



*Failed But
Not Finished*



Problems Christians Face

Failed But Not Finished

by

Alan Morrell

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Failed but not Finished

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Contents

Chapter 1	He Made It Again	Page 5
Chapter 2	Wrong Choices	Page 9
Chapter 3	A Tough Wrestling Match	Page 13
Chapter 4	A Final Fling	Page 17
Chapter 5	You Are the Man	Page 21
Chapter 6	A Terrible Rage	Page 25
Chapter 7	Prayer Changes Things	Page 29
Chapter 8	A Second Chance: Jonah	Page 33
Chapter 9	Burdens or Blessings	Page 37
Chapter 10	Not Fit For the Scrapheap	Page 41
Chapter 11	Care For My Sheep	Page 45
Chapter 12	Make Me Your Servant	Page 49
Chapter 13	Not Fit to Serve God	Page 53

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Chapter 1

He Made It Again

Jeremiah 18:1-4

It was a clear instruction from God. And it was not the usual one for the prophet, which was to take a message of hope, challenge or encouragement to the people of Israel. No! This was different! God told him very clearly and distinctly, “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message”.

Before Jeremiah could preach he had to listen... before he could give he had to receive. Perhaps that is a word for those of us who preach today; we cannot give a word for God until we receive a word from God. The Bible is God’s Word, and there is a sense in which any message based on the Bible is ‘a word from God’, but only God can search the human heart and meet its deepest needs. Only God can speak the word which will lift men and women out of depression and give them hope and peace and joy. Only God can really challenge our consciences and give us the desire to live for Him. So preachers today need to be tuned in to the clear guidance of God, so that what they say will meet the needs of the people to whom they minister.

I believe that the ‘word from God’ for this course is “He has not finished with you yet”, or, if you like “Failed but not finished”. We are inclined to write people off far too easily, but we have a God of patience and long-suffering... He does not write us off the moment we make a mistake. No! Our God is the ‘God of Another Chance’. So as we look at Jeremiah 18:1-4, we will use two simple headings: Reminding and Re-making.

Reminding – Verses 1 and 2

Jeremiah was a man of God, who had been raised up for a special purpose. He had seen the people of God ruled by an evil king - Zedekiah; God had given him, Jeremiah, a powerful word for King Zedekiah, but 2 Chronicles 36:12 tells us “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD”. Now God reminds the prophet that He is still in control and although the king had refused to heed the warning which he, Jeremiah, had given so faithfully, God had not given up on His people. “Go down to the potter’s house and I will give you my message”.

As Jeremiah went down to the potter’s house he must have wondered just what kind of message he would receive in such an unusual place. What he did not know was that God had already arranged a powerful visual aid which would remain with the prophet and the people for many years, and would be a blessing to millions of people right up to our day. Jeremiah little dreamt that men and women would read of the events of that day, and would be blessed as a result; which leads us to our second heading.

Remaking – Verses 3 and 4

As Jeremiah looked through the open window of the workshop, he saw the potter busily engaged in shaping a pot. The wheel was whirring around, the water was lubricating the operation, and the clay was like plastic in the skilful hand of the potter. The vessel began to take shape beautifully and perfectly; someone was going to be the proud owner of a hand-crafted pot of exquisite beauty and design. But no! The potter has stopped the wheel; what has gone wrong? There is a look of dissatisfaction on his face. Jeremiah asks the potter for an explanation and the skilful artist tells him that the first effort was marred! It was spoilt! It was defective! If he went ahead with his work it would

be fit only for the scrapheap; it would never grace a table, it would never be an ornament of beauty... it was marred.

Jeremiah wonders what message God is giving him through this picture of the potter at his wheel, and a marred pot. "Oh, don't worry," says the potter, "I will take this same piece of clay, press it patiently in my hands until it is workable and pliable, and then make the vessel all over again". As Jeremiah watched, so the skilful potter took the clay in his hands and gently, tenderly, almost lovingly, he formed it into another pot, shaping it as only he could do. "Now" says the LORD to Jeremiah, "that is what I am going to do with my people; they are resisting Me as I seek to mould them, but I will give them another chance ... I will not write them off." (paraphrase v6).

The wonder of it is that He has not changed through all the centuries; just as He took His earthly people, Israel, and 'gave them another chance' so He will take men and women today. Perhaps you think God has written you off. You are feeling discouraged and disheartened; things have not gone well. You feel that you have made a mess of your life! Well, there is good news for you. Christ died on the cross for people just like you. If you will put yourself into the hands of the Lord, the Master Potter, He will make you again, shaping you as only He can. He will give you a work to do for Him which will absolutely amaze you. He is still the One who takes broken vessels and makes them all over again, then fills them with His Holy Spirit and uses them for His glory.

Perhaps you are a Christian, but you have failed your Lord. Well, the story of the potter is for you, too! The Lord is ready and willing to take you and 'make you all over again'. Remember, He is the God of the Second Chance. We are only too ready to write people off when they slip up... even Christians do that! God does not! He picks them up gently, works on them patiently, taking

them into His tender and loving hands. Remember, He is the Perfect Potter; give Him the opportunity of remaking you! Put your total trust in Him today.

Perhaps you think you have sunk too low, have sinned too badly for God to forgive you. Do not forget that He is the One who forgave a dying thief upon the cross. He is the One who forgave Peter who had denied Him with oaths. Someone has said that the only sin God cannot forgive is the one we are unwilling to forsake.

Think about it! You may be a failure but God has not finished with you yet!

Chapter 2

Wrong Choices

Genesis Chapters 12 and 13

It is now known that when Abraham was called by God to go from his home town of Ur in Mesopotamia, to an unknown land 1000 miles away, he was leaving behind a cultured and sophisticated lifestyle. It could not have been easy for him and his wife Sarah. God then made a covenant with him, promising him a land, a nation and a blessing. But how was he going to live up to the high calling of God? Abraham's faith had not yet been thoroughly tested. Amy Carmichael, who served the Lord for many years in India, wrote "Life can be difficult, sometimes the enemy comes in like a flood, but then is the time to prove our faith and live our songs". Warren Wiersbe once said: "A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted".

