible?*

*Have we ever doubted His integrity as we struggle to follow these commands?*

## Chapter 4: Who's Knocking at Your Door?

*And the huge dragon was cast down and out--that age-old serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, he who is the seducer (deceiver) of all humanity the world over; he was forced out and down to the earth, and his angels were flung out along with him. **Revelation 12:9 (Amplified Bible)***

In Lesson two we discussed doors that should have been shut. We referred to the unfaithful priests that refused to shut the door on those who were bringing sacrifices with insincere motives. They were benefiting from this practice and welcomed the profit they received from the actions of backslidden Israel. In this lesson we will discuss doors that should never be opened!

How many of us are tempted to close the shades and retreat when we know there is a peddler in the neighborhood? I confess that on more than one occasion my children were instructed to be quiet and still as we peeked out of the blinds waiting for the persistent salesperson to give up all hope of anyone answering the door. Persuasive words are sometimes hard to resist! Much like the pushy seller, the deceiver of humanity is in the business of pursuing mankind. The damage he can do is much greater, however, than the huge hit we can suffer after giving in to a fraudulent scheme or overpriced merchandise.

The word *deceive* is defined in the World English Dictionary as "*to mislead by deliberate misrepresentation or lies.*" Does anyone in his right mind enter into a relationship or contract with someone who he knows will lie, cheat, and fail to deliver on his promises? A woman in a domestic violence cycle becomes frustrated with her abuser, desperately wanting to believe his promises to change destructive behavior patterns. Whether you relate to the woman who goes back into this cycle over and over, enticed by the false promises of her abuser, or the customer who purchases an item he can't really afford through the crafty persuasion of a sly salesperson, we have all been duped at one time or another. The point is that most of us don't guard our hearts if we don't perceive a threat or a danger. That is the nature of deception! It is intended to catch you off guard.

Satan has a master plan, and if we would take some time to understand his methods of operation, we would be more apt to close the door on his enticing promises. We don't have to be caught unaware. For one thing, the Scripture above warns us of his plans to deceive the whole world. This is an enormous task, and he is determined to succeed. It is important for us to know, first of all, that he is full of fury (Revelation 12:12). Angry people are fueled by their passion. We have an arch-enemy who is driven by his wrath, and if anyone has ever faced an angry opponent, he is aware of the dangers involved in those encounters.

Why is Satan so angry and why is his main goal to deceive the nations? Take the time to read Isaiah 14:12-15. The indication in these passages reveals that Satan desired a position in heaven above God's throne. His desire to make himself like the most high God was covetous and blasphemous. He was not content with his boundaries. This is a familiar scenario. This was the same way in which he tempted Eve in the garden. Though she had been given the best, Satan enticed her to become discontent and to desire more than what she was given.

Turn to Ezekiel 28:12-14. If this is describing Satan's dominion, which many commentaries conclude, he was an *"anointed cherub that covers with overshadowing wings."* He was *"upon the holy mountain of God."* It seems that he allowed this position to corrupt his mind with grandiose thinking that resulted in acts of rebellion before the Creator God. It wasn't enough to be created *"perfect in beauty"* and *"full of wisdom."* Satan wanted to climb the corporate ladder and become C.E.O. of all of heaven and earth. He desired to stand in the position of God Himself. We know that this act of rebellion was met with grave and eternal consequences. He was cast down from heaven. Jesus himself stated in Luke 10:18, *"I saw Satan falling like a lightning [flash] from heaven."*

With great fury, Satan comes to mankind. He can no longer stand in the position he once occupied in heaven, so his desire is to bring as many people down with him as he can. As an abuser who wants to control his victim, he must present an array of false promises to smokescreen his true intentions. Under that puff of smoke is the stark reality that he will never deliver on his promises and in fact, he will always, without fail, leave an aftermath of destruction in his path. In order to accomplish this destruction, he must disguise himself in order to make his appeals more palatable to man. His darkness and fury is veiled as his mask hides the grotesqueness of his image. Victims are snared by the lies, caught in the trap of his manipulation. This is what compromise is all about. Did you ever notice that the word, *compromise*, contains the word, *promise*?

We must recognize the true image behind the mask if we are to succeed in thwarting Satan's plans. II Corinthians 11:14 states, *"And no wonder; for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."* We don't need to give in to covetous ways and forsake the boundaries that God has provided for our own safety. We need to sharpen our senses to become more aware of his lying schemes and false promises. We must guard our hearts much like a consumer needs to resist all temptations and flee when approached by those whose only goal is to prosper from their vulnerability. Who's knocking on your door today? It isn't always wise to answer it.

### **Chapter Questions:**

*What tools does Satan use to trap mankind?*

*Have you ever been taken by the deception of a friend or co-worker? Describe the event and the purpose for the deception.*

*Have you ever been tempted to use deception to manipulate circumstances or people to your advantage?*

*What are the possible outcomes of using deception as a tool to succeed?*

*How can trusting God's plan for your life enable you to protect your heart from being deceived and keep you from using deceptive ways to succeed?*

## Chapter 5: Hungry Lion on the Loose

*Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour. **I Peter 5:8 (Amplified Bible)***

There is a story in the Bible that few mention. We need to speak of it more and become familiar with its sobering message to us today. It begins with a king bringing compromise to his kingdom and ends with a lion devouring a prophet. Why did this king compromise God's ways? How did the prophet become prey for this lion? The answer lies in the message of these lessons. This study intends to expose the captivating lies that loom over man, seducing them to defy God's boundaries. This message is not a new one, but rather an ancient message warned about in page after page of Biblical text. As we take the time to review several Biblical accounts which point to the vulnerability of God's creation to partake of the mixture of good and evil, we will see sin patterns leaving their ugly mark on mankind. The fall of man in the garden was just the beginning of a reoccurring cycle. We see mankind repeatedly reaching out for the forbidden fruit in an effort to gain something they believe is of value to them.

There is an ironic twist in this particular story. This same prophet that was devoured by the lion in I Kings 13, was ordained of God to speak against the king who had allowed this mixture of good and evil in his kingdom. We need to turn back to I Kings 12 in order to understand the significance of this prophet's mission. It is here that we read of the inner turmoil of the nation of Israel after the reign of Solomon, resulting in a split of the kingdom. Only a small minority remained faithful to David's dynasty. The vast majority of Israel's population pledged allegiance to a man named Jeroboam, a former officer of Solomon who rebelled against him.

Rebellion tends to be a breeding ground for the devious inventions of man. Jeroboam's first policy was to build two golden calves and set them up in Bethel and Dan to entice the people away from Jerusalem, the place that God had ordained for worship. The "sins of Jeroboam" are aptly described in the Davis Dictionary of the Bible, copyright 1973 Royal Publishers, Inc., page 384:

"It would seem that he still desired to worship Jehovah under the image of the calf. He not only thus established houses of high places which lacked the ark and the shekinah, but he made Israelites who were not of the tribe of Levi priests, doubtless because few or none of the lawful priests and other Levites consented to serve in the idolatrous and schismatic worship (I Kin. xii, 31; 2 Chron. xi. 13-15; xiii. 9). He further decreed that the harvest festival, which was celebrated in Judah on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, should be observed in the northern kingdom on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (I Kin. 32, 33). The mass of the people conformed. Thus Jeroboam made Israel to sin. This abhorrent worship continued until the fall of the kingdom."

Jeroboam imitated the things of God, but fashioned it his own way, and for his own benefit. He did not eliminate worship, he just added his own twist to it in order to accommodate his desire to maintain control of the kingdom. God had told Jeroboam that he would have a permanent dynasty if he followed God's ways (I Kings 11: 31-38). Clearly Jeroboam was in rebellion against God, and used what he had been entrusted with for his own purposes.

