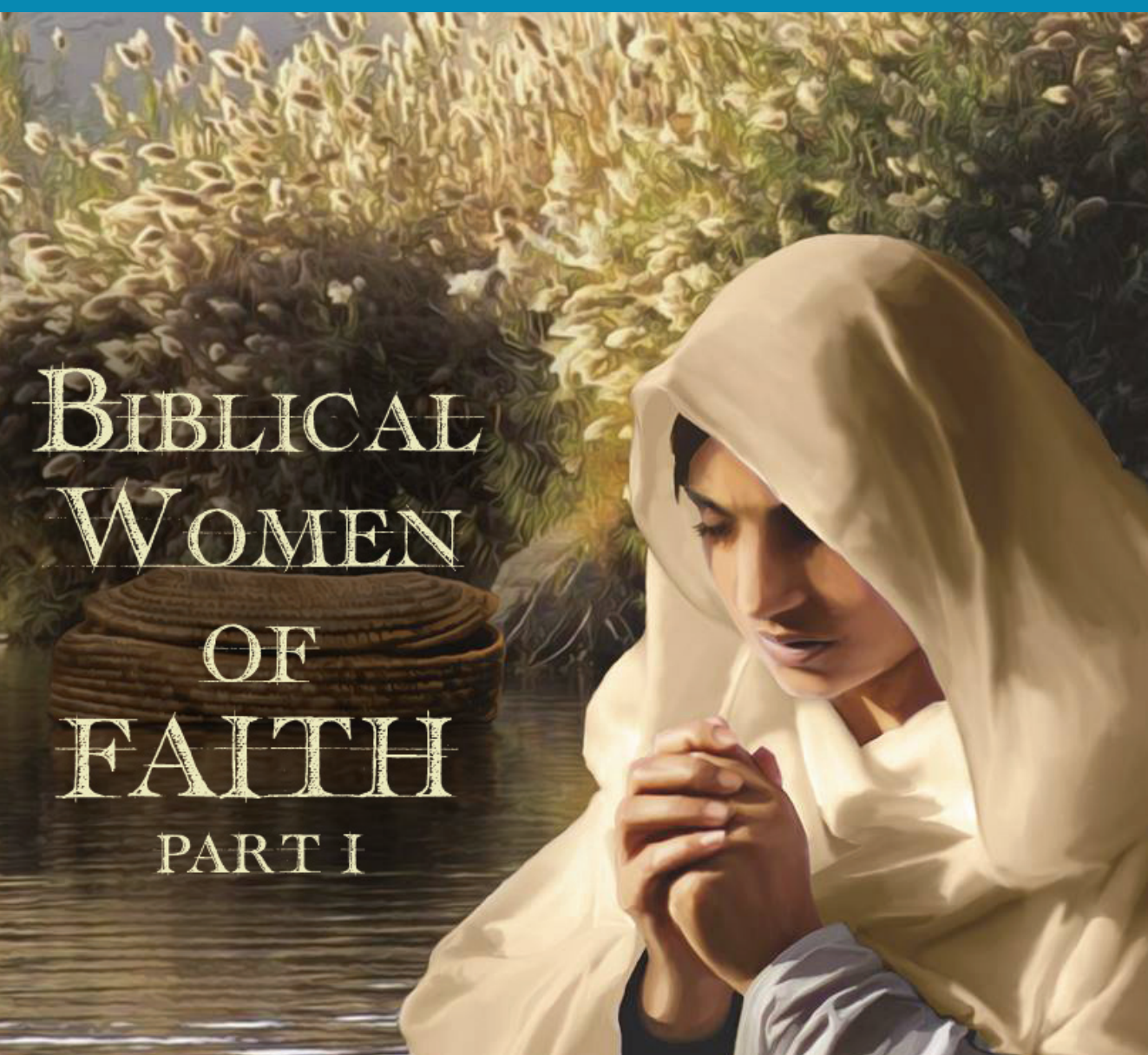


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Bible Witness



BIBLICAL WOMEN OF FAITH PART I

The First Woman of Faith | Faith Undaunted by Unknown Territory
Faith in the Hour of Crisis | Faith in the Face of Impending Doom



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*All the articles in this issue are contributed
by Ho Kee How, Assistant Editor of Bible Witness
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About the cover design

Trusting in God's wise bestowment, Jochebed laid her baby boy in "an ark of bulrushes" and placed it by the river bank.

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Editorial

Dear readers,

Scripture has recorded stories of women who lived and fulfilled their God-given roles in their homes with unflinching faith in God. Their stories are not told because of great success in their pursuit of wealth, position, glamour and fame. Many of them lived in tough and rough conditions of their peculiar circumstance of life, with some whose lives were broken because of their failures and sins. But when the grace of God shone on them, they rose in faith in God their Saviour, strengthened their hearts in boldness, strove against all odds that were set against them, conquered their sadness and fears, yielded fully to do all things for God's glory. By faith, they overcame temptations of sin, and trials of life and service. They became women of God's Book, for all God's children to learn from and emulate as people of faith.

In this issue, the assistant editor of Bible Witness, Ho Kee How, brings to your attention the manifestation of faith in the lives of four women of faith - Eve, Rebekah, Jochebed and Rahab. God willing, he will tell the stories of more women of faith in the next issue of the magazine. May the articles found in this magazine build up your faith in the Lord, for the accomplishment of all the good pleasures of the Lord concerning you.

Bible Witness Media Ministry has planned the next Retreat (7-9 Sept, 2016) - a time to rejoice in "The Excellencies of Christ". I would like to invite you to come and learn the glorious truths about our Saviour. (For information on registering for the retreat, please refer to the back cover page of the magazine.) We pray that we all, like Paul, will be able to testify, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8a).

Please pray and support Bible Witness and its efforts, together with Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, to purchase a larger place for accommodating all their ministries.

For God's glory and for your edification.

In His service,
Prabhudas Koshy

The First Woman of Faith



Any biblical study of “Women of Faith” must not exclude the first woman of faith, namely Eve. Admittedly, when we talk about men and women of faith, it is so easy to overlook Adam and Eve. Many (including Christians) blame Adam and Eve for their fall into sin. After all, does not the Bible teach us in Romans 5:12 that “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin”?

Undoubtedly, death came as a result of Adam’s sin, precipitated by Eve’s being deceived by the Tempter (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14). The moment sin entered into the picture (via Adam’s one disobedient act, he being the federal head of the human race), what was originally created as “very good” by God has since been turned into a cursed arena of “thorns and thistles”

(Genesis 3:18), subject to the bondage of corruption and mingled with infirmities and death. The universal prevalence of death and suffering is, tragically, part of the “package” of consequences which comes with Adam’s fall. Little surprise that some Christians even went as far as to suggest that Adam and Eve were not saved! On the contrary, there is strong inferential evidence that Adam and Eve are saved – by faith, of course!