In this chapter of 'Failed but not Finished', Abraham faces special tests, and as you and I are faithful to God we, too, will face similar tests. We will look at them in the three ways in which they came to Abraham, through Problems, People and Possessions. This is a very relevant message for us in our day!

Problems – Genesis 12:10

In Genesis 12:10 we read that there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and Abraham "went down into Egypt". Was this the start of his departure from God's will? The land where Abraham was living had abundant vegetation, but in the summer season it was almost desert. On this occasion the drought was particularly

bad because we read "the famine was severe". So it was a very difficult problem for Abraham, feeding his flocks, herds and servants. He thought he was in the place God wanted him to be, yet a gigantic problem had hit him! Choices opened up to him; what should he do? Retrace his steps to the more fertile area to the north or stay put and 'brave it out'? His expert knowledge told him that certain death lay along that pathway and he was no fool! There seemed to be only one choice left. He must go south to Egypt, with its bountiful supply of food. Did it not occur to him that the God who had brought him into Canaan was the God who could meet all his needs. He had cared for him over the 600 mile journey from Ur to Haran and the 400 miles from Haran to Canaan. Surely He could help him over a small problem such as a famine? Who controls the food supply anyway? And why had he overlooked another choice open to him - he could have prayed! Whatever problem you are facing just now, do not overlook the great value of prayer!

Next we see Abraham going down into Egypt. It is always dangerous to leave the place of God's appointment! Think of Naomi and her husband, who in a time of famine went into the country of Moab. Naomi survived but she lost her husband and two sons! Abraham made the wrong choice and he lived to regret it! Never forget that we can safely leave the choice to God.

People – Genesis 12:11-20

If Abraham failed God in making the wrong choice, he certainly failed after entering the land of Egypt. He started to look at his wife, Sarah, in a new light. Whilst in normal circumstances most wives would be very pleased for their husbands to tell them they were beautiful, this time it was different. Abraham told her "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me and let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for

your sake and my life will be spared because of you.” This was a dreadful thing to do, for he was risking the moral safety of his wife to save his own skin! This was the man who had been called and blessed by God. This was the man who is held up to us in the New Testament as a man of faith, whose example we should follow. He was afraid of people, and was ready to put his wife in danger to save himself! It was fear instead of faith, lying and deceiving instead of taking God at His word. It was fantasy instead of fact. He certainly should have known better! Perhaps he assumed that God would protect Sarah.

We then read that Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, took Sarah into his own house, and he could so easily have taken her out of his harem, and used her for his own purpose if God had not protected her. The strange thing about it is, that although Abraham was the guilty party, the Lord permitted him to prosper in Egypt, and He actually plagued Pharaoh and the Egyptians, so that the truth would come out. Once again, as so often in scripture, we see suffering through sin. How many times in the Bible and in real life today do we see that sin brings suffering upon us and others. The very man whom God had called to be a blessing to the nations brought them judgement! Warren Wiersbe writes “God forgave his sin, so what is the problem? The big problem is that everything Abram received in Egypt later caused trouble”.

There is a clear principle evident through this incident; God can protect us from people who would do us harm if we are prepared to live in obedience to Him.

Property – Genesis 13

Abraham is sent out of Egypt, back to the land of Canaan, and the record says that Abraham had become very wealthy. (v2) Abraham had failed the first two tests miserably, but God had not finished with him, and he passed this next one with flying

colours. Perhaps the secret lies in the fact that after leaving Egypt, he returned to Bethel, which means 'The House of God'. And we read that it was 'the place of the altar'. It was the place where he had met God, and worshipped Him. The altar was the place of repentance and forgiveness. It was the place of consecration and peace.

Perhaps you feel that you have let God down badly. Maybe, like Abraham, you have not been fair to your partner. Or you have lied and cheated, and like him you have even made money out of it. Will you come back to the best possible place for forgiveness, reconciliation and healing? Come back in faith to the cross of Christ. Realise again that you may have failed but God has not finished with you yet. The way back is always the way of repentance.

Are you having problems with people? Remember that God made people, and He knows them. Will you trust Him to sort things out? Perhaps you are worried about what you need? God knows and will provide. If you are too concerned about what you think you ought to have, then God says: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these (necessary) things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Failed but not Finished

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EXAM 1

USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE

Chapters 1-2

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Jeremiah's message to Israel portrayed God as a
 - a. farmer
 - b. potter
 - c. shepherd
2. A New Testament verse which confirms that Jeremiah's message is still relevant today is:
 - a. John 3:16
 - b. Luke 7:47
 - c. Matthew 12:20
3. God called Abraham to leave his home town of
 - a. Ur
 - b. Babylon
 - c. Nineveh
4. When faced by famine what did Abraham decide to do?
 - a. Pray
 - b. Trust God who controls the food supply
 - c. Escape to Egypt
5. God can protect us from people who would do us harm if we
 - a. live in obedience to Him
 - b. do enough good works towards others
 - c. have more faith in God

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Before we speak to others about God, God must speak to us.
7. Broadly speaking, Zedekiah was a good king.
8. The potter threw away the marred pot.
9. Because God forgave Abraham, his stay in Egypt had no long-term consequences.
10. God had previously met with Abraham at Bethel, the house of God.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Have there been times when you have tried to solve problems using your own ability rather than allowing God to act?

Chapter 3

A Tough Wrestling Match

Genesis 32

He was a cheat and a liar. In fact his name, Jacob, means ‘Supplanter’, and he came out of his mother’s womb grasping his twin brother’s heel. What a start in life, to be given a name meaning “one who tries to put it over other people”. There are plenty of people about who also try to get the better of others by whatever means they have at their disposal, but here was a boy who started off with a name like that! It was not too long before those who lived with him could see how well his name had been chosen. Perhaps God chose it for the parents, because that was what happened in those days. This story is found in Genesis chapter 32 and will be considered under four headings: A Problem Expected (vs.1-8); A Prayer of Escape (vs.9-12); A Proposition for Esau (vs.13-21); A Personal Encounter (vs.22-32).