We can now fast forward to the prophet of God. His mission is described in I Kings 13. He is from the tribe of Judah, one of the small remnants that remained faithful to the Lord's commands. The Lord raised him up to speak against the altars that were erected by this idolatrous King Jeroboam. He was given clear boundaries:

1. Do not eat or drink in the city.
2. After completing God's assignment of bringing judgment against the idolatry of this king, he is not to return to his home the same way he came.

Isn't it interesting that the Lord set boundaries for the prophet who is to speak against the man who defied all boundaries? God knows the nature of his people and their tendency to give in to the adversary's devices. He was setting up a warning to this prophet to protect him from partaking of the same sin that he was asked to correct.

The prophet began his mission with strict adherence to God's commands. After performing a miraculous sign intended to confirm the Lord's indignation at Jeroboam's sin, the prophet resisted a tempting offer of food, drink, and gifts offered to him by the astonished king. After experiencing this miracle, the king apparently was ready to appease the prophet, but the prophet refused the bait. However, Satan became more clever with this obedient prophet. Remember, he is filled with wrath, but he is also able to disguise himself, if need be, to appeal to the fleshly instincts of mankind. He chose a plan that the young prophet would never expect.

An older prophet arrived on the scene, after being told about the details of the miraculous event that took place between King Jeroboam and the younger prophet. He was curious about the mission of the younger prophet. Interesting enough, the older prophet found God's emissary sitting under an oak tree. Had he been looking for shade or comfort after this challenging encounter with a powerful and wicked king? We can only imagine how Satan used the circumstances of this encounter to trick this servant of God. The older prophet invited the man from Judah to come and eat and drink in his home. This first request was met with resistance as the younger prophet told him of the command given to him, that he should not eat or drink in that place. Nevertheless the temptation became more appealing when the invitation from this elder man appeared to be approved by God. The older prophet lied to the younger man and said that God told him to invite the younger prophet to his home. Satan, disguised as an angel of light working through a disobedient and curious prophet, used the religious card on the man of God. It worked! The man from Judah defied the boundaries previously set up by God. What a sinister plot the enemy devised against this man, but the Lord had been faithful to warn him. He went back to the home of his host and enjoyed a meal with him.

At this point the lion's mouth was probably already poised and open, ready to devour his prey. After the meal, the older prophet sent his visitor on his way. Death was around the corner for this courageous but undiscerning missionary. The lion pounced upon his prey much like Satan pounces on us when our lives have carelessly veered off track.

Why would God allow such devastation to come to this prophet's life? Is it possible there is a lesson in this story for us to see? We can only wonder what this prophet was thinking as he reclined under the oak tree. As this young prophet sat and rested, relieved of this great responsibility, he allowed his guard to come down. As followers of Christ, we must weigh all counsel carefully and be determined to seek God's will in every matter that comes our way. One might think that older means wiser, but not in this case. The man of God assumed that this elder

was hearing from God and speaking the truth, though the words were contrary to the commands God had already given him. Trusting in the persuasive words of others could cost you your life. This story speaks of the tragic death of an anointed servant of Judah as well as the continued demise of a nation because of the deadly poison first formulated in the Garden of Eden. I Peter 5:8 beckons us to stay alert and be watchful. Be careful! Wherever the presence of compromise is welcomed and residing, there will always be a hungry lion on the loose!

### **Chapter Questions:**

*Look at the first command that the prophet from Judah received from God in I Kings 13:9. In Biblical times, hospitality, fellowship and relationships centered around eating and drinking together. Why do you think God gave him this strict command and how can we make this command relevant to our lives today?*

*The second command in verse 9 of I Kings 13 was regarding the path the prophet would take home. Why do you think God gave him specific directions not to go out the same way he came in to the city?*

*What do you think the prophet might have been thinking while resting under the oak tree?*

*The prophet faithfully resisted the tempting invitation of food and gifts from the wicked king. Why do you think he was so easily deceived by the older prophet?*

*Do you struggle with any commands God has given us in His Word that you would consider strict?*

*What can you learn from this story regarding receiving direction and guidance from others?*

## Chapter 6: Did Simon Say?

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22 (New International Version)*

The success of the familiar childhood game, Simon Says, depended on the ability of the participants to hear and do what they were commanded. The facilitator's role was to attempt to trick them all into doing something they were not commanded to do by "Simon." If he succeeded in trapping all the players, the game was over. On occasion you would find one very diligent child who would firmly stand his or her ground, not moving a muscle, unless Simon said. In that case, you would find the winner standing proudly, triumphing over the facilitator's masterful attempts to deceive him or her.

As we discussed in an earlier chapter, our enemy, Satan, delights in twisting the Words of our Creator in an attempt to trap us into doing things that God has commanded us not to do. The story of Balaam is an excellent depiction of this method of deception, as the main character in this Biblical account chose not to yield quickly to the commands of our God. Balaam was a prophet relentlessly sought after by Balak, the king of the Moabites. This king, along with the elders of Midian, feared the success of the Israelites, believing that this powerful nation was a threat to their well-being. The plan of these leaders was to depart from their countries with the rewards of divination in their hands, to employ Balaam, the prophet, to curse the people of Israel. Apparently, Balaam had a reputation for success.

Balaam's first inclination after receiving this offer was to quickly decline, stating that no one could possibly curse a nation whom God had chosen to bless. We know that Balaam had some knowledge of the powerful God of Israel in order to understand the principle stated in Genesis 12:3 (New International Version):

*"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

This promise was given to Abraham, the father of this Hebrew nation, before the nation was ever brought forth. Balaam knew that if he followed through with this lucrative offer he would be fighting against God himself. However, as this story unfolds in Numbers chapters 22-24, Balaam went with the men whom he previously had rejected. God raised up a donkey to speak sense into this maddened prophet. As Balaam proceeded to go with these enemies of Israel, he was halted by the beast, an unusual messenger, who miraculously warned Balaam to speak only as directed by God. Balaam continued along with this envoy of leaders who despised God's people, and was taken to the pinnacle of a mountain to curse them. He opened his mouth, and only blessing came forth, causing the king who hired him to be very wroth. The story is not over. Balaam found another way to satisfy the wishes of King Balak in the days to come, since he couldn't use his words to curse God's people.

At first glance in Balaam's story, you might think that this man was an obedient prophet of God, walking in the commands of the Lord. He apparently had some level of communication with the true God, Jehovah. Numbers 22:9 depicts a scenario of Balaam and God conversing about the events at hand. We must take into account the whole counsel of God's Word to test the obedience of this seer. Though he quickly appeared to obey God's commands verbally and

initially rejected the offer to curse God's people, the actions that ensued proved otherwise. He lingered in a dangerous place between knowing God's commands and struggling with the will to obey them. As the Scripture in the beginning of this chapter states, this hesitation will lead to self-deception. Enticed by the rewards of earthly kings, he came up with another plan to curse the people of God. In the days that followed, he proceeded to give counsel to Israel's enemies. He taught Balaak how to trap Israel into fashioning their own demise through self-deception.

As followers of Christ, many times our actions do not match our words. Our spirit wants to follow after Christ, yet our flesh desires something different. This struggle is part of the ongoing battle we face every day as we are surrounded by temptations to benefit from the wages of our wrong-doing. Satan's desire is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). If his mission cannot be accomplished in the obvious way through the direct cursing of a people or a nation, his next step is to bring that individual or nation into compromise and self deception as they mingle the Truth with error. This was the tactic that Balak used on the children of Israel, and the counsel to do this came from Balaam himself! He taught Balak to entice the children of Israel into intermarrying with the nations who bowed down to other gods. This fellowship with pagan cultures drew them into a false religion that intermingled the worship of idols with the worship of the true God. This gave way to compromise, and compromise gave way to destruction. The real enemy of Israel, Satan himself, came in the back door, diluting the strength of Israel as they disregarded the command to worship the one, true God. The Israelites' own actions of disobedience caused the curses of God to descend upon them. Numbers 31:16 briefly describes the advice Balaam gave Israel and the curse that followed those who heeded his counsel:

*"They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the LORD in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the LORD's people."*

The effects of this compromise reached far into the generations that followed, as we see an admonishment in Revelation to the early church regarding pagan sexual practices that stemmed from Balaam's counsel.