Evidence of Unseen Things through God’s Word

Faith, as the Bible tells us, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The Greek word translated as “substance” is a compound word consisting of the prefix “*hupo*” (which

means “under”) and a noun form of the root verb “*histemi*” (meaning “cause to stand”). It gives the idea of “an undergirding support” which gives confidence. The Greek noun translated as “evidence” is closely associated with the verb “*elegcho*”, which tells of “making manifest hidden things”. Both are derived from the root verb “*lego*”, which means “to say”. In other words, the utterance of words is involved here! Interestingly, this Greek verb “*lego*” usually refers not to the mere form or sound of words, but specifically to the content and connected sense of the words uttered. Clearly, God’s manifestation of unseen things (as revealed through His Word, of course!) gives the undergirding support of our faith.

The Christian faith is not a blind faith. It is a reasonable faith, not a mindless “blind leap of faith” apart from God’s Word. Neither is it a mystical faith that thrives on superstition and rituals. It does not bypass the mind or discard the reasoning and thinking process. Rather, saving faith is that “spiritual enlightenment” of the mind based on a clear knowledge of God’s Word. And we notice that Adam and Eve did exhibit this kind of saving faith after the Fall. (Since the theme concerns “women of faith”, this article shall focus on Eve, yet with relevant reference to Adam, inevitably.)

Eve’s Belief in the First Good News

It is instructive to note Eve’s interesting response upon giving birth to her firstborn son. When her first child was born, she literally

exclaimed, “I have gotten a man from the LORD” (Genesis 4:1b)! This exuberant utterance seemed to spring forth from a sense of praise and triumph, which is strong inferential proof that Eve believed in the truthfulness of God’s promise given together with the pronouncement of the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:15 – “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Theologians call this the “*protevangelium*”, a combination of 2 Greek words – “*protos*” (which means “first”) and “*euaggelion*” (meaning “good news”). It literally means “the first good news”, for in God’s solemn pronouncement, we heard for the very first time, the Gospel of mankind’s salvation!

Two things would have gripped and preoccupied Eve’s thinking since then – the “Seed of the woman” that would come, and the “bruising” of the serpent’s head by “her seed”. You could say, Eve fixed her whole soul to that divine promise, hence the name “Cain” for her first son. The name “Cain” comes from the Hebrew root word (*qanah*) which means “acquire”, and is obviously derived from Eve’s joyful exclamation of acquiring a man-child!

Eve was certainly thankful for obtaining (through the birth process) a man-child and must have secretly hoped that this man-child would grow up to be the promised “Seed” that would one day “bruise” the serpent’s head, though in the process, He would be “bruised” in the heel. While the latter is not a mortal wound (implying

a short-lived victory for the serpent), it is nonetheless going to be a vigorous “bruising” or “wounding”. The same root verb is used for both the “bruising” inflicted by the woman’s Seed and the serpent, but with a slight difference. The action by the serpent has an added suffix attached to the verb (what is known as “energetic nun” in Hebrew grammar), employed for added emphasis – thereby depicting repeated and vicious attempts at destroying this “Seed of the woman”, but all in vain because it is only to the “heel”. The woman’s Seed, on the other hand (according to God’s fullness of time), needed just one decisive “hit” to deliver a capital blow – for it is to the “head” – which shows He is more powerful than the serpent! Eve certainly did put her faith in God’s promised Deliverer; but alas, Cain turned out to be the first in the long line of “the serpent’s seed” instead! Poor Eve! She must have felt so disillusioned and heartbroken at how her first son turned out.

Notwithstanding this, all those actions / reactions of hers point to her as one who had faith in God and His Word. Prior to the Fall, Eve had been maliciously taken out and beguiled by the subtle serpent; her gullibility and thus vulnerability to deception were the result of her failure to take heed of God’s Word literally (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3). Since the Fall, she knew better than to question God’s Word; she believed literally what God had said concerning a future Deliverer. Eve had real faith – faith that “cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Biblical Significance of Eve’s Name

This brings us to the name Adam gave to his wife. After the Fall, Adam felt moved and found it a necessity to give his wife a name. Remember, Adam had that mandate from God (given in Genesis 2:19b) that “whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof”, including the wife God gave him. And Adam would not give frivolous, flippant names. After all that had transpired, resulting in the Fall and culminating in God’s pronouncements of curses, one would expect Adam to give his wife a sad, unflattering name. But instead, we find in Genesis 3:20 that Adam called her “*Chavvah*”, a name that is closely associated with the Hebrew word (*chayah*) which means “to give life”. Hence, this gives rise to the English transliteration “**E-V-E**”. (A good clue to its original pronunciation is to enunciate each of the vowel sound as well).

Now, in the midst of all the tragic consequences that had been pronounced, Adam realised that God had not left them without hope. Something momentous must have been reverberating in his thoughts. To him, the most important message was in Genesis 3:15. He clung to that one gleam of hope which God had revealed in the midst of all the gloom and doom. A future “Seed of the woman” was promised that would come to deal a crushing blow to the serpent’s head. With hindsight and fuller revelation from the New Testament, we now know “that old serpent” is none other than “the Devil, ... Satan” (Revelation

12:9). And the phrase “it shall bruise thy head” is pregnant with meaning – it means ultimate deliverance from the tyranny of Satan and sin is assured! Perhaps in Adam’s thinking (given the limited revelation he had), together with that would be their restoration to Paradise, which he and his wife had enjoyed freely with God before the Fall.

This so stirred up great hope in Adam. He showed faith in God’s promise by believing that God would give them children, and that through this means (of childbearing), the promised “Seed” / Deliverer would ultimately come to bring salvation. Therefore, he saw in his wife not death, but life. So he aptly named her “*Chavvah*”, for she would literally be “the mother of all living”. Adam heard, understood and believed the first Gospel! He, like Eve, had faith, which “cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”.

Saved through the Childbearing

Now that Eve and her husband had been thrust out of the garden of Eden into unfamiliar surroundings to face a cold, intimidating world (subject to the bondage of corruption and decay), Eve must have been full of regret (of what-might-have-been) and filled with a deep chastened feeling. But in the midst of her fallen world, she remembered God’s promise of hope for mankind. She now knew better than to doubt God’s Word, though she might not fully understand how it would all pan out.