A Problem Expected – Verses 1 to 8

Jacob was returning to his homeland after many years’ absence, prior to which there had been a blazing row between him and his twin brother, Esau, over their father’s blessing. Their mother had overheard Esau plotting to kill Jacob, and she had arranged for him to leave home in a hurry. Now he is returning because God has told him to go back home, but he is very much afraid that Esau will not have forgotten their feud, and will still seek his life. Perhaps you have a real fear gripping your heart or a problem too big for you to handle. You know God personally; Christ is your Saviour and Friend, but somehow you find it hard to trust

Him. Well, the next step that Jacob took was the best one for you to take, for Jacob offers ...

A Prayer for Escape – Verses 9 to 12

We read that Jacob was “in great fear and distress”. Is that how you feel right now? The problem is so big and your faith seems so small. What can you possibly do in such circumstances? Well, Jacob prayed!

That is not only the thing that you should do, but it is the best thing that you can do! And Jacob’s prayer teaches us some valuable lessons. First of all He prayed to One whom he acknowledged to be ‘the God of history’; One who had proved Himself faithful to his father and his grandfather. Then he told God that he was obeying Him, when He had said. “Go back to your relatives and I will make you prosper” (v9). After that, Jacob did what did not come easily to him, he took a humble stand: “I am unworthy of all Your kindness and faithfulness”. I wonder, are we willing to humble ourselves before God in prayer? There is no place for pride and bigotry in the prayer room. Next we see Jacob making ...

A Proposition for Esau - Verses 13 to 21

He carefully laid his plans, selecting an expensive gift of donkeys, flocks and herds, and giving his servants explicit instructions in what they were to say, and how they were to act. Verse 20 says that he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts...and perhaps he will receive me”. We are not sure whether he was failing to trust his God, after taking the matter to Him in prayer, or simply doing what he could, as his part in the proceedings. Sometimes it is right for us to play our part after praying, as long as we are not trying to ‘pull strings’ which are not ours to pull! There is a verse in John’s Gospel chapter 11, which gives us some guidance on the matter. When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the grave, He told the people around Him to take away the

stone, and when they had done so, He spoke the word of power which brought the dead man out of the tomb. It was as though Jesus was saying, “I’m not going to do for you what you are able to do for yourself, but if you play your part, you can trust Me to do mine”. Finally, we see Jacob enter into an experience which would change his life forever. It was ...

A Personal Encounter - Verses 22 to 32

Having taken his family to a place of safety, Jacob then crossed the ford of the River Jabbok, and as he meditated in the darkness, a man wrestled with him until daybreak. This unknown wrestler then touched Jacob’s hip, wrenching it out of its socket, as he asked Jacob to let him go. Jacob replied “I will not let you go unless you bless me”, and the man asked him his name. It would appear that he wanted Jacob, the supplanter, to understand that his life had been something of a failure. He had deceived his father, cheated his brother, and walked out on his father-in-law. Indeed, a great deal of his life had been spent in either defending his rights, as he saw it, or living by his wits.

So the unknown wrestler wanted him to see that he was a deceiver by name and a deceiver by nature. When Jacob acknowledged the meaning of his name, the Stranger gave him a wonderful message: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, ‘A Wrestler with God’ or ‘A Prince of God’”. Suddenly, the whole picture became clear to the young man who had returned home; this Stranger, with whom he had wrestled, was God in human form, so he named the place Peniel, meaning ‘the face of God’.

Although Jacob did continue to make mistakes, his whole attitude seems to have changed. There was a meekness which had not been seen before. He had prayed about his problem in real humility, had sought to care for his family in the right spirit, had faced up to his responsibilities in relation to his brother, and

now God had heard and answered his prayer. It was as though God was telling him “I know you have failed, but you are not finished. In fact I am going to do something quite astounding with you, because in 4000 years’ time, the nation Israel, which bears your name, will dwell in the land in the Middle East towards which the eyes of the whole world will be turned.” (see Genesis 35:10-12).

Perhaps you have been a cheat. You have cheated your wife or your husband; you have cheated your parents or your children; you have cheated your business partner or your friend, and you just feel yourself to be one big failure. If you are a Christian and you know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, He is waiting for you to come back to Him in repentance and faith - and in humility. He will in effect say to you “You may have failed, but I have not finished with you yet”. Here is forgiveness and the opportunity to start a new life for Christ. Do not let it pass you by.

Chapter 4

A Final Fling

Judges 13-17

It is one of the many exciting stories of the Bible, with drama, intrigue and romance. Sadly not everything goes well for 'the hero', but it seldom does in real life! His name was Samson, the woman who caused him so much heartache was Delilah, and the story is found in Judges chapter 16. It was a time in Israel's history of which they have no reason to be proud. The book of Judges commences about 1385 B.C. with the death of Joshua, the capable and God-fearing man who had led them into the Promised Land, and it finishes with the cryptic comment "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25 NKJV). How up to date that is! What a description of the day in which we live.

In the book of Judges there are seven cycles, each made up of four movements; the people's sin and disobedience, God's judgement, followed by the people's repentance and, finally, God's forgiveness and deliverance. Although they did not have kings, Israel was ruled by judges, of whom the best known were Deborah, Gideon and the character who is at the centre of this study, Samson. We will consider his story under four headings: Blessing, Baiting, Blinding and Believing.

Blessing – Judges 13

The birth of Samson followed a special promise made by God to his parents, that if their son became a Nazirite from birth, not

partaking of alcohol nor using a razor on his head, then he would begin the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Philistines. In due course the baby was born, named Samson, and we read “the Lord blessed him and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him”. He had a wonderful start in life!

As he grew up we read of his great strength, but also of his self-will and dominating character. He fell in love with a Philistine woman and instructed his father to arrange their marriage. Sadly that marriage ended in heartache, as Samson’s wife was given to his so-called friend who had been best-man at the wedding (chs 14,15). Sometime later Samson fell in love with another Philistine woman by the name of Delilah, which leads us to our next heading...