It seems that Balaam was caught up in this very same battle we face today. Knowing the right thing to do and failing to carry it through will produce turmoil in our lives. Satan's mission was to use Balaam's fleshly desires to destroy the Israelites. II Peter 2:15 tells us that Balaam loved what his wrong doing earned him. This love for carnal wages won out over his desire to obey the commands of God.

How is this battle being played out in modern day? Does this ancient story have relevant Truth that can impact our lives in the present? We discussed in Chapter 3 how Satan convinced Eve to disregard God's warnings and consequences. Prior to this manipulative lie, we see the initial doubts cast upon mankind as the Devil asked Eve in Genesis 3:1 "...Did God really say that?" Is it any wonder that Balaam, a greedy prophet, would allow himself to waiver in the same valley of decision that trapped Eve? Satan cannot successfully curse those whom God has blessed. He will, however, try to bring God's people into deception by offering the rewards of compromise. Are you faithfully following the commands of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, or are you lingering in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14)? When the game of life is over, will you be found doing what Jesus says?

## Chapter Questions:

Read the following Scripture passages and then answer the questions:

*Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: you have some people there who are clinging to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to set a trap and a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, [to entice them] to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols and to practice lewdness [giving themselves up to sexual vice]. Revelation 2:14 (Amplified Bible)*

*Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. Jude vs.11 (New International Version, ©2010)*

*What do you think caused Balaam to find another way to satisfy King Balak's request to curse Israel?*

*Balaam seemed to have an imaginary compliance to God. He came in the back door, teaching Israel's enemies to plan their destruction. As he was teaching deception, he was caught in the very snare of sin's deceitfulness. Do you suppose he actually thought that the back door approach would not bring consequences?*

*Balaam couldn't curse God's people directly, but he indirectly participated in their destruction by taking the back door approach and enticing them to follow other gods. Knowing that certain sinful actions are not acceptable to the Lord or others, have you ever participated in taking this same type of back door approach to sin? (Ex: Rather than openly gossiping about someone, you disguise your bad intentions in the form of a "prayer request". ) What was the result?*

*Can you relate to his desire for gain and the willingness to compromise what he knew was right?*

*Are there any areas of your life today that love the wages of wrong-doing more than delighting in the commands of God? Be specific.*

*Balaam is not spoken of highly in these Scripture passages. How can Balaam's bad example and tainted reputation encourage you to overcome the temptation to benefit from the wages of wrong-doing?*

## Chapter 7: Faithful Berean Or Zealot Without Knowledge?

*Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Acts 17:11 (New International Version, ©2011)*

During the earliest years of church growth and the spread of the gospel message recorded in the book of Acts, we can see individuals and groups of people exhibiting varying levels of receptivity to the Word that was spoken through Christ's followers. A group of Jews that resided in the town of Berea was noted as being more noble than others. They enthusiastically received the Word spoken but took the responsibility of examining the Biblical text to see if what was spoken of by the disciples of Jesus was accurate and true. The Scriptures referred to in this passage would have been the Hebrew Torah. It should be noted that the followers of Christ who shared the message with the Bereans were said to be turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Apparently their message was having an impact on the religious teachings of the day. The Bereans didn't allow the excitement of the good news to be their sole reason for acceptance; they were concerned with the accuracy of the message. We would do well today, if we examined the current philosophies of our day in the light of Biblical text.

A king who was described as having a heart after God (Acts 13:22), failed to examine the philosophies of his day with the teachings of Torah; the result was disastrous. That King, David, ruled Israel with skill and integrity (Psalm 78:72). We know he wasn't a perfect man or void of scandal throughout his life, but he was beloved by God, as his name implies. The interesting twist of this story is that in spite of his integrity and good intentions, David was snared by the mixture of good and evil.

He had a zeal for God that resulted in a strong desire to bring the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. Compromise and corruption had caused the Israelites to succumb to their enemies, the Philistines, who captured the ark after defeating Israel. In those days, before the redemptive power of the blood of Jesus made the pathway for God to dwell in the hearts of His people, God resided with Israel in what was called the Ark of the Covenant. Before the ark had a permanent dwelling place in the temple, it took its residence in the tabernacle which was a mobile structure that went with Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness. The tabernacle was their contact place with Jehovah, the place where they would meet with God. This ark of God's presence was contained in the area designated as the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. The ark contained a copy of God's commands to Moses, commonly referred to as the Torah. It is written that He dwelled on the throne of mercy that covered this ark (Exodus 25:21-22). The priests would bring to the tabernacle sacrifices from God's people, and they would follow daily rituals, commanded by God, in order to remain in communion with the living God. The ark and the tabernacle that surrounded it were the focal point of Israel's worship.

When the Philistines defeated Israel, they targeted the ark, Israel's most sacred object, as part of their spoils. You can understand then, that the absence of the ark was the absence of God's blessing, protection and presence. David decided to be the one to bring the ark back to Jerusalem, and he acted on this mission with the utmost of enthusiasm and passion. In his zealotry, however, he made a very grave and fatal mistake. While guiding the ark back from

Kiriath Jearim in Judah, the oxen who were hitched to this ark stumbled at a threshing floor and the cart upon which the ark rested began to tip. A man named Uzzah reached out to steady the ark with his hands and he was instantly struck dead! Fear gripped David, and he was angered at this violent outbreak from God against one of his men. Where did Israel go wrong? David had consulted with every officer before attempting this task. The whole assembly of Israel agreed that David's plan was a noble and necessary mission. Doesn't a unanimous vote count for anything in God's eyes?

Previous to this unfortunate incident, the Philistines had also experienced a tragedy of their own relating to the ark. After they captured the ark during King Saul's reign, they were stricken with tumors. This blatant act of retaliation by God threatened them, and the fear of eventual death and annihilation compelled them to send the ark back to the Israelites, where it belonged. It seemed that God's presence could not be used merely as a good luck charm for those who had no respect for the true God. They proceeded to place this ark on a new cart and hitched it to some cows, hoping these lowly beasts would complete the assignment of bringing the divine presence back home to Israel. Tragic occurrences with the ark continued as the cart stopped at Beth Shemesh where some irreverent Israelites peeked inside the ark only to have individuals die for dishonoring God's Holy presence (I Samuel 6:19). The town trembled in fear of the disaster that struck and requested that the men of Kiriath Jearim come to remove the ark from its place. This is where David's men came to retrieve it; you would think by this time, they would have exercised a little more caution in returning this sacred object to its destination in the holy city of Jerusalem.

After Uzzah was stricken down, David's men brought the ark to the home of Obed Edom, where it lay at rest for several months. Interestingly enough, Obed's family and everything he owned were blessed during that time. After David sought the Lord in prayer regarding the judgment on Uzzah, he declared,

*"You are the leaders of the Levite families. You must purify yourselves and all your fellow Levites, so you can bring the Ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. Because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the LORD our God burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it properly." So the priests and the Levites purified themselves in order to bring the Ark of the LORD, the God of Israel, to Jerusalem. Then the Levites carried the Ark of God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the LORD had instructed Moses. **I Chronicles 15:12-15 (New Living Translation)***

The grave and fatal mistake that David made was that he failed to seek God regarding the transportation of the ark. All of these instructions had been carefully outlined in the Torah (Numbers 1:50-53, 7:9), and David had ignored the previously written commands in favor of doing things the easy way, just as the Philistines had done. They placed the ark on a new cart and hitched it to some oxen. Israel followed the way of the Philistines rather than God's way. It seemed reasonable enough to move the ark in this fashion, but the carelessness of David's actions resulted in death.