Unfortunately, family tragedy struck when Cain killed Abel

(manifestation of the depravity of human nature due to the Fall) because of envy and hatred over his brother’s righteous works (cf. 1 John 3:12), thus disqualifying himself from being in the promised line. Although Eve’s excited hope of an immediate Deliverer was dashed, she continued clinging on to God’s promise of the “Seed of the woman”. She still believed that through this means of childbearing, the “Seed of the woman” would ultimately come, hence Paul’s commentary in 1 Timothy 2:15a, which can be literally translated from the Greek text as: “she shall be saved through the childbearing”. This indicates the channel through which God’s promised deliverance would reach Eve. It does not refer to childbearing in general, but (because of the presence of the definite article) to that particular childbearing event, namely that of the Incarnate Christ.

Though Eve was not so sure exactly when or who that Deliverer would be, she knew He must come through the appointed godly line. We see her faith and submission manifested in Genesis 4:25 in the birth of another son, in place of the slain Abel. She called his name “Seth”, which comes from the Hebrew word (*sheeth*) meaning “appoint”. Instead of saying, “I have gotten”, she now gave due honour to God by acknowledging that God “hath appointed”. And though it would be some 4,000 years before God’s promised Messiah arrived on the scene, Eve showed her faith in resolutely believing God’s promise, which is the “substance” of her hope and the “evidence” of things yet future to her. ■



Faith Undaunted by Unknown Territory

Genesis 24 tells of a remarkable woman of faith – Rebekah – whom Bible-readers would fondly remember as the “bride for Isaac”, the promised son of Abraham. Admittedly, many Christians would point to some incidents later in her life, which seemed to show her lack of faith in God. Before we be too quick to judge, let us keep the historical events in perspective by not forgetting how Rebekah came into the picture in the first place – in fact, how she came into the land of Canaan when she had been

living all her young life in Haran, some 500 miles up north of where Abraham’s family had settled in response to God’s call to begin a new nation.

Come to think of it, when God promised Abraham a son (through whom he would have many descendants), it is as good as promising a bride for his son as well! How else could children come? God’s promise to Abraham did not stop at him having Isaac. God was going to make of Abraham “a great nation” and a blessing to “all families of the

earth” (Genesis 12:2-3). That would mean God’s plan and redemptive programme would go beyond his and his son’s generations. Abraham, through progressive revelations given to him by the LORD, understood this very well. Though he did not in his lifetime directly receive the promises, yet “having seen them afar off”, he was “persuaded of them, and embraced them” (Hebrews 11:13), i.e. he believed them with all his heart and soul.

Matter of the Choice of Wife

Yet, on a practical level, Abraham must have often wondered where he could find a wife for his son. If Isaac was to be the father of God’s promised great nation, the choice of a proper wife was absolutely crucial.

No Suitable Wife from the Canaanites

There apparently was no good “candidate” among their neighbours. Abraham knew the surrounding people were utter idolaters and perpetrators of many wicked practices, which were integrated into their cultures and lifestyles (cf. Genesis 15:16)! Moreover, taking a wife from among the Canaanites would result in acculturation (i.e. blending with the culture of the Canaanites), and amalgamation (i.e. merging of identity / values with the Canaanites). Abraham knew that a distinction must be maintained if his descendants were to develop into a separate nation. That is why we see in Genesis 24:3 that Abraham made his eldest servant “swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the

earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell”. The principle to be drawn here is clear: We are not to unite in matrimony with someone who does not share the same faith and spiritual beliefs as us.

Suitable Wife Only from Like-Minded Brethren

No doubt Abraham would have occasionally wondered what had happened to the family of his other living brother – Nahor – whom he had not heard for several decades, having left Haran at the age of 75 (cf. Genesis 11:31; 12:4). His brother had stayed back in Ur of the Chaldees and had not accompanied his father Terah and his brother Abraham to Haran – though he learnt that Nahor had later made the journey there himself and settled in “the city of Nahor”, which is likely Haran (cf. Genesis 24:10; 27:43). Abraham must have providentially obtained this information from a travelling caravan of merchants who frequently plied the well-known trade-route from Mesopotamia down south to Egypt and vice versa. For we read in Genesis 22:20-23 that “it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham” that Nahor had 8 sons borne by Milcah his wife. With that piece of news, Abraham would undoubtedly be told of where his brother’s family were residing as well, for it was “unto the city of Nahor” (Genesis 24:10) that he later sent his servant to search for Isaac’s prospective bride.

Now, Isaac, being born so late in Abraham’s life, was much younger than his 8 boy-cousins. He was more

around the age range of his cousins' children, i.e. Nahor's grandchildren. Nahor's grandchildren would have been many (going by simple geometric progression), one of whom was Rebekah, Bethuel's daughter (Genesis 22:23). Abraham must have been relieved, grateful, even hopeful to know that the search for a good girl could be from among his own relatives' young daughters! What's more, Abraham would have noted with interest that Nahor had moved his family away from Ur towards Haran. Could he also have felt the need to move away from his idolatrous homeland, as Abraham had done so several decades ago in obedience to God's divine call? Well, actually Laban (Nahor's grandson) alluded to this when he made peace with Jacob with an oath in Genesis 31:53 – "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac." It looks like Nahor worshipped and embraced the same God as Abraham – he might have believed later on.

This thought would have excited Abraham! To find a chaste, spiritually like-minded bride for his son, the best option for Abraham is to search for one from among his own believing brother's extended family, probably a believing grandniece, who had known God from her youth. Again, the principle to be drawn is very clear: We should not just marry any believer; the one whom we marry should be someone who is rooted and established in the faith, one who loves and serves the Lord sincerely and fervently.

Undaunted Faith Required

Of course, in sending his eldest servant on the all-important mission unto his own country to search for a bride for Isaac, Abraham did not yet know that it would be Rebekah. But whoever would agree to be Isaac's wife must not only be chaste and spiritual-minded (unlike the Canaanite girls), she must also be full of faith herself, no less!

No Room for Homesickness

Admittedly, if she be a godly girl, she ought also be one who loved her own family. Yet she must be prepared not to stay near her parents, because she must "be willing to follow ... unto this land (of Canaan)" (Genesis 24:5). Implicit in God's promise to Abraham is this realisation that a deliberate, decisive cut from his own country right from the start was needed in order for his posterity to develop into a separate nation. Isaac must not be brought back at any cost to the land where Abraham came from (Genesis 24:6,8). If the prospective bride proved to be willing to come all the way to Canaan, it would reflect her undaunted character. That would mean she would not easily get homesick and thus be able to make her home, together with God's promised heir to Abraham, in the Promised Land! Needless to say, her number one priority must now be the new family unit which God would give her in her marital relationship with her husband. All other existing relationships / familial ties, including that with parents, would have to take second place.