Baiting – Judges 16:4-19

Delilah was bribed by the leaders of her nation, and she did her best to discover the secret of Samson’s great strength. He resisted the temptation to tell her that he was committed to no alcohol and no razor, giving her several false leads. Each time she told the Philistines what Samson had shared with her as the secret of his strength. This should have alerted Samson to the fact that she was being unfaithful to him, but they say ‘love is blind’, and eventually he told her that if his head was shaved he would be “like any other man”. Once again, Delilah had the Philistines lie in wait as she put him to sleep, and quickly called for a barber to shave off the seven braids of hair which singled him out from other men. Then follows one of the saddest verses in the whole of the Old Testament, for as Delilah called out to Samson that the Philistines were coming to attack him, the man to whom God had given such super-human strength, “awoke from his sleep and thought ‘I will go out as before and shake myself free.’ But he did not know that the LORD had left him” (Judges 16:20).

How sad! A man whom God has used powerfully in His service, whose borrowed strength has now been withdrawn - did not know it. It is possible for someone who has been used by God in His service, perhaps as a worker amongst young people, or even as a preacher of the Gospel not to realise that their witness and work has lost its cutting edge. The people around may know, and of course the Lord knows, but they do not. Let us open our hearts to the Holy Spirit today, and pray the words of Psalm 139:23,24 "Search me, O God, ... and see if there is any wicked way in me" (NKJV). Thankfully Samson's story is not finished, for our next heading is ...

Blinding – Judges 16:21

The Philistines had an easy task overcoming the weakened Samson, and he paid the penalty for sharing the secret of his strength with the enemy, for they gouged out his eyes, and set him to work grinding in the prison. Here is the man who was once a champion of the people and powerful for God, now blinded by the enemy and reduced to grinding in the prison-house. What a sad picture of God's servant. Does this describe you? Your work for God lies in ruins, you are held by our enemy, the devil, and you feel utterly useless. Samson was indeed a failure, but take heart, for he was not finished, and the God who picked him up and used him against the enemy can do the same for you today. Our last heading is ...

Believing – Judges 16 :22-30

Note verse 22 very carefully! What an encouragement, for we read "But the hair on his head began to grow again". As the curtain is raised on the next scene, we see the Philistines holding a great celebration in a huge national arena, and the record reads "While they were in high spirits they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us."" The great stadium was packed with thousands of people, including all the rulers of the Philistines, and as Samson stood between the two central pillars, to be the

sport of the crowd he prayed “O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more”.

Then, putting his trust and confidence in God, instead of in himself, he braced himself, pushed with all his God-given strength, and brought the whole stadium down upon the crowded arena. The record reads “Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived”. The oppression of Israel’s enemy had been broken, and the man who was written off by the people as a failure, was not finished in God’s book.

Do not let the devil or the people around you write you off as a failure, and do not write yourself off, either, for the God who sent His Son to the cross is the same One about whom it is written “God works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Phil 2:13). What He requires of us is repentance for past sin and failure, a total commitment to Him and His will, and a willingness to be and to do what He wants.

May God pick you up, and use you again in His own powerful way. You may be a failure but you are not finished!

Failed but not Finished

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EXAM 2

USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE

Chapters 3-4

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. The name Jacob means
 - a. deceiver
 - b. deliverer
 - c. faithful
2. Which of these characteristics did not feature in Jacob's prayer?
 - a. Obedience
 - b. Humility
 - c. Praise
3. Jacob wrestled with God at a place called
 - a. Macpelah
 - b. Hebron
 - c. Peniel
4. Which of these has the right order of events for the cycles of the Judges?
 - a. Disobedience, judgement, repentance, forgiveness
 - b. Judgement, forgiveness, disobedience, repentance
 - c. Disobedience, forgiveness, judgement, repentance
5. Philippians 2:13 describes the purposes of God as
 - a. wise
 - b. good
 - c. true
6. As Jacob returned home he was in great fear and distress.
7. If we play our part, we can trust God to do His part.
8. A Nazirite is a person from Nazareth in Israel.
9. Because Samson was Israel's Judge, he knew the moment God's power had left him.
10. As Samson's hair grew again, so his strength returned.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Past sin and failure does not stop God using us, if we turn to Him in repentance, but what effect may it have?

Chapter 5

You Are the Man

2 Samuel 11,12

He was the greatest king in the whole of Israel's history! Born into a humble family, caring for the sheep on the hills surrounding Jerusalem as a lad, yet chosen of God and anointed as Israel's king by the great prophet, Samuel. Surely he had a golden future opening up to him, and nothing could spoil his progress along the pathway to which God had so clearly called him. He had shown remarkable courage and skill in killing both a lion and a bear, as he cared for his father's flock. He had stepped into the breach as Israel looked for a champion to challenge the Philistine giant, Goliath, and had won the hearts of the people as he delivered them from the hand of the enemy.

The day finally came when he was crowned king of the whole nation, and victory followed victory as God enabled him to set Israel on the map in a big way. He defeated the Philistines, who had been such a thorn in the side of his people for so many years and he set the ark of God in the city of Jerusalem, symbolising God's Presence in the midst of the nation. Then David told the prophet Nathan that he felt uncomfortable living in a palace, whilst the Almighty God was worshipped in a plain tent. Nathan quickly told him that God was not concerned about the type of dwelling; He was content to dwell in the midst of His people, whether in a tent or a permanent building, but He would allow David's son, to build Him a house for His name.

In a wonderful prayer, David showed true humility, saying “Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me thus far...How great You are, Sovereign LORD” (2 Samuel 7:18-22). Surely, with a spirit so humble and open before God, nothing could possibly go wrong for King David, the man after God’s own heart? Sadly this is not the case, for the whole story of David’s life changes and in 2 Samuel chapter 11, we see him Failing in His Duty, Falling to His Desires but thankfully, in chapter 12 Forsaking His Deceit.

Failing in His Duty – 2 Samuel 11 :1

As so often happens, David’s sin followed his failure to carry out the work to which God had called him. In those days it was his normal duty, as king, to lead his army into battle, but the record tells us that “when it was the time for kings to go off to war, David sent Joab out with...the Israelite army”. There is an old saying ‘Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do’, and there is a great deal of truth in it; a warning we need to take seriously! If God has given you a task to do for Him, do not forsake it for something which may seem to be more attractive. David sent his general off to the battle front in his place, while he relaxed at home to enjoy the city life of Jerusalem. Next we see him ...