So what's the big deal? David's heart was right, wasn't it? We can agree that David possessed a devotion for God and a wholesome desire to bring the presence back to the capital city, but do enthusiasm and zeal trump righteousness? How about the myriads of churches in America who have a strong desire to bring lost souls to Christ but use methods invented by man? Is it possible that we are bringing turmoil and confusion to the people of God by adapting to worldly means of

bringing his presence to the people rather than following God's Holy instructions? David was deceived into thinking that he could accomplish something great for God in his own strength, and he failed to question a method that ran contrary to God's design. God's design included rich symbolism that taught the importance of the priesthood and the holiness of God.

This trap of deception can come to those who desire the wages of unrighteousness, like Balaam, or it can lure those whose hearts' desire is to follow God. Remember how the young prophet in Chapter 5 threw caution to the wind? He started out with strict adherence to God's commands and ended in compromise and destruction. This story of David's folly is very similar in nature to the story of the anointed prophet. They can both serve as a reminder to us that walking circumspectly is so vital to those of us whose hearts are set on doing God's will. Their experiences stand as a strong admonition to us to always go back to God's infallible Word as a plumb line for our life and teachings.

Are you tempted to question God's wrath upon Uzzah? Do you wonder about the fairness of Jehovah in such a scenario? Let's consider these words of warning given to Israel before the people even conjured up the thought of having a king rule over them. God had already made provisions in the law for the monarchs that they would choose. The Lord God desired to be their supreme ruler, yet He knew full well that they would reject His absolute rulership in their lives, and thus this command was given in the Torah on behalf of those who would one day reign over His people:

*"And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:*

*That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." (Deuteronomy 17:18-20 King James Version)*

If David had been faithful like the Bereans, he would have been faithful to copy these laws and read them all the days of his life. No doubt he would have carefully followed what was written in the law concerning the instructions given for carrying the ark of God's covenant. Lives are lost and time is wasted when we fail to let God's Holy Word be our teacher.

Are you committed to accomplishing God's business God's way, or do you imagine you have a better plan that seems more profitable and reasonable? Does transporting God's divine presence with a new cart led by beasts rather than carrying His presence on the shoulders of the priests really make a difference? Apparently it made such a difference that God used what seemed to be unreasonable and harsh means to get their attention. The Lord got David's attention, and his mercy is calling out for ours. Will you be a faithful Berean or will you allow your passion for God to be your only guide? Take a moment right now to ask God for His help in combining your zeal for him with a knowledge of His holy and perfect righteousness. Thank Him for the instructions given to us through His infallible Word and trust that His design is always best.

### **Chapter Questions:**

*A well-known saying states that "ignorance is bliss." Is this a biblical statement? Are we responsible for what we do not know?*

*Do you feel God made it clear about how to carry the Ark? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or Why Not?*

*Read Numbers 4:5-20. Did David have a right to be angry with God for taking Uzzah's life (Numbers 4:15)?*

*Do you believe the tragedy at Beth Shemesh (1 Samuel 6:13-19) could have been avoided?*

*How did the people of Beth Shemesh respond to the tragedy (1 Samuel 6:19b-21)? Give details.*

*Tragedies happen daily. Some of these may cause individuals - believers and non-believers - to question God's care and concern for them. We may be unable to explain certain tragedies from our own theological view, but there are times that we can see a definite connection between tragedy and disobedience to God's principles. Read Galatians 6:7-9. Have you ever attributed blame to God for a calamity you or others might have faced that clearly resulted from disobedience to God's word?*

*Read James 1:21-25. Are you committed to hearing and obeying God's teachings?*

## Chapter 8: To Wash or Not to Wash

*Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" **Matthew 15:1-3 (New International Version, ©2011)***

America is steeped in tradition. Many of the traditions of our forefathers are rich in symbolism, originating in the hearts of those who were dedicated to capturing significant events to preserve their memory and meaning from one generation to the next. Traditions can encourage, stimulate and inspire us. They can be part of the fabric that holds families, cultures and even nations together. So what could be wrong with tradition? Like the character, Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, you may be challenged, in this chapter, to take a deeper look into the meaning and relevance of the traditions you hold so dear to your heart.

Let's first look back at ancient times when the Jewish leaders would initiate certain ritual observances and then place them on equal ground with Scripture. In the Scripture passage above, the Jews had created rules about handwashing that went above and beyond anything that was ever stated in the Torah. Some individuals would call this building a fence around God's laws. If breaking the commands is symbolic of falling in a ditch, the fence created around these "ditches" would be the safeguard to keep them from getting close to falling. For instance, some Jews refuse to write or speak the name of the Lord. It is believed that this practice stems from a fear that they will violate the third command stated in Exodus 20:7a, "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain....*" These types of "fences" around God's laws would then form the basis for some of the traditions that Jesus was addressing in this passage. In some cases, the care and scrutiny of the Scriptures were done out of adoration for Yahweh, but at other times, the sages and leaders used these traditions to exercise authority over the people. Some of these traditions became heavy loads and burdens forming a religion of their own that mixed the laws of God with their own ceremony, ritual and rules. Does this sound familiar? We spoke of the age old plan of the serpent to inject his poison into mankind in Chapter 3. His lies were mixed with God's Truths and resulted in death for the human race. In like manner, the vain traditions of the religious leaders were mixed with God's righteous laws. As time progressed, they held these traditions in their hearts as more important than the Truths of the Scriptures, and they became a lethal poison.

Let us now observe the development of tradition from a view that might hit a little closer to home. In order for us to identify areas of our own lives where we may be in danger of elevating tradition over God's teachings, we must first take a careful look at how we have formed the basis of our customs and practices. Let me give you an amusing example to make my point clear. A woman was cooking a ham for a holiday dinner. Her daughter watched curiously as her mom cut off both ends of the ham before placing it in the pan. The daughter asked her mother why she did this, supposing that there was some rational explanation for this action. Her mother thought for a moment, and then embarrassed with her own reply, she expressed to her daughter that she had always watched her mother do the very same thing, year after year. She had followed this same pattern without really knowing the reason behind it. Her daughter decided to call grandma to figure out why the ends of the ham were cut off before being put in the pan. Grandma laughed as her granddaughter posed the question. She admitted that the only reason

she cut off both ends was because she never had a pan big enough for the hams she purchased! The tradition of cutting the ham ends was formed as the mother observed her mother; she simply copied her mother without question. Her practice was void of any real understanding or thought.

This illustration, while rather simplistic, is a humorous way of reminding us that we may need to take a closer look at our own observances. Are we guilty of following vain traditions? Do we partake of religious practices that were passed down to us with no real understanding of their origins or meanings? The next step, in the development of a vain or worthless tradition, is the observing of that tradition in a manner that becomes of equal importance or even greater importance than the observance and practice of God's teachings. As we first stated in this chapter, traditions can be inspiring and encouraging, but what if our traditions become so dear to us that we refuse to examine them in the light of Biblical text?

Jesus would never have rebuked the Pharisees for following their traditions except that these traditions had obviously affected their ability to love and worship the One True God. It hindered them so much that they rejected not only the teachings of Christ, but the revelation that Christ was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Extensive washings don't really seem like a horrible tradition until you see the consequences resulting from their faulty belief system. Christ was rejected as the Son of God as the Pharisees who practiced these ritual washings began to judge him and others who didn't follow them as heretics of the faith. They had missed the understanding of the laws pertaining to ritual washings and purity. They were looking at and focusing on external means of purifying while the Lord always dug deeper until reaching the very heart of the matter.