Not Blind Faith

Be that as it may, given the massive uprooting she had to undergo in her life, no normal woman on earth in her right mind would consent to such an arrangement, unless God had already started the work of faith in her heart. So, stunning as it was, when they (Rebekah's parents and brother) "enquire at her mouth" (regarding her decision), "she said, I will go" (Genesis 24:57-58)! It must be emphasised that Rebekah's was not a mindless "blind leap of faith", apart from God's Word. Hers was a reasonable faith based on God's revealed Word, which she had heard at the mouth of Abraham's servant in his faithful and dutiful reporting and rehearsing of the LORD's goodness (Genesis 24:34-49) on behalf of his master Abraham.

We have a further hint that Rebekah's family (and by implication, Rebekah herself) had already heard of Abraham and Isaac when they gave Rebekah their blessings – "And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them" (Genesis 24:60). Evidently, they had heard of Abraham's calling by God to go to a promised land, where God "will make of (him) a great nation" (Genesis 12:2), which would necessarily comprise "thousands of millions" of descendants! Rebekah's family would also have later learnt of how God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age. Rebekah no doubt could infer that though Isaac was her father's cousin,

he was not much older than her, he being born so late in his father's life.

Faith in God's Promise

So, it is not at all far-fetched that Rebekah had heard about her granduncle Abraham's great faith from her father Bethuel (Abraham's nephew) or even her grandfather Nahor (Abraham's own brother), and of how he forsook his idolatrous homeland and kinsmen (in Ur of the Chaldees) to go to a promised land which God would show him to begin a new, and in time to come, a great nation.

Faith that Cometh by Hearing of God's Word

Prior to the encounter with Abraham's servant, God must have already started the work of faith in Rebekah's heart – faith that "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). And God calling Abraham to "Get thee out of thy country ... unto a land that I will shew thee" (Genesis 12:1) is certainly God's Word which, though repeated to her through a third party in Nahor's extended family, is nonetheless God's truth!

Rebekah could have secretly longed to be caught up with and be part of this divine, glorious plan, though marriage might not have immediately come to her mind. But now this unexpected but wonderful proposal came – everything that the servant dutifully recounted and testified excited her. It was like good news from heaven! He was like a messenger sent from God,

as it were, reiterating God's promise to His chosen one. Rebekah understood this prospect very well – not only would she be part of God's promised nation, she was even going to be an early and direct ancestor of God's blessed people, through marriage to God's promised heir to Abraham! Faith in her heart must have stirred her to say "Yes!" – faith which "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God".

An Undeterred Bride of Faith

So when God's providence clearly opened the door of marriage, you could say, Rebekah wholeheartedly and trustingly entered into it – not

unadvisedly or recklessly, but soberly and advisedly, her decision being based on God's promise.

For Rebekah, her prospect and challenge were clear: to leave home, parents, familiar surroundings, and venture on a long journey of some 500 miles with someone whom she had just met, in order to be married to a man whom she had not yet met (though had heard of). That she decisively agreed to go, notwithstanding the unknown territory ahead and the geographical uprooting involved, is a clear indication of how much she wanted to have a part in God's glorious promise and programme. Hers was truly an undaunted faith indeed! ■

whoever would agree to be Isaac's wife must not only be chaste and spiritual-minded..., she must also be full of faith herself, no less!... If the prospective bride proved to be willing to come all the way to Canaan, it would reflect her undaunted character. That would mean she would not easily get homesick and thus be able to make her home, together with God's promised heir to Abraham, in the Promised Land!

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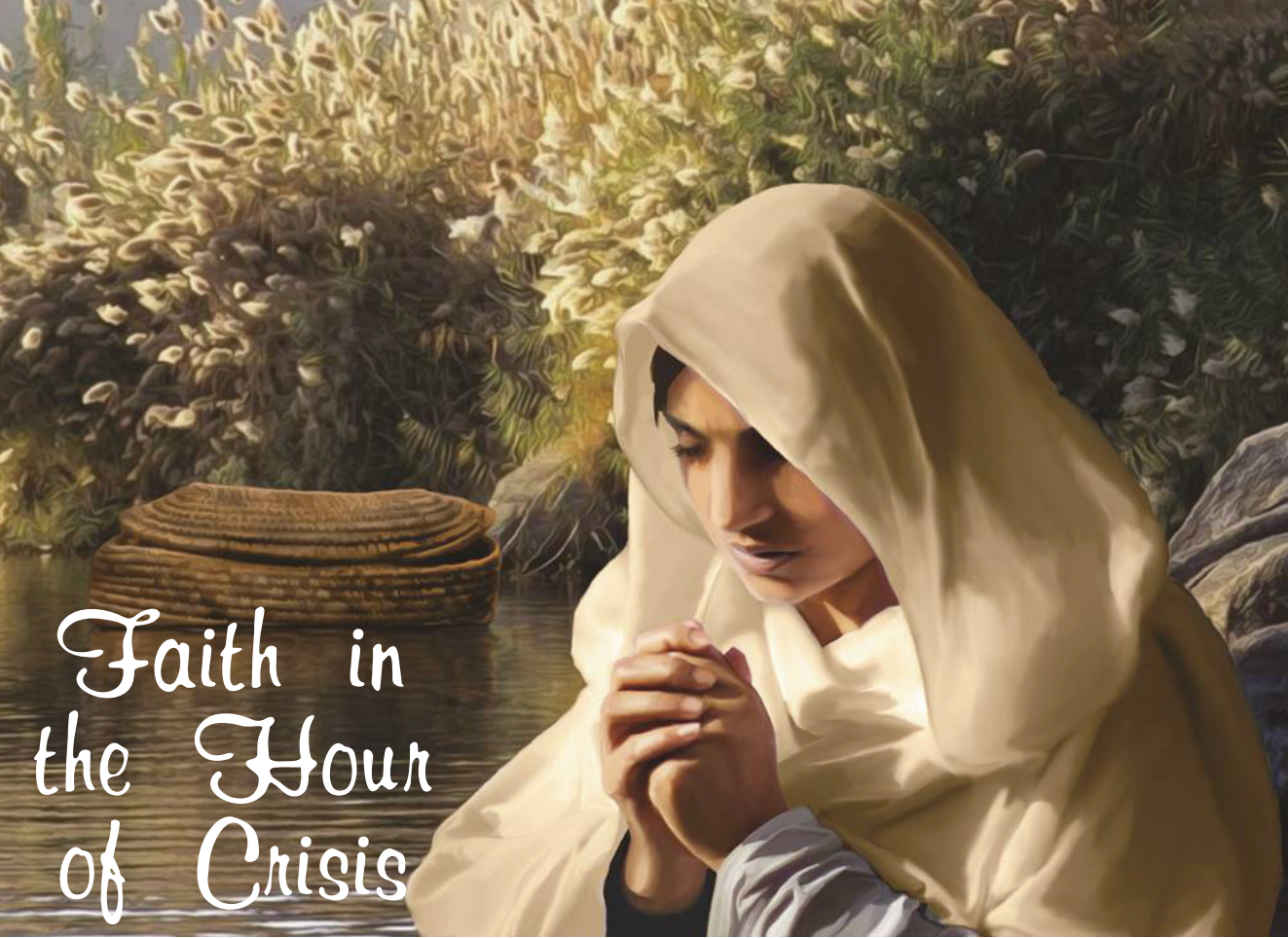
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Faith in the Hour of Crisis

Jochebed, a rather unfamiliar-sounding name, is nevertheless associated with one of the most well-known names in biblical history, namely Moses, the “founding father” of the nation Israel. From Exodus 6:20, one can tell that this quietly remarkable woman of faith is the wife of Amram, and mother of Aaron and Moses.