Falling to His Desires – 2 Samuel 11:2-5

Notice the sequence of events. First of all David was casually walking around the roof of the palace, probably getting fresh air in the heat of the day, when his eye alighted on a beautiful woman nearby who was taking a bath. Now that should have been the end of the matter, he was already married, and soon discovered that the woman was married, too. Sinful desires grew within David, however, and he commanded his servant to fetch the woman so that he could gratify those desires. Similarly, the woman should have sent a message back telling him that she was already married, and that her husband was away at the

battle where David should have been. But perhaps it was too much to expect her to resist the attention of the king, and before long an act of adultery had taken place.

No doubt David hoped that he could carry on a secret affair while this woman's husband was out of sight, but before long she sent a message to say that she was pregnant. It has often been said that 'one sin leads to another' and this story provides a graphic illustration of that fact. By a series of events David committed adultery, then schemed, lied, and finally actually planned her husband's murder at the battle front. After a suitable period of hypocritical mourning, he took the widow as his wife, expecting everyone to assume in due course that the baby was the outcome of a normal relationship.

At this stage God stepped in! His servant, Nathan, dramatically exposed King David's sin and hypocrisy (12:1-6). Thankfully, God is so gracious that although the baby died, He gave David an opportunity to repent and return to Him, which leads us to our final point ...

Forsaking His Deceit – 2 Samuel 12:24,25

When David returned to the Lord in genuine repentance he might well have expected God to tell him that He was finished with him; that never again could there be fellowship between a holy God and a man who had sinned so terribly. Never again would God accept the worship of the heart of a man who had acted so deceitfully and so shamefully. Never again could He use this man in His service. But the Lord is so gracious and the amazing thing is that the very son who was later born to David and his new wife Bathsheba was Solomon, who became successor to the throne. In fact, Solomon extended the kingdom of Israel to its greatest size in all history. That is a picture of the forgiveness of God, a confirmation of the powerful truth which

we are considering in this course, that God does not write us off when we fail Him, but gives us another opportunity.

There are some important lessons to learn. First there is a warning to each one of us; David had been greatly used by God, but he still fell into deep sin. Then, after his sin, he did not simply shrug his shoulders with a bland comment “Oh, there’s nothing to worry about, God will forgive me...He’ll give me another chance”. If that had been his attitude, then he would never have known the forgiveness God was waiting to give. No! David knew he had sinned, and that his sin was a disgrace to the profession he made as a man of God, and he repented of his sin. That is exactly the way we must come, if we are to know God’s forgiveness and renewal. The Word of God is clear “If we confess our sin God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Will you come back to God like that? He will not turn you away. You may be a failure but God has not finished with you yet!

Chapter 6

A Terrible Rage

2 Kings 5

It was one of those strange stories that fiction is made of, but this time it really happened. Syria had come in from the North as they attacked the Israelites, and amongst the many prisoners taken, was a young Jewish girl. Thankfully she did not fall into wrong hands, as she could so easily have done, but she finished up as the maid-servant of the wife of Captain Naaman, a leading Syrian officer. He was an outstanding soldier, with a brilliant military record, but we will soon see that there was something drastically wrong in this man's life. His story is found in 2 Kings 5 and we will look at it under four headings: Realisation, Remedy, Reaction and Repentance.

Realisation – verse 1

Although Naaman was such an outstanding servant of his country, respected by all, from the king down to the soldiers under his command, the Bible account states his problem in five simple words “but he was a leper”. He realised that there was one major problem in his life, and he had to do something about it. At the time, leprosy was a dreaded skin disease, which many people thought to be a direct act of judgement from God. Captain Naaman, as a leading Syrian army officer, must have found it extremely hard to bear such an affliction and it would be well known that he would give anything to be rid of the dread disease. This is what brings us back to the little Jewish maid at the start of our study. It says a great deal for the way in which

she was treated, whilst in enemy hands, that as this young girl attended to the needs of Naaman's wife, she showed real concern for her master, and expressed this with the words "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy" (verse 3).

The interest of her mistress was instantly aroused, and in no time Naaman had an interview with the Syrian king. He proved most helpful, writing a personal letter of introduction to the King of Israel, requesting his aid. Captain Naaman duly arrived at the Israeli palace, complete with the letter, and a suitable present of gold, silver and expensive clothing. The outcome was not what Naaman expected however, for the king saw the approach as a military mission aimed at commencing hostilities between the two countries.

Thankfully, news of the visit and the king's reaction reached the ears of Elisha, the man of God, and he quickly sent a message to the king: "Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" (verse 8). Next we come to ...

The Remedy – Verse 10

As Naaman arrived at the prophet's house, Elisha sent a messenger to tell him to wash seven times in the River Jordan; his flesh would be restored and he would be cleansed. What an opportunity! What an easy remedy to take! Nothing complicated; no hard task to perform; no payment to be made; no formula to follow. It was just a simple instruction to follow "Wash and be clean". There is a sense in which this is a picture of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 John 1:9 we read "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness". One of the problems is that we sometimes try to make the Gospel too complicated. The Biblical way is by repentance of sin, with a genuine desire to

forsake that sin, then a simple faith in Christ who died for our sins upon the cross.

To return to the story... We can imagine Naaman being thrilled with the prospect of simply dipping in the local river seven times and being completely healed, but if so, our imagination has failed us, for next we will see ...

His Reaction – Verses 11 to 13

Naaman instantly flew into a rage. He used the two words which so many people use when faced with the simple truth of the Gospel: “I thought”. He thought the man of God would come out in impressive style, call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure him of his leprosy. Isaiah had to remind the people of his day that “God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways” (Isaiah 55:8).

Today, many people ‘think’ that they know how they can receive cleansing from sin and acceptance with God. God has determined the way, and it is the only way in which we can come. Thankfully Naaman had men around him who really cared. They were quick to point out to him that if he failed to take God’s remedy, he was refusing a wonderful opportunity. They challenged him “if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he tells you ‘wash and be cleansed?’” (verse 13). This excellent advice was followed by a genuine ..