As young believers, filled with zeal and desiring to be faithful Bereans, we found it easy to recognize the error of the church teachings we had learned as children, and to make a decision to join a church that upheld the teachings of God's written Word. We were, however, even in this new church setting, very wary of traditions centering around the worship of the Lord, since we had followed traditions all of our lives without question. As time progressed, we came to see that some of the practices and belief systems commonly upheld as Truth to the Christian church were threaded with elements of paganism and influenced by godless cultures and nations foreign to the ways of God. In many cases, we had participated in and accepted secular and pagan views of how to parent our children, how to celebrate certain holidays, and how to worship and serve God along with a host of other areas of influence. Wanting to hold to the tradition of the Bereans, we decided to question the views and practices of those who were honored as leaders and mentors in the Christian church. We looked into some of the lives and teachings of the early church fathers. We came to find out that though many of them brought tremendous insight to Scriptural Truths and revelation that brought the Church out of terrible darkness and error, some were not too far away from the pagan culture they had once embraced. Tainted by anti-semitic views that hindered their understanding of certain Biblical events, they mingled some of these views with their understanding of the Scriptures.

Wrapping up our thoughts for this chapter, it is important to note that we are in no way indicating that traditions and ceremonies need to be abolished. A careful examination of our traditions may result in some surprising conclusions. After much prayer and sober judgment, we may find that it is time to toss some of our current beliefs away. We may also discover some new traditions and practices that lead us to a greater revelation of the God of the Bible and a deeper insight into knowing Him. The question posed in this chapter is this: To wash or not to

wash. Only you can decide where tradition occupies a place in your heart and whether or not you are forsaking God's commands for the sake of your own tradition. Maybe you will find that the traditions you have been following deserve a closer look.

**Chapter Questions:**

*What traditions have you established in your own family life? List them.*

*Do any of these traditions violate Biblical principles? Are there any that uphold and support Biblical values?*

*Do you think God has a purpose for traditions?*

*Can you see any of the popular traditions or customs of our day subtly encouraging the mixture of good and evil?*

*Are you willing to toss out any of your faith and practices that are causing you to forsake God's laws for the sake of your tradition?*

## Chapter 9: Zeal for His House Consumes Me

*And His disciples remembered that it is written [in the Holy Scriptures], Zeal (the fervor of love) for Your house will eat Me up. [I will be consumed with jealousy for the honor of Your house.] **John 2:17 (Amplified Bible)***

In the last lesson, we were encouraged to take a long, hard look at the traditions and teachings we have followed and how they may have shaped our view of how to worship God. Jesus wasn't One to haphazardly follow the crowd. In many instances, He surprised and challenged the religious leaders of His day by exposing their practices as false teachings. Our first lesson began with the study of Cain and Abel. In the very beginning, God divulged Cain's corrupt heart. In like manner, Jesus uncovered the deceptive heart motives of those who did their best to appear as true worshipers.

Many of the religious leaders of Jesus' time were unwilling to look solely at the Scriptures that precisely described the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. They preferred to mix in their own traditional views of a Messiah that would follow their man-made laws. They were blinded to the Word of God and the prophecies that could accurately lead them to faith in Jesus. They were unable to recognize Him because their view of Messiah was erroneously shaped by what was traditionally accepted as faith and practice for a good Hebrew. Once again, we see the deadly mixture of Truth and error dealing its fatal blow. The gospel of John records the tragic consequences of their folly:

*"He went to his own people, and his own people didn't accept him." **John 1:11 (God's Word Translation)***

The passage for this lesson recalls one such time that Jesus blatantly exposed the underhanded and deceptive ways of the religious people of His day. If we look at the full context of this passage, describing the zeal of Jesus in the temple, we will come to a greater understanding of why He displayed such anger. We will also see how it relates to the theme of this study.

There was nothing more repulsive to Christ than the insincerity of these who merely claimed to follow God. He was drawn to the repentant sinner but often rebuked the hypocritical followers of God, referring to them as white-washed tombs (Matthew 23:27). In the instance described in John 2:17, individuals were flocking to Jerusalem in preparation for the coming Passover. Every good Hebrew knew that there were three times during the year that a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was observed. Offerings were brought and feasts were celebrated. Life and livelihoods were put on hold so that the pilgrims could commemorate the events that God had ordained for them. These were times of complete consecration, a drawing near to the God who sustained them throughout the year and brought purpose and meaning to their lives. The feasts or Holy convocations described in Leviticus 23 were called, "mowed," pronounced *mo-ade'*. They were appointed times and seasons and rehearsals of things to come. It makes sense that the enemy would desire to obscure or distort the meaning and purpose of these sacred times. These feasts were vital to the health and future of Israel.

Take the time to read John 2:12-17. Jesus overthrew the tables of the moneychangers and chased out the merchants that were selling their goods in the temple. Why would such passion

consume our Lord? For one thing, it was obvious that some of those who came to celebrate the Passover had ulterior motives. They weren't coming to consecrate or commemorate. They weren't focused on the spotless lamb that needed to be slain for the feast, or the unleavened bread that reminded them of a time that God had miraculously delivered them from a wicked foe. Their hearts were selfishly focused on how they could derive the most benefit from this feast. This time of consecration was now being mixed with the desire to prosper monetarily. Instead of complete dedication to God's service, their interests were now divided to include their own gain.

Was Jesus being unreasonable? Was this outburst of anger nothing more than a legalistic display of piety? What is wrong with making the most of your time and killing two birds with one stone, as the saying goes? To understand why Christ responded in such a way and to realize how it relates to the dilemma of deadly mixtures, we need to look back to the beginning of time. We need to back up all the way to Genesis 3:15 when the Lord promised that a deliverer would bruise the head of the serpent and rescue mankind from sin and death. This promise came right after Adam and Eve partook of the deadly mixture of good and evil. The feast of Passover was a significant event in the timetable of God. It wasn't just a celebration designed to remind the Israelites, year after year, of how God freed them from Egyptian bondage. It was a feast that would foretell of this future event when the death of a spotless lamb would remove the leaven (sin) that dominates and enslaves the lives of unredeemed humanity. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus is found cleaning out the physical, earthly temple from those filled with hypocrisy and selfish gain during the event of Passover. At the end of his ministry, once again, at the feast of Passover, we see him demonstrating His zeal to cleanse another temple. The temple that He was cleansing was not an earthly one. It was the spiritual temple of our lives that was being washed as all of man's sins were placed on this pure, spotless lamb. His ministry would culminate in the fulfillment of this long-awaited promise of a Messiah, and all Israel would be able to witness it.

Israel was in need of a Savior; that fact was apparent in their display of apathy toward the feast of the Lord. Their desire to mix a dedicated time of offering with an opportunity for personal gain clouded their vision, and many of them missed the amazing plan of God to redeem Israel through Yeshua the Messiah. This is the danger of mixing our ways with God's ways. It is like looking through a dirty lens. Our vision is hindered and we miss the righteous paths. James 1:22 tells us, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves."* Diluting God's Word results in delusion! As we drink of the deadly mixture of God's Truths and man's ways, we become self-deceived and blinded. We don't even see that our ways are displeasing to the Lord. We shun and defy those who confront our wrong-doing. The priests and religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority; he had the audacity to disrupt their market day (Mark 11: 18,27-28)! They couldn't even see that what they were doing was horribly offensive to God.

This pattern of despising God's ordained feasts and holy days was nothing new to Israel. Yet another prophet was brought into conflict with the religious leaders of his day. Amos was a shepherd, ordained as a prophet, sometime around 750 B.C. He was sent to Israel to expose the people's vain and shallow worship of God. According to Amos Chapter 8, they were rebuked for not truly honoring the Sabbath in their hearts. The Sabbath was a time of rest when all Israel was commanded to cease their labor. They came to despise this day because they were unable to buy and sell. They couldn't wait for the day to be over so that they could carry on with their

mischievous deeds. They were polluting the grain with refuse from the wheat, using false balances to weigh their products, and taking advantage of the poor and needy. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary states this:

So greedy are they of unjust gain that they cannot spare a single day, however sacred, from pursuing it. They are strangers to God and enemies to themselves, who love market days better than Sabbath days; and they who have lost piety will not long keep honesty. (Jamieson, Robert, D.D. "Commentary on Amos 8". "Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible". <<http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/jfb/view.cgi?book=am&chapter=008>>. 1871.)