Though not mentioned by name, she is clearly alluded to in the Gospel’s “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment” (Hebrews 11:23). Since the newborn Moses was

too young to exercise any faith, the subject of “faith” here has to refer to his God-fearing parents, particularly his mother. Scripture tells us it was “she (who) hid him three months” (Exodus 2:2b), and that he was “nourished up (which implies being breastfed) in his father’s house three months” (Acts 7:20b). Jochebed did all these in courageous defiance of the king’s vicious commandment, because of faith.

Now, the believer’s faith is not blind faith, apart from God’s Word. Although there was no Scripture yet (as the first 5 books written by Moses were yet future at that point in time), the Hebrew people would surely have remembered Joseph’s last words: “I

die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). This was an echo of God's irrevocable promise to Abraham that they would be afflicted "in a land that is not theirs ... four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Genesis 15:13-14). Jochebed, during this hour of crisis, must have believed and embraced this divine revelation, looking forward to the ever approaching time of God's promised deliverance for her family and people.

God's Preparation of the Hebrew Nation

God had begun His chosen nation with the divine call of Abraham and was going to make of him "a great nation" (Genesis 12:1-2). Almost 400 years had already passed in Egypt just prior to Moses' birth. Over the intervening decades and centuries, God's people might have forgotten, but not God. In fact, God was about to finalise His preparations for the founding of that nation.

Of course, God's ways are higher than man's ways (Isaiah 55:9). His "preparations" involved not only abundant increase in the Hebrew population [relatively isolated from the Egyptians in the land of Goshen (cf. Genesis 46:34), until "the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7)], but also political oppression and slavery. This was to instil in them a yearning to leave, not stay when the time came for their exodus. The

Egyptian Pharaoh viewed these rapidly increasing foreign people as a threat to his political power. By dealing oppressively with them, their freedom was not only restricted, they also constituted a large labour force for the Egyptians' building projects, like the "treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses" (cf. Exodus 1:9-11). This cruel exploitation actually played into God's Hand; it served to keep the Hebrew people distinct and separate (with continued high fertility rate), while making them all the more desirous to leave.

Then came the Hebrews' darkest hour in their Egyptian stay. When Pharaoh realised that the blatant schemes to get rid of the Hebrews by "rigour" or hard labour had gone awry and instead "the more they multiplied and grew" (cf. Exodus 1:12, 14), he ordered the genocide of Hebrew baby boys! The first (more subtle) approach was by instigating midwifery malpractice, which failed because of non-cooperation from the God-fearing midwives (Exodus 1:15-17). The second (downright blatant) approach was by drowning the newborn boys, which succeeded because of manipulation of his people's fears and xenophobic prejudice (Exodus 1:22)!

God's Preparation of His People's "Deliverer"

Into this historically tumultuous setting was to be born God's deliverer for His people. He had to be born in a time of great national crisis; otherwise there would be no urgent need of a deliverer. That was not all. He had to be instructed in the

things of God, including his people's history and the divine promises to his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That would mean he had to be born to (and nurtured by) God-fearing, dedicated, believing parents (particularly mother). This was next to impossible to realise, given Pharaoh's vicious edict on the decimation of Hebrew baby boys. Here's where the quietly determined, unafraid, devoted Jochebed came into the picture.

Furthermore, God's providential workings would see to it that he be highly educated and academically trained. He had to be a man of great leadership and intellectual skills, one who would be able to "stand before kings ... not stand before mean men" (cf. Proverbs 22:29). But this scenario was not humanly possible as the Hebrews were not treated as equals, but as slaves, with no opportunity for the best education of the land. But with God all things are possible. Being the Architect of world history, He could make all those seemingly conflicting conditions fit like clockwork and bring about a conducive chain of events, in preparation of His people's deliverer. Truly, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4).

Now, at the time Pharaoh commanded that the Hebrew baby boys be cast into the river, Jochebed could have been or was about to be pregnant with child. She might have prayerfully hoped to avoid this pregnancy. But "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3). Well, it might be a girl, she

hoped. Those nine months must have been a most torturing wait for her – "Is it a boy or girl?" When the day of her delivery finally came, the midwife's reply to her all-important question was like a sword that pierced right into her heart, changing her – and her entire family's – life completely. Oh, how quick joy could turn into grief! Yet God's presence was with them. The moment she looked at her newborn – a very good-looking, beautiful child – something in his radiant countenance so stirred her up and told her it was no ordinary child. What downright cruelty to snuff out such a sweet, innocent life! To Jochebed, the king's wicked law must be defied because it ran counter to God's goodness and justice.

She determined to disregard the inhuman decree and protect her baby at all costs. When he became too noticeable to be hidden successfully in the house after 3 months, she resorted to putting him in "an ark of bulrushes", placed by the river bank, in the hope that he be rescued by some kind Egyptian soul. By God's providence, that kind soul happened to be none other than the Egyptian princess (Pharaoh's daughter) herself, who was moved with compassion for the helpless baby (cf. Exodus 2:5-6)! This had to be God's doing, including the name that the Egyptian princess later gave to this special Hebrew boy – "Mosheh", which literally means "drawing", alluding to her drawing him out of the water (cf. Exodus 2:10b). This was a most apt name, for God would in due time use him to draw His oppressed people out of Egyptian

bondage in the Exodus towards His promised land.

Far-Reaching Influence of a Mother's Unintimidated Faith

Desperate times call for desperate measures, together with a deepening of faith. The role Jochebed played in God's unfolding drama of His people's history was indispensable. Her unprecedented and unconventional actions worked out marvellously under God's providential care. Never in her wildest hopes did she expect her son to become adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and herself appointed as his nurse (cf. Exodus 2:8-9). That would mean she could openly care for her son without fear of harassment (given the legal protection of Pharaoh's daughter), and her son's access to the finest educational opportunities was assured. In fact, Scripture tells us that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Yet all of Egypt's training could not corrupt his heart's loyalty. This has to be attributed to his mother's faithful and committed nurturing and instructing during the first few years of his life.