Repentance – Verses 14 and 15

This word ‘repentance’ is an interesting one, which is often misunderstood. Basically it means ‘to change our mind for the better’. Here was a man who was faced with a glorious opportunity to obtain the one thing in life which he longed for more than anything else, cleansing from leprosy. All he had to do was dip seven times in the river, and because it seemed too easy,

he was prepared to pass it by. What a good thing it was that Naaman had real friends around him, who were prepared to tell him how foolishly he was reacting to Elisha's instructions, for he repented, 'changed his mind for the better', dipped in the Jordan seven times, and was instantly healed of his leprosy. The man who had failed to obey God was not finished; he was given another opportunity, and he took it.

How often people today react to the claims of Christ in a similar way. They refuse God's offer of salvation because they think it sounds 'too easy', they have the idea that God requires them to do their best to earn it, instead of simply receiving the cleansing which Christ has obtained for them on the cross. Have you thus far rejected God's offer of salvation, thinking it to be too simple. God is giving you another opportunity. Why do you not follow the good example of Naaman, and receive the cleansing and forgiveness which can be yours today?

It may be that you are a Christian, but you have failed to obey God in some matter which He has made clear to you. You may have failed but you are not finished yet. He is graciously giving you another chance to go along the pathway of obedience.

Perhaps you are a preacher of God's Word, and you are making the message so complicated that those to whom you minister are confused. May you return to the 'simple, plain truth of God's Word' and be a blessing to many, as the powerful Holy Spirit applies it to their lives. Then, like Naaman, give God the glory!

Failed but not Finished

AK17

EXAM 3

[USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE](#)

Chapters 5-6

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. At the time that David fell into sin with Bathsheba, his army was being led by
 - a. Nathan
 - b. Abner
 - c. Joab
2. According to 1 John 1:9, the key response to our sin should be
 - a. confession
 - b. restitution
 - c. sorrow
3. 2 Kings chapter 5 tells us that Naaman was
 - a. a great man in the sight of his master
 - b. a brutal tyrant
 - c. a clever politician
4. Which prophet teaches us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts?
 - a. Elisha
 - b. Isaiah
 - c. Elijah
5. Repentance means to
 - a. be very sorry for wrong behaviour
 - b. change our minds for the better
 - c. recognise that God has forgiven me
6. Nathan told David that he was the one whom God had chosen to build the Temple.
7. David was guilty of adultery, lying and murder.
8. The way in which God blessed Solomon demonstrates the character of God's forgiveness.
9. Abana and Pharpar were rivers in Damascus.
10. Human good works can play a part in our salvation.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

If we know that we may face a tempting situation, what is the best course of action?

Chapter 7

Prayer Changes Things

2 Kings 18-20

He was only twenty-five years of age when he took Israel's throne, and he reigned for twenty-nine years.

His name, Hezekiah, means 'strengthened by Jehovah' or 'God is my strength'. What a wonderful start to give any boy, as he sets out in life. Names meant something in those days, and the parents must have been keen to see their son grow up to love and serve God, and to experience His power and strength day by day. The story of Hezekiah is found in 2 Kings chapters 18-20, and 2 Chronicles chapters 29-32. We will see that this king was Powerful and Prayerful, but sadly there came a time in his life when he was also Proud; a time when he failed, but thank God, he was not finished.

These studies have looked at many different Bible characters, in all kinds of circumstances and situations, yet they all have two things in common. In the first place they failed, but then in every instance they were not finished. Because they came back to God in the right way, He took them up again, and used them in His service. Failure may seem to spell disaster at the time, but we have a gracious and forgiving God, who is always waiting to receive us back, and give us the power to live for Him once again. We will now consider the life of King Hezekiah and see what lessons we can learn from him under the three headings: Powerful, Prayerful and Proud. First he was ...

Powerful - 2 Chronicles 29,30

At the start of his reign he must have had all kinds of plans; things he would like to do for the good of his people, Israel. He had acted as vice-regent to his father, King Ahaz, for 14 years, and he must have longed for the opportunity to improve their lot. Now the time had come. How would he commence his reign? Would all the good plans be forgotten? Would he simply have an easy life, living off the income provided for him, without doing anything positive to improve the conditions in which the people lived? Time alone would tell.

In the very first month of his reign, Hezekiah set to work to reform the nation's religious ways. He followed this up by gathering the priests together and commanding them to set themselves apart for God's service. He reminded them that they had been specially chosen to perform this important task for God. The priests responded magnificently, which proved Hezekiah's powerful influence. Temple worship was fully restored, and once again God's people were worshipping Him in the way He had planned. Hezekiah even sent letters to all the people of Israel and Judah, inviting them to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover feast. 2 Chronicles chapter 30 tells of the wonderful way in which the people responded, and there was obviously a time of great rejoicing. Hezekiah had made a marvellous start to his reign.

Not only was this new king powerful in leading his people back to God, but he was also practical in the way he stood up to the Assyrian king, refusing to surrender to him. He defeated the Philistines too, (2Kings18:8) and his name was beginning to be well known throughout the area. In addition to leading the people back to true worship, and in military action against their enemies, he also proved to his people that he was ...

Prayerful

We read in 2 Chronicles 30:18-20 that Hezekiah prayed for the people, asking God to pardon them, and the Lord heard him, and healed them. He seems to have become a man of real prayer, walking with the Lord and knowing His guidance in the affairs of state. When the Assyrians were preparing to attack Jerusalem, they sent a message to Hezekiah telling him that if he depended on his god to deliver him, he would live to regret it. Hezekiah did what we should all do in such circumstances, he spread the letter out before the Lord and committed the whole matter to Him in prayer (Isaiah 37:14-20). He gave God glory for His greatness and then asked Him to help them in their hour of need. He then stood up before his people and told them “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. He has only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chron. 32:7). Surely such a king would enjoy a long and successful reign; nothing could go wrong! Perhaps he thought that, too, and once we think in that way, we are heading for trouble. From trusting in the Lord, Hezekiah started to show that the failure which has overtaken so many of God’s people down through the years was not far away, and we next see that he was

...