God had been warning His people for years to hold his sacred days in honor and reverence. These days would point to His coming and reveal His very nature. The Sabbath is a representation of our Lord as He invites us to enter into His rest and cease from our own works through His completed work on the cross. The Passover speaks of His blood, shed for mankind, the innocent for the guilty, so that we might go free. The cross would be that ultimate sacrifice that would forever blot out our guilt and shame. Over and over God warned His people to follow His teachings, respect His Holy days and trust His deliverance. Throughout history God was using these observances to draw us to Himself. Not unlike the same battles we face daily, God's people were in constant danger of losing their respect for God. As the commentary mentioned, the result was a tragic loss of honesty with themselves and with others; it continued for generations to come. They lost touch with their own sinful nature, and the religious leaders chose to hang on to the traditions and practices that would satisfy the greedy longings of man instead of pointing him to the only One who could save him. Amos had a message of rebuke for his generation. Christ's similar message of rebuke for the greedy of His day came centuries later but was rejected in similar fashion.

What messages are we rejecting today? Are we mixing with the world and believing we can still hang on to Christ? Do we look for our Christianity to bring only benefit to our lives in the here and now and shun the thought of true sacrifice and self-denial? Have we decided that His teachings are no longer relevant in our modern day culture? Many are now casting off the message of purity and true holiness that the followers of Jesus were enjoined to embrace throughout the epistles.

If we see this mixture rising up in our culture, are we prepared to deliver the same message that Amos and Christ did? It is important that we be fueled by the same motivation that filled Christ with zeal for His Father's house. It was love for His Father's house that rose up on the inside of Him and gave Him the courage to rebuke his generation and cleanse the temple. It was this same love that impelled Him to offer his life on the cross to cleanse the temple of our lives. We will discuss this motivating love further in our next lesson.

Decide today what message Christ wants you to live out before your fellow man, and be faithful to represent Him to a culture that desperately needs to see genuine and sincere passion for the One True God.

### **Chapter Questions:**

*Are there any ways that attending fellowship has become a way of selfish gain for you?*

*Do you see any current church trends that may encourage the self-centered behaviors that Jesus was rebuking in His Father's temple that day?*

*Have you noticed a despising of God's promptings when He rebukes you for selfish behaviors in your own life?*

**Read the parable of the sower and the seed in Luke 8:4-18. Jesus was describing the hearts of those who received God's Word. Which one of these descriptions best describes the condition of your heart?**

- heart by the wayside (unbelief) - verse 12*
- heart with no root (falls away with temptation) - verse 13*
- heart choked with cares, riches and pleasures - verse 14*
- the honest and good heart - verse 15*

*If God is calling you to confront someone who has been overtaken with sin are you willing to follow the Scriptural admonition of Galatians 6:1-5 in order to restore them?*

*What changes are you willing make in your own life in relationship to the message you received in this lesson?*

## Chapter 10: He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not

*...you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;... Psalm 45:7 (ESV)*

When you read this title does your mind wander to a grassy field strewn about with daisies and wildflowers? The familiar scene comes to mind of a little starry eyed girl gently picking one of those daisies. Carefully she plucks off each petal as she recites the familiar phrase, "he loves me, he loves me not." Of course she hopes the petals will run out at the precise moment she declares, "he loves me." This childlike depiction of immature puppy love may be an accurate illustration of the kind of love we express to our Heavenly Father. Can He count on our love or do we keep Him guessing with our waning appetite for worldly pleasure? I am sure the Master of the Universe in all of His omnipotence, has no need of flower petals to determine the genuineness of our love, but just how faithfully do we express our devotion to Him?

We have spent much time, in these lessons, discussing the tactics of our adversary. No matter how much information we have about the schemes of this enemy, we are powerless to resist him without a very necessary ingredient in our lives. Lesson 9 spoke of the zeal of our Lord. This passion was fueled with love for the Father's house to be honored (John 2:17). **Love is the vital ingredient!** Without it we are unable to walk righteously in this present world. Is love the motivating factor for your worship of the King of Kings? Are you filled with love for the Savior? Do you have the same intense desire to see God honored in your home and your church as Jesus did to see the temple cleansed from greedy merchants?

Loving righteousness is necessary for true worship and should be the forerunner to hating evil. Put simply, when we love the Savior, we will love doing things His way. When wickedness comes to tempt the true worshiper, his appetite for righteousness will exceed his passion for lustful consumption. Love gives us the power to resist the urge to compromise our convictions. So how is it that the very same hearts that desire true worship can sometimes derail and end up in the most unsightly places and circumstances?

Imagine that you were invited to a scrumptious feast. Your favorite dinner is being served and awaiting your arrival. The table is set with all sorts of fine ingredients that have the power to nourish the body and satisfy your cravings. There is only one problem. On your way to the home of your host you take a quick detour to the Godiva Chocolate shop. It would be rude to arrive at your destination without a gift. The problem is that you indulged in a few too many samples in your quest to find just the right box of chocolates. When you arrive, what would have been a delectable meal, seems almost a little repulsive as your appetite for the nourishment found in that meal was abated by the choice to indulge. Your joy is hindered. In much the same way our appetite for the things of God wanes if we are filling our lives with earthly pleasures.

Worship is not a one time decision. Love for God begins with a commitment and is evidenced in daily choices to nourish our vessels with the genuine morsels of God's Truths. Although the additive MSG can whet our appetite for more, studies have shown that it creates obesity by increasing cravings. You can mix MSG with the most unhealthy ingredients and the appetite

will soar regardless of the nutritional value. So it is with the tasty morsels of Satanic lies. Our appetites cry out for more and satisfaction is never found because those lies can never nourish us. We cannot mix the lies of the enemy with the Truth's of God's Word if we are to be truly nourished. We must choose a daily diet of unadulterated Truth in order to stay on "course".

Our priorities speak volumes about what we love the most. The Lord anointed the one who loved righteousness and hated wickedness with the the oil of joy. Loving righteousness and hating wickedness go hand in hand. No matter how grieved we might become about the moral decay of our society, our love for God will keep us in His joy. Merely hating wickedness will result in unmercifully judging those around us. It will make our hearts embittered, dry and barren. Hatred for evil can become the focus of our attention, turning our heads and eventually causing our bodies to take steps in the same direction. We become fixated on the wrong-doing of others. In II Peter 2:6 we see Lot being described as a man who was vexed by evil because of his righteous soul. He didn't look back but was willing to move forward away from the evil as God provided deliverance for his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. His wife, however, didn't fare this journey of deliverance so well. She became a pillar of salt as she looked back at this vile city and its inhabitants.

This principle of loving righteousness and hating evil will defend us from the hardening of the heart and keep us thriving in our love for God and others. It is made clear in several passages. Psalm 97:10 resounds with the same important message: *"Let those who love the LORD hate evil."* Romans 12:9 (God's Word Translation) makes it clear again: *Love sincerely. Hate the evil. Hold on to what is good. Zeal for God will not burn out when it is fed with love for the Savior. It won't quit. Love never fails.*

To sum this last lesson up, let us consider what tables we have been dining at lately. Have we succumbed to some fast food dinners with the Lord instead of taking the time to sit and abide in His presence? Have we been feasting at other tables that are filled with carnal delights? God invites us to feast at His table in the presence of our enemies!

*You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Psalm 23:5 (NLT)*

The Lord is faithful to set a table before us; we must be faithful to sit and take delight in what He serves us. Can you see the outcome of spending time with our loving Savior according to this passage in Psalm 23? He honors us, anoints us, and blesses us. Enjoy the feast that God has set for you, Beloved! Allow His anointing to pour upon your head. Abiding in His presence as we are feasting at His table enables us to walk faithfully in the midst of the temptations we face in this world. You may see or feel the presence of evil as you set at His table but don't allow your eyes to wander or your heart to fear. His food will become the nourishment necessary to fuel your love for Him and keep the flame of zeal alive in your heart.