Jochebed knew she had limited years to spend with young Moses;

it could be 6, 8 or 10 years before Pharaoh's daughter would call for him to live with her in the palace. She was determined to make those first few crucial years count by laying a firm spiritual foundation in his life. Scripture testifies of her far-reaching influence when Moses, having been nursed by his mother in his young, impressionable years, grew up "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Thus, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" (Hebrews 11:27a), just like his mother some 40 years ago (cf. Acts 7:23), who was "not afraid of the king's commandment". For there is a God in heaven whose counsel shall nevertheless stand, despite the many contrary devices of men's hearts (cf. Proverbs 19:21); and there is an infinitely higher authority to whom every man must give account.

Jochebed understood this and hence acted decisively in the hour of crisis, and thereby will be remembered by posterity as a woman whose unintimidated faith not only saved her son, but also ultimately paved the way for her nation's deliverance! ■

Scripture tells us it was "she (who) hid him three months" (Exodus 2:2b), and that he was "nourished up (which implies being breastfed) in his father's house three months" (Acts 7:20b). Jochebed did all these in courageous defiance of the king's vicious commandment, because of faith.



Faith in the Face of Impending Doom

Rahab was a woman who hailed from a heathenistic people – one who not only was not from God’s chosen nation Israel, but was also of an ill-reputed background and occupation. The Bible calls her “the harlot Rahab”!

Still, the Bible also has these amazing things to say of her: “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Hebrews 11:31); “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (James 2:25). Can the Bible be mistaken in these descriptions? Absolutely not! The Bible is infallible and perfect in every of its Hebrew and Greek words, for “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” and is therefore inerrant.

Rahab’s Repulsive Background

But then, how can this be? How can such a woman be listed among the “heroes of faith” in Hebrews 11? Besides Sarah (Abraham’s wife), the only other woman mentioned by name in the Gospel’s “Hall of Faith” chapter, is Rahab! Admittedly, it is so difficult and repulsive even to reconcile such a loose, wanton, immoral woman with a woman of God-honouring faith.

The term “harlot” conjures up a picture of a shameless, wicked woman who has no qualms about luring men and breaking up families. All she cares about is sensual pleasure and money! She flatters with her words and her paths lead unto the dead. “Her house is the way to hell (literally!), going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:27). Many lives (directly and indirectly) can be ruined by a harlot. A harlot ruins her very own life as well. Many such women end up

having sexually transmitted diseases; many despise themselves, become depressed and even take their own lives! Such a woman is certainly not a model of piety, let alone to be emulated for her faith or virtuous living.

In fact, some Old Testament commentators tried to get round it by explaining away the Hebrew word (*zonah*) translated as “harlot”. They claim that it could mean an innkeeper or a landlady of a tavern. Well, let God’s words speak for themselves; one should not read one’s preconceived ideas into them. This Hebrew noun is derived from the root verb (*zanah*) which means “to commit fornication”, and is used consistently throughout the Old Testament to refer only to “harlot”. Any lingering doubt is eliminated by the New Testament writers using the Greek word “*porne*”, which comes from the root verb (*porneuo*) meaning “to give one’s self to illicit sexual relationships or activities”. This Greek feminine noun literally gives the idea of “a woman who prostitutes for gain”. Hence, the King James Version faithfully and accurately translated it as “harlot”.

In a word, take God’s Word at face value. She, Rahab, had been a harlot, for sure. Doubtless, there probably were many harlots in the depraved city of Jericho in those days. But God’s mysterious, undeserved, wonder-working grace must have been working in Rahab’s heart for some time (perhaps even months) prior to the spying mission. She knew she was a despised character. Having sold herself out to the most degrading sin a woman can sink into, she had rejected her honour and virtue. It is not too far-

fetched to believe that over time, her soul must have grappled with qualms of regret and pangs of deep guilt because of her licentious life. Before repentance of soul, there must be a deep revulsion and conviction of one’s sinfulness; “a broken and a contrite heart, ... God ... wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17b). She wanted to get out of it all somehow, but did not know how to – given the prevalent immorality and abominable perversions of her entire city (cf. Leviticus 18:27; 20:23) – until she heard about a marvellous, God-honouring nation that was approaching her land...

Rahab’s Amazing Reception of the Spies

Hence this amazing commentary by the New Testament writer in Hebrews 11:31 – “By faith the harlot Rahab ... received the spies with peace”, i.e. not to endanger them or turn them in to the authorities, but as their ally. This is most incredible! Nobody had done it before – it is tantamount to being a traitor, exposing herself to being arrested and executed. She would be beheaded if caught. The king of Jericho would have no sympathy or leniency with a downright harlot, a filthy and despicable nobody in his eyes! But what she did was special and significant in God’s eyes. Thus, Scripture deems it fit to record her act as a testimony of her “daring” faith to Bible-readers down through the ages.

It is noteworthy that the same word “received” used by James has an added prefix “*hupo*” (which means “under”) attached to the Greek verb. It has the idea of “to admit under one’s roof”. This tells us that at great risk to her

life, Rahab had entertained the 2 spies sent from Joshua hospitably. She not only played host, but also provided protective shelter for the 2 spies when their cover was blown and guards from the king of Jericho came pursuing them (Joshua 2:3-4). Though she misdirected the pursuers with a lie, the Bible does not justify lying. It must be noted that she was not justified by her lie, but “by works” (James 2:25a), i.e. by her daring “step” of being identified with the God of Israel and His people. Hers was still an immature faith. Her faith, though decisive and commended by Scripture, still needed to grow. Though there was a 180°-turn in her convictions and values, there were still old ways of set thinking and deep-seated attitudes that needed to be changed over time. One such instance was her misguided view that the end justified the means. In fact, there was no need to tell a lie. God could easily intervene supernaturally (by distracting the pursuers or causing them to look another way), since it was His express will that the 2 spies should succeed in their mission in order for Joshua to go ahead to conquer the land (cf. Joshua 1:2).

Rahab’s Astonishing Confession of Faith

Rahab actually alluded to God’s supernatural intervention when she furnished the 2 spies with vital information on enemy morale, or rather the lack of it. She acknowledged “that all the inhabitants of the land faint ... For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side

Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed” (Joshua 2:9b-10). The parting of the Red Sea in the exodus, and the comprehensive victories over the 2 fearsome kings, together with the capture of the latter’s 60 highly fortified cities (cf. Deuteronomy 3:4-5), were nothing short of miraculous. She had heard and believed all these great exploits God had accomplished on behalf of Israel, which must have come from reliable news sources (such as travelling merchants).