Proud - 2 Kings 20:12-18

Although God graciously delivered the nation of Israel from defeat and destruction which seemed certain to come at the hands of the Assyrians, Hezekiah took the glory for himself. Sadly this has been the downfall of many men and women of God. Satan was cast out of heaven because of his pride, and he is the one who cleverly leads God’s people along the same path. Humility is the way of blessing, and pride is the road that takes us away from God. Perhaps you have been doing a work for God, and have seen His blessing in your life. You have rejoiced in the way that God has been using you, as you have witnessed for

Him. Like King Hezekiah, you have seen God's hand at work in quite remarkable ways, and at first you were quite ready to give God the glory. As time passed, however, and friends began to praise you for the way you are using your gifts, your head was turned away from God toward yourself. Now, you have lost the blessing; you have no keen sense of God's presence, and you feel a total failure. With the hymn-writer, you cry out:

Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord,
Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus in His Word.
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed, How sweet their memory still,
But they have left an aching void, The world can never fill.

You just feel as though your life of work and witness for God is over... you are finished. Well, I have good news for you! The Bible tells us that "Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart... therefore the Lord's wrath did not come upon them" (2 Chron.32:26). God gave him another fifteen years in which to serve Him, and prove his gratitude for God's love and mercy. He had failed, but he was not finished! And that is the wonderful news for each of us today! You may have failed God; you may have let your Lord down badly...and who has not? But He has not finished with you yet. If you and I are prepared to come back to Him in repentance and faith, He will take us up and use us again, in His service and for His glory.

Chapter 8

A Second Chance

Jonah 1 and 2

Jonah is yet another Bible character who failed, but was not finished. This study is centred on one of the best known events in the Bible, but every time we hear about it there is a fresh call for us to examine our hearts to see if we, too, are guilty of disobeying God. The story is told in the book bearing his name and we will look at it under four main headings: The Commission, The Confusion, The Confession and The Conversion.

The Commission – Jonah 1:1,2

It is very interesting to note that Jonah's earlier prophecy in 2 Kings 14:25, was fulfilled to the letter. So here was a prophet who had already been used by God to deliver His word, and he had done so faithfully and effectively. Now, having given him a simple duty, God was going to entrust a major task to the prophet from Galilee. This was his big opportunity to be used by God in a dramatic way. It was a clear commission from the Lord, Who told His servant to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because of its wickedness.

What a wonderful call from God for a budding young preacher. Surely he would be honoured to be selected by God for such a mission. But no, for verse 3 of chapter 1 tells us that Jonah ran away from the Lord, and headed for Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction. When he arrived at the port of Joppa he even found a ship which was preparing to sail to his desired

destination. Everything was working out as he wanted. So we see the man of God, commissioned to do a task for His Master, going in the opposite direction, with all the circumstances slotting into place. Perhaps he was even prepared to believe that God was guiding him.

There is a clear lesson here for us in our day. However favourable our circumstances may appear to be, they are not being ordered by God if we are disobeying Him. There is only one course which pleases the Lord, and that is obedience. Jonah was soon to learn his lesson. For next we see ...

The Confusion – Jonah 1:4-7

One thing is certain, God was in control of the situation, for we read “The Lord sent a great wind... and a violent storm arose”. Here is an ordinary ship, on an ordinary voyage, with an ordinary cargo, but carrying an extraordinary passenger! God had planned for that passenger to go to Nineveh, not Tarshish, and to Nineveh he would go!

The storm was so violent that even the seasoned sailors were afraid, for as they jettisoned the cargo it made no difference. They all seemed to be heading for a watery grave. Following the usual practice they drew lots to find out who was responsible for the calamity, and the lot naturally fell on Jonah. The truth was out, and we next come to ...

The Confession – Jonah 1:8-10

It is to Jonah’s credit that he did not hide the truth from the crew, but made a clean breast of it, telling them of his refusal to obey the word of the Lord. When he also told them that his God was the Maker of heaven and earth, they were terrified. They asked him in no uncertain terms why he had disobeyed the direct command of such a God.

There really was no answer to such a question, and with a remarkable show of honesty and courage, Jonah told the sailors that the only way to still the storm was for them to throw him into the sea. His repentance was honest and complete: “I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you” (verse 12).

The man who had failed was beginning to take the road back to recovery. He had failed, but God had not finished with him yet! Are you someone who has served God faithfully, proclaiming God’s Word to all who will listen. You have lived in a close relationship with the Lord, and even experienced His blessing upon your ministry for Him, but now you are walking in disobedience. You have pitted your stubborn will against the plan and purpose of God for your life; perhaps sin has blunted your witness, or you have failed to make time for daily prayer and Bible reading in order to discover what God wants you to do for Him. Well, take a leaf out of Jonah’s book today, and begin with honesty and courage. Go back to the point in your life where you failed the Lord and seek His forgiveness, then start all over again. Jonah had failed God, but He had not finished with him, and as the sailors reluctantly threw the prophet into the sea, God prepared a great fish to carry him back to land. Finally we see ...

The Conversion – Jonah 2:1-10

There are three separate and distinct conversion stories in the book of Jonah.

First of all we see the conversion of the sailors through the witness of the disobedient prophet. Here is Jonah, running away from God, yet prepared to witness faithfully to foreign sailors; even risking his life to do so. And the Bible record is so powerful: “The men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him” (Jonah 1:16).

Secondly, God was willing to give Jonah another opportunity, a second chance, so He prepared a great fish to swallow him, and the prophet was inside the fish for three days and nights. What an incredible experience; particularly when he must have realised that it was his disobedience that had landed him in such peril. Three days and nights to go over his life again! Three days and nights to recognise his foolishness in disobeying God; and during this time he prayed to God. What a prayer it was. As he recounts it he says: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me” (Jonah 2:2), and finally he came to the position of saying to God “What I have vowed I will make good”. So, first of all the sailors were converted, now the prophet, himself, is converted; he has ‘turned around from going his way to going God’s way’. He was now ready to do God’s will. Although he had failed, God had not finished with him, and the reluctant prophet was now willing to go to the place where God had wanted him to go in the first place.

Then thirdly, we see the conversion of the great city of Nineveh! Perhaps the experience of being inside the fish had given Jonah’s mission to Nineveh a fresh urgency, for when he eventually reached that great city, his message was used by God to the conversion of thousands of men and women, from “the greatest to the least”, even though Jonah’s attitude was wrong!