If God was picking daisy petals at this moment, to determine your love for Him, would He stop at.. he loves me or he loves me not?

**Chapter Questions:**

*What other "tables" have you indulged in recently?*

*inappropriate viewing of any media*

*impure thought life*

*bitterness/unforgiving spirit*

*unhealthy relationships*

*Have you struggled with a self-righteous attitude towards those whose actions are offensive to the Lord?*     *yes*                       *no*

*Read Luke 7:36- 50 and Luke 18:9-14. Which characters do you most closely resemble in these passages? Why?*

*Discuss the characters involved in the above passages and how they relate to this lesson.*

*Do you have set times for meeting with the Lord each day?*     *yes*                       *no*

*Do you think God would have you adjust your schedule to accommodate daily feasting at His table?*

*yes*                       *no*

*What benefits could be derived from faithfully seeking Him? List them here:*

## Chapter 11: Is the Grass Really Greener?

*"The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." New International Version (NIV)*

Throughout these lessons we have spoken of those who defied boundaries. Johnny, Adam and Eve, Cain, Balaam and others chose to set standards that seemed right to them. They cast off the boundaries of God only to find out that their selfish tendencies led them down a path that brought more pain than pleasure. The grass wasn't greener on the other side of the fence. David, the man who penned Psalm 16, ignored God's righteous standards on more than one occasion and found himself in the most helpless predicaments. At times, he questioned God's provisions. Apparently, so did Adam and Eve and all the rest of the characters that we have studied. As we mentioned in Chapter 3, mankind tends to fear living by God's standards. Fear gives way to doubt and the enemy does his best to convince us that God is withholding good, when just the opposite is true. No matter how much or how little we possess, the question of how adequately God can provide for us can lie dormant in the back of our minds. Yet, the Word of God is rich in reminders of how vast an inheritance His children possess.

Perhaps you have found yourself peeking over the fence a time or two and maybe some of you have already taken the plunge into the neighbor's backyard! The nation of Israel was plagued with a wandering eye, too. They frequently strayed from the Truth in search of other gods. It was difficult for Israel to believe God's promises. They were constantly mixing God's ways with the ways of the surrounding nations whom God had already warned them to reject. They cried out to other gods who were really no gods at all. They pledged allegiance to foreign kings and bowed down to worship the idols of men. It is difficult for our American mindset to relate to Israel's idolatry, yet, in many ways, our lives are similar.

We may struggle to believe that God can provide all that we need within the framework of the boundary lines that He has set for us as individuals and as the people of God. The church has been guilty of adultery, idolatry and hypocrisy. Abortion, suicide, pornography, divorce, breaches, schisms and hostile church splits blatantly advertise our failure to trust Him with our deepest needs. There is a desperate need for us to come to Him in complete confidence and trust so that we might find out how pleasant life can be within the boundary lines. Perhaps this is the greatest reason for the church being involved in the mixture of good and evil. Like the Israelites, we also fail to realize the delightful inheritance made available to us by our King.

David's wandering eye caused him a great deal of trouble. He deeply felt the consequences of reaching outside the boundary lines. When he was confronted by the prophet, Nathan, after his affair with Bathsheba, David immediately confessed and admitted his sin. He acknowledged his transgression against God and his fellow man. God revealed the path of restoration to David and we can now glean the understanding of what true repentance looks like by reading and practicing the lessons found in Psalm 51. His life and ministry was restored and more importantly, he was washed thoroughly in his inward man so that his broken connection with God could be mended.

Tragically, lives can be lost when we venture outside the safety of God's laws. Can you think of a specific time recently when you reached for the forbidden in an effort to please your lower

nature? Are there times in your past when reaching for that fruit caused tragedy and maybe even death to someone you loved? The Scripture passage from this lesson can become very meaningful to those who have faced great losses due to sin's deceitfulness. The Lord is longing to restore the broken-hearted. He delights in saving those whose heart is contrite. Not only will he thoroughly purge our iniquities, He desires to assure us that He can provide for our needs as we seek His face. What He did for David, he can do for you!

*Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Psalm 34:8-10 (NIV)*

After reading these lessons, have you found yourself more aware of the doubts that you have struggled with regarding God's ability to provide for you within the boundary lines? Can you see areas of your life that have suffered because you have taken action on that lie? God is full of redemptive grace and He is longing to turn our detours into valuable lessons that can lead us to places of rest and contentment. God's redemptive plan can turn the ashes of our sinful consequences into a platform for viable ministry opportunities once true repentance has had its way in our hearts. Though experience is not always the best teacher, we can let the hard lessons of life mold us into individuals who can walk circumspectly in this world.

Rest assured, beloved. If you have hopped the fence and squandered your inheritance, God is waiting to take you back to greener pastures. You can lie down in safety. You will lack nothing in His presence. Like the prodigal father in Luke 15:11-24 our heavenly King anticipates your arrival. The fatted calf is waiting. The ring and robe are ready to put on.

### **Chapter Questions:**

*What boundaries have you defied in order to reach for something your heart desired?*

*What consequences were waiting for you on the other side of the fence?*

*Read Psalm 51. Does this resemble the sorrow you have for the wrong paths you have chosen? If not, are you willing to ask the Lord to give you a clean heart?*

*Read Psalm 37:3- 4. How can this passage help us to stay within the boundaries God has set?*

*As believers in Christ, we have the law of our God now written upon our hearts. How can that help us to stay within the boundary lines?*

*Take a pen and paper and write down the rich inheritance that has been made available to you in Christ. Take some time to thank Him for His blessings today.*

## Chapter 12: All Who Are Thirsty, Come!

*Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again." **John 4:13-14a (J.B. Phillips New Testament)***

The account of Jesus with the woman at the well in John chapter four, contains a crucial message very applicable to these lessons. The disciples had gone into town to purchase food (John 4:8) and returned to find Christ speaking with a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were famous for blending God's ways with their own concepts of worship. Any good Jew would smugly turn their noses up at the Samaritans, viewing only the Hebrews as the true worshipers of God. I am sure the disciples found it odd that the Lord would spend any time with a people they had deemed unworthy.

We know that Jesus valued people from all cultures. He accurately discerned that this woman was ready for a lesson from heaven. He found it worthwhile to engage her at a place called, Jacob's Well. How timely a lesson and how appropriate the setting as the Lord used the example of water's ability to satisfy mankind's thirst as a means of illustrating what He could provide to a dry, parched soul. Jesus went on to supernaturally reveal her past and present condition; she had five prior husbands and was now living with another man. Jesus then presented a solution to the craving of this woman's heart. He had water available, of the supernatural kind; water that would forever quench her thirst.

The Lord wants to present this invitation to all who have never chosen to drink of the well of salvation. For those who have never made the decision, Christ can become your greatest desire. His Spirit can live within you like an everlasting stream. This well of water can be found within the boundary lines of every believer's inheritance. It comes with the territory. It springs from within the heart of all who choose to embrace the Savior and accept the cup of eternal life.

As we are wrapping up our lessons, we must note that this interesting account given by John is addressing the very crux of this issue of mixture. This woman represented a people that had been steeped in idol worship for centuries. [Davis Dictionary of the Bible](#) gives us insight into the origin of her people, the Samaritans.

"How then did the Samaritan nationality or race arise? When Sargon captured Samaria, he carried into captivity, by his own account, 27,280 people. That he left many Israelites in the land is evident. Finding that the remaining Israelites were rebellious, he began a systematic course for their denationalization. He introduced colonists from Babylon and Hamath (II Kin.xvii. 24) and Arabia, who continued to practice idolatry in their new home. The population of the country had been thinned, and the cultivation of the soil interrupted, by these wars, so that the opportunity was afforded for wild beasts to multiply, which God used as a scourge. Lions killed some of the idolaters. The newcomers concluded that they did not understand how to worship the particular god of the country, and they informed the king of Assyria. He sent them a priest from among the captive Israelites, who took up his residence at Bethel and began to instruct the people regarding Jehovah. He was unable to persuade them to abandon their ancestral idolatry. They erected images of their gods on the high places of the Israelites, and combined their idolatries with the worship of Jehovah (25-33). This dual worship they kept up until after the fall of Jerusalem (34-41)."