While everyone else’s heart “did melt” (i.e. became discouraged and demoralised) so that “there remain (no) more courage (or spirit) in any man” (Joshua 2:11), Rahab’s heart was buoyed by a gleam of hope. She had never heard of such a wonderful God before, who had such righteous laws and sanctified requirements for His people. The 10 commandments – one of which is “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”; and another of which is “Thou shalt not commit adultery” – would have resonated with her wretched soul! To her, Israel’s approach spelt hope, though it meant impending doom to her wicked people. Hence her astonishing confession of faith: “the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11b).

Now, the 2 spies’ chanced appearance at Rahab’s house was, in effect, God’s providential opportunity for her to realise God’s message of doom – and yet hope if accompanied by repentance. Since the spies almost immediately had to hide for their lives, they hardly had any opportunity to spy out the land. Yet in God’s providence, they had been used of

God to bring salvation to Rahab. Thus, James fittingly described the 2 spies as “messengers”, for they were like “bearers of good news” to Rahab! She was so grateful that she was prepared to risk her life for theirs. Furthermore, by sending “them out another way” (James 2:25b), she facilitated their undetected escape back across Jordan to Joshua and the waiting Israelites. But not before she secured their agreement to make provision for her family’s deliverance, by token of a scarlet cord in the window (Joshua 2:12-13, 18).

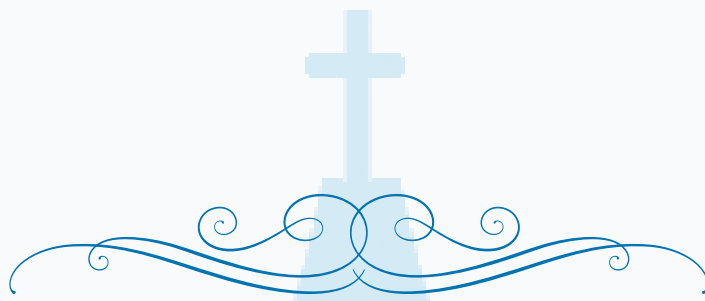
Her astonishing faith was not only shown by her sombre confidence that Israel would destroy Jericho by the LORD’s doing, but was also manifested by her obedience in binding the scarlet cord in the window, as instructed by the 2 messengers as a means of easy visible identification. Now, this certainly served as an outward sign of “being separated” in Rahab’s case. Yet at the same time, it posed a potential danger as it could be easily spotted and marked out by the returning pursuers, thereby arousing her own countrymen’s suspicions. She could have been tempted to delay binding the scarlet cord in the window until a more convenient time. But she did it immediately after the spies’ departure, though she had no idea when they would return. It could be days, weeks, or even months! Not wanting to be caught unawares at the imminent coming of Israelites, she was prepared to take the risk, trusting that God could overrule and even intervene supernaturally. She thus showed an increased maturity in faith, in marked

contrast to the earlier episode when she had to resort to telling a lie.

Rahab’s Decisive Motivations

Why did Rahab risk her life with seemingly no loyalty to her own nation? Her own confession in Joshua 2:11b gave a clue as to her inner motivations: “the LORD ... is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” She realised that one cannot have blind loyalty with total disregard to the truth; there is a God in heaven to whom she must give account. She wanted to have a clean break from her bondage to sin. She yearned for a new lease of life – not a mere physical, existential life of “eat, drink and be merry”! Not sensual pleasures, not the pleasures of life, not riches of this world! All of a sudden, she (being given the eyes of faith) could see beyond this present earthly life, and (like Abraham and Sarah) desired “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:16).

Rahab’s story did not end here. Though after Israel’s conquest her name was not mentioned again in the Old Testament, she later became married to Salmon, who begat Boaz, who in turn begat Obed, grandfather of David (cf. Matthew 1:5-6). Amazingly, she became part of King David’s genealogy and thus the Messiah’s lineage. Truly, Rahab’s story is a classic case of a heart of faith being matched by some decisive step in faith. One can never tell how much may hinge on just one step, especially in the face of impending doom. Indeed, sometimes the whole course of one’s life – as in Rahab’s case – may be changed by just one decisive step of faith! ■



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Bible Trivia - Exodus 26

Sarah Yong

The LORD gave precise measurements for the construction of the Tabernacle, such as the number of loops required for each curtain and number of sockets for each board. Read the Bible verse listed, and then fill in each blank below.

1. Curtains for the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1)

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Number of Curtains | _____ |
| Type of Material | They are to be made of fine twined _____ |
| Colour Requirement | Only 3 colours – blue, _____ and scarlet |
| Special Design | Embroidered with _____ |

2. Covering for the Tent (Exodus 26:14)

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Covering Made of | _____ skins |
| Colour of Dye | _____ |
| Covering Above Made of | _____ skins |

3. The Most Holy Place and The Holy Place



- 1 - Ark of Covenant
- 2 - Table of Shewbread
- 3 - Golden Candlestick

Read Hebrews 9:1-5 and answer the following questions.

- a) The Holy Place is also called the _____ (v. 2)
- b) The Most Holy Place is also called the _____ (v. 3)
- c) Name the three items found in the Ark of the Covenant.

ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 25 (VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2, P. 23)

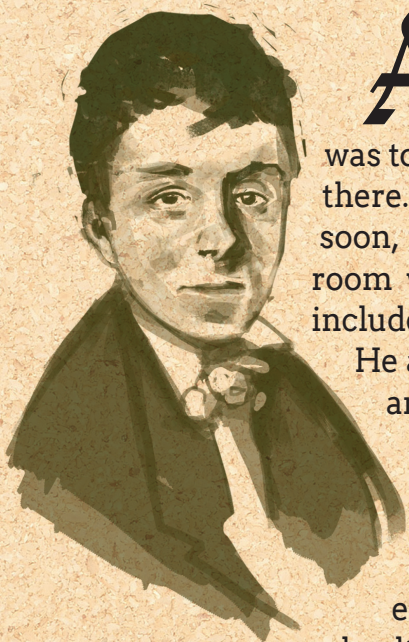
- | | | | | |
|----------------|-------------|------------|----------|----------|
| 1) PURE | 2) BRANCHES | 3) ALMONDS | 4) KNOP | 5) LAMPS |
| 6) SNUFFDISHES | 7) TALENT | 8) PATTERN | 9) OLIVE | |

Henry Martyn (1781 - 1812)

"Burnt out for God!" - Part II

*(Retold from 'They were Pilgrims', written by Marcus L. Loane,
published by The Banner of Truth Trust)*

Retold by Jenny Lok Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy



After 5 months in Serampore, India, Henry Martyn moved to Dinapore (a British military station) in the neighbourhood of Patna. This was to be his first assignment – preaching to the soldiers there. Initially, there was not a single church building but soon, they moved into a bungalow and turned its central room with a verandah into a church. His daily routine included visits to the sick and dying in the army hospital.

He also started a weekly service for the native women, and opened three schools to poor children who often wandered in the streets. At Dinapore, Martyn had to endure an extremely hot summer, as well as dirt and disease in the streets and markets. His health was affected and he would frequently experience pain in his chest. Despite his poor

health, Martyn gave much of his time to studying the Hindustani language and took on the task of translating the New Testament into Hindustani and Persian. His love for different languages and ability to master them made his task most enjoyable and rewarding.

In the meantime, he continued to write to Lydia, the lady whom he really wished to marry one day, but it soon became clear to him that she was not willing to serve in India with him.



Cawnpore

PATNA

Martyn's hope of marrying her was dashed! Feeling much pain and disappointment, he wrote: "Prayer was my relief and I did find peace by casting my care on God."

In April 1809, Martyn was instructed to leave Patna for Cawnpore, another military campsite about 300 miles inland. It was a torturous journey under scorching heat, and the merciless wind that came "like the blast of a furnace" added to his agony.

Finally, he arrived at Cawnpore in a feverish, almost lifeless state. By God's grace, with the help of the Sherwood family (whom he had befriended), he recovered and was soon reaching out to soldiers

in the camp. Come Sunday morning, he would be preaching to a huge crowd of beggars in his compound, many of whom came clad in rags and were often covered in mud or full of sores and diseases.

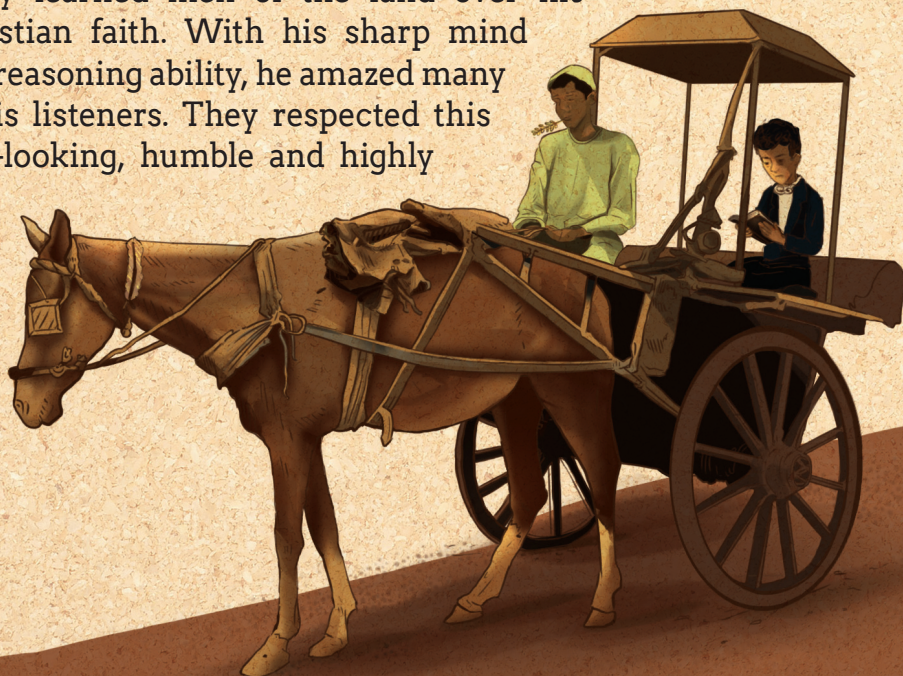
Occasionally, some in the crowd would hurl rude and hateful remarks at him, and an outbreak of violence was possible anytime but Martyn was determined to patiently "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). Just when he thought that his preaching had fallen on deaf ears, a young man – who was tasked to oversee the binding of the Persian translation in Calcutta – believed in Jesus and was baptised after reading the New Testament from cover to cover!

What a day of rejoicing it was for Martyn! In addition, he also translated the Book of Common Prayer and the Book of Genesis into Hindustani. Overall,

Martyn's Hindustani translation of the New Testament was outstanding in its text and style.

By mid-1810, Martyn's health took a turn for the worse; he often lost his voice and suffered pain in his chest and was unable to have a restful sleep. Consumption (also known as tuberculosis) had taken hold of his body and this same disease (which in those days was not curable) had sadly claimed the lives of his sisters a few years before. If not for Martyn's friend, Daniel Corrie, who came just in time to relieve him of his preaching duties, he would not be able to continue with his translation work. The ailing Martyn thus decided to take his doctors' advice to go on a sea voyage for his health's sake. While on leave, Martyn had hoped to revise both his Arabic and Persian translations of the New Testament.

In January 1811, Martyn left India for Persia. He made a brief stop at Muscat, Arabia, to finalise his Arabic translation of the New Testament. Shortly after, he made his way to the Persian cultural centre of Shiraz. During this journey, he was often exposed to the intense heat in the day and the chilly air in the night. After passing through miles of desert land and steep mountains, Martyn finally arrived in Shiraz, refreshed by a few hours of sleep along the way. The days that followed were filled with many hours of discussions and debates with many learned men of the land over his Christian faith. With his sharp mind and reasoning ability, he amazed many of his listeners. They respected this pale-looking, humble and highly



knowledgeable man of God. Martyn persevered despite many who opposed him. Never once did he deny God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son of God. Time flew while Martyn was in Persia. A year later, in February 1812, the translation of the New Testament in Persian was completed in a style that was most elegant and technically superb!

Three months later, Martyn left Shiraz to return to England for a time of rest as his body was wasting away from consumption, being constantly in a state of fever and pain. He was not sure whether he would ever see his beloved Lydia again! On 6th October, while having a short respite from his travel, he wrote in his journal for the last time: "I sat in the orchard and thought with sweet comfort and peace of my God; in solitude my company, my friend and comforter. Oh! When shall time give place to eternity! ..." The answer came on 16 October 1812 in Tokat, Turkey, when God received his devoted and faithful servant into heaven's glory to dwell with Him for evermore!

Though Henry Martyn had served as a preacher and translator of God's Word for only 6 years, his work had brought much honour and glory to the Almighty God. He never slackened in his ministry but continued to labour with such love and selflessness in the midst of great pain and suffering and yes, even in the face of death. Oh, how Martyn did "burn out for God"!

Dear children, like Henry Martyn, let us love God and obey His will, that He may fill our hearts with His peace and joy every day, even unto eternity.

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

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