Samaria had a reputation for committing high treason against the Lord. As a matter of fact, the invasion by Sargon was sent to Israel as a punishment for idolatry. They had instituted calf worship and had forsaken the way of worship designed by Jehovah. The young prophet that we spoke of in Chapter 5 was just one of many prophets sent early on to warn these tribes of their certain doom if they failed to repent of this wickedness. How tragic that he lost his life to a lion's jaw and that the people who spurned his message fell to a similar fate years later. As we can see in the above citation from the Davis Dictionary of the Bible, Israel did not learn their lesson even after the Assyrian invasion.

From this idolatrous culture came the woman at the well. Jesus, in his mercy, was reaching out to her in an attempt to present yet another opportunity to a people who had rejected him for centuries. The woman further engages with Christ, intrigued with his invitation to drink. He is not just looking to quench her thirst, however. Read the following passage in order to understand the commitment that comes with this invitation.

*The woman said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem."*

*Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You and your people worship what you don't know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth." - **John 4:19-24 (CEB)***

Jesus is describing a way to come to the Father in relationship, our spirit communing with His. This relationship is regarded as sacred and holy and the truth that Jesus is referring to can only be found in His Word. Jesus, in his dialogue with this Samaritan woman, was pointing to a time when a physical building would no longer be needed to house the presence of the Almighty God. It is not about a church building or a certain denomination. It isn't about passing winds of doctrines that are popular today and gone tomorrow. It isn't about the way our ancestors worshiped. This way of worship must be based on the Truths of God's Word not religious ideologies. Jesus himself declared that he **was** the Truth and that no man could come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Truth is a person. His name is Jesus. There is no other way to worship the Father except through the magnificent Son of God.

We come as we are, but like the Samaritan woman, we cannot stay the same if we are to truly behold His image. Religion can produce zealots but it is unable to bring the worshiper into intimate communion with God by effecting change and lasting results. This encounter with the Living God became a life line to her people. The life giving water that she received became a force that compelled her to go out and tell the good news of the Savior. Her testimony brought the message of salvation to many Samaritans who believed on Jesus because of her message (John 4:39-42). We have the awesome opportunity to learn from Biblical history and to depart from idol worship. Like the Samaritan woman, the amazing invitation to worship in spirit and truth is offered to us today.

Worship is our way to commune with a Holy God. It transcends culture, time and man made religion. This intimate communion of God with man was introduced in the Garden of Eden and assaulted by the evil one since the beginning of time. It has been mangled by man, manipulated by our arch enemy, Satan, and mocked by those who refuse to bow to an omnipotent Creator. Our God is powerful, yet He bowed in humble adoration for His created beings by becoming human so He could show us the way to come to Him. He wants all of us, and promises to give

all of Himself in exchange. He is awesome, to be feared and adored, and to be worshiped above all that we are and all that we possess.

Will you come, will you drink, will you surrender?

### **Chapter Questions:**

*Have you ever judged other people groups or cultures as unworthy of the Lord as the Jews did with the Samaritans? If so, where do you think your prejudice arose from?*

*Imagine for a moment that you are the woman at the well. What questions would you have for Jesus if He invited you to drink and never thirst again?*

*In what ways are/were you like the idolatrous Samaritans. List some of the false ideas you had about worship.*

*The woman at the well carried the message of the Messiah to her hometown. What might be some of the obstacles she might have encountered while delivering this message to her people?*

*What obstacles have you encountered while sharing the message of Christ with others?*

## Summary

Summing up these lessons, our sincere hope is that we have adequately presented the message that no one is immune to the temptation to partake of the mixture of good and evil. Throughout Biblical history up to the present time, the decision to surrender all is blatantly placed before our eyes. The epistles, written to the early church, reflect a passionate concern to warn believers of the very real and present dangers of deception while indicating that this danger will escalate before the return of Christ. We cannot eliminate this danger, but we can prepare ourselves as any good soldier would do when war is approaching.

The presence of signs and wonders will increase, the gospels warn us, so as to deceive even the very elect (Matthew 24:24). These signs and wonders can also be the "coincidences" that lead us headlong into the slippery slope of idolatry. Arming ourselves with passages such as this one in Deuteronomy 13:1-4 will prepare us for the signs that have the potential to mislead the casual follower. We must be careful not to elevate signs, wonders and coincidences above the Truth.

*"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him." - Deuteronomy 13:1-4*

Remember that Jesus declared that true worshipers would worship in spirit and truth; they will not be led by coincidences or even by miraculous visions or signs that run counter to the Truths of God's Word. The book of Jude presents an earnest appeal to the saints of the New Testament church to contend for the faith that had been handed down to them. In this short but powerful epistle, Jude described men who would creep into the church unaware, defiling their flesh, rejecting authority and distorting the grace of God. We, like the men and women of the early church, must contend for the true faith. It seems that many have forgotten that Jesus described the way to life as difficult and narrow (Matthew 7:14). We must choose to hold fast to the Truth. Only then can the church become the salt and light that we were intended to be, influencing the world as God designed. This influence cannot be accomplished when we partner with the world. This message to the Corinthian church is most pertinent to the church of our day:

*"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers [do not make mismatched alliances with them or come under a different yoke with them, inconsistent with your faith]. For what partnership have right living and right standing with God with iniquity and lawlessness? Or how can light have fellowship with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and Belial [the devil]? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement [can there be between] a temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in and with and among them and will walk in and with and among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. So, come out from among [unbelievers], and separate (sever) yourselves from them, says the Lord, and touch not [any] unclean thing; then I will receive you kindly and treat you with favor." - 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 Amplified Bible*

Corinthian church, they had become boastful about their tolerance for evil. It is not good to boast about our tolerance for things that God considers an abomination. This is part of the reason that our worship of Him should be centered around His Truth rather than what has become familiar and acceptable to us. Like the Corinthian church, we must determine whether or not the culture of the world or the Bible will be our measuring rod for determining the standard by which we live and relate to others. Paul was encouraged that God was indeed able to clean up the church of Corinth regardless of their idolatrous condition. We, too, can maintain the same hope as we look to the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2).

We have reviewed much material in these lessons. They all speak the same message. Man is continually making God into his own image rather than submitting to the image already revealed to us through His Word. Adding and subtracting from the Truth, we make Jesus into the image we like. Adjusting our religious life much like we would a T.V. set, we turn the dial until the image that we prefer comes into view. The picture soothes us, lulls us and fills us with a shallow sense of well-being. Jesus Christ was the Word made flesh and able to perfectly express the image so carefully outlined in the Torah. He fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law and shining upon the hearts of every man who comes into the world, He invites them to know His Father as they come by way of the Son. The invitation rings loud and clear: our way or His commands, His voice or the serpents, true worship or a form of godliness? Are we ready to surrender all the false notions and ideas we have had regarding worship, that we might gain a greater revelation of the true and Living God through His Word, the Bible? Our former ways might be rather precious to us and difficult to place on the altar, but like Abraham, we must be willing to yield what is dear to us. We must never fear the outcome of this kind of sacrifice; the decision may be agonizing but the end result of this kind of sacrifice will never be disappointing. Even as the Corinthian church had the power of influence, we can take this message one step further and imagine the greater impact we can have on those around us as we choose to place our idols on the altar of sacrifice.

The Lord is welcoming us today. The altar is ready and the fire is burning. He is waiting for us to place our idols on this altar. Only then can we be made truly ready and adequate for the tasks that await us.

He bids us to depart from idolatry and follow Him.

*And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." **Matthew 4:19 (ESV)***