The story of Jonah offers encouragement to any who may have failed God in any way. Despite Jonah’s disobedience, God was prepared to take him up and use him again; and He will do the same for you. We must be honest and open before God! If you and I will come to Him in that spirit, even if we have failed Him badly, He will not have finished with us yet.

Failed but not Finished

AK17

EXAM 4

USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE

Chapters 7-8

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. The name Hezekiah means
 - a. the God who sees
 - b. God is my strength
 - c. God is my light
2. In 2 Chronicles Chapter 30, Hezekiah prayed for the people asking God for
 - a. riches
 - b. military success
 - c. pardon
3. Jonah was a prophet of God from
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Galilee
 - c. Joppa
4. Which statement is not true of Nineveh?
 - a. It was less wicked than other cities
 - b. It was a very large city
 - c. It was given 40 days' notice of impending judgement
5. Which of the following statements is true of the sailors?
 - a. They were spiritually untouched by Jonah's actions
 - b. They were more than happy to throw Jonah overboard to save themselves
 - c. They were radically converted through Jonah's actions
6. King Hezekiah invited the whole nation to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.
7. 'Pride comes before a fall' is a proverb that accurately describes the life of Hezekiah.
8. After defeating the Assyrians, Hezekiah gave God the glory for the victory.
9. Drawing lots is superstitious nonsense.
10. Jonah praised God when he saw the success of his preaching in Nineveh.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In terms of God's blessing, what effect does obeying Him with a wrong attitude have?

Chapter 9

Burdens or Blessings?

Matthew 11:28-30

This study is a little different from the previous ones but the message is the same ... you may have failed but God has not finished with you yet! The focus is on the last three verses of Matthew chapter eleven. These are the words of Jesus to you; let them sink deep into your mind and heart: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light". We will consider them under three headings: Problems, Promises and Partnership.

Problems

As the Lord Jesus Christ spoke these powerful words He knew that there were many problems deep in the hearts of the people who were listening to Him. There were men and women all around Him who had failed! Some had tried their best to please God, but repeatedly they had discovered that they did not have the strength to resist the temptations which were pressing in upon them. No doubt there were some who had made a personal commitment, and seemed to go on well for a little while, then they had fallen into disobedience and sin. There were many who were longing to enjoy a better quality of life, but each time they turned over a new leaf they did not have the inner power to keep it up. All around Jesus that day there were people with problems.

Even today the scene has not changed; all around are men and women and young people whose hearts are heavy. You, too, may have problems and burdens weighing you down, and there does not seem to be anything you can do about it. You may have made a personal commitment to Christ, but your Christian life has been one of failure and disappointment.

You feel as though each day is a struggle and you do not know which way to turn. Perhaps you have a guilty conscience; many of your friends think that you are going on with God, but in your heart you know the truth. There is no peace and joy in your life because of sin. Perhaps your sin has to do with sexual desires which you cannot control, or strong drink which is getting the better of you. Perhaps you are playing with harmful drugs which you know should not form part of your behaviour; maybe it is pornography which is fouling your mind, or it may be a temper you cannot control. For some of you it is marital strife which makes you feel a complete hypocrite in view of your profession as a Christian. For others, it is a deep hatred against someone who has done you harm in your past, and you just do not feel able to forgive them.

Whatever it is that is pressing in upon your heart and mind, it is a problem too big for you to handle; a burden too heavy for you to bear. The good news is that you may have failed, but you are not finished! The same Lord Jesus Christ who looked into the faces of all the people around Him that day, is the Son of God, and He looks into our faces, and indeed right into our hearts, today. He knows the problems we are facing and the burdens we are bearing even better than we know them ourselves, and He comes to us with His glorious ...

Promises

Consider again Jesus' words: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" and remember

that the One who says these words is God's Son, with all the power and authority of heaven at His command. There is no-one whose problem is too great for Him to solve, no-one who is beyond His love, no-one whose burden is too heavy for Him to lift. Perhaps your heart cries out with the hymn-writer:

My Saviour You have promised rest,
O give it then to me,
The rest of ceasing from myself,
to find my all in Thee.

What is it that Christ is promising to the burdened heart in the verse we are considering? Rest! That is a peace of heart and mind which will give us calm in the midst of storm, a quiet and inner strength in the face of oppression and persecution, and the sure knowledge of His Presence with us, just when we need Him the most!

Does all this sound too good to be true? Are there any conditions attached to this wonderful promise? The answer is 'Yes'. The condition is that we must 'Come to Him'. That sounds very easy, but we must not forget that the Bible message is clear; when we come to Christ we must come in repentance and faith. There must be a genuine desire on our part to turn from our sin and failure. The words of the Apostle Peter are as true now as when they were first spoken: "Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Confession of sin involves repentance; a real hatred of our sin and a determination to forsake it. If we come to Him in that state of heart and mind, then the promise is for us! He will forgive, He will purify and He will lift our burden; He will give us rest.

Perhaps you are not a Christian; you have never made that all-important first step of confession of sin, repentance and faith.

Well, the promise is for you, too. In John 6:37 the Lord Jesus Himself said: “Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away”. There is wonderful acceptance with Him. There may be others who are saying “Well, I’m only too ready to come, but I could never ‘keep it up’. I would fall to the first temptation”!

Thank God, these verses have a message that will meet this problem, too, for finally we will look at ...

Partnership

The last part of this text is very important: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me”. The picture is of the Eastern oxen, yoked to each other so that they can work together. Once we have been cleansed from our sin, Jesus is inviting us to be yoked with Him in a wonderful partnership. He is the One who has lived down here, facing temptation, opposition and finally death upon a cross. He knows our difficulties, sympathises with us in our problems and is able to share our disappointments. He knows what it is like to be tired, hungry and homeless. He has experienced the heartache of seeing His own family turn against Him. Even His disciples, His close friends, all forsook Him and fled, just when He needed them the most! You can depend upon the Lord Jesus, but He does look for our trust and obedience.

Will you come to Him today, and experience His rest? Will you take His yoke of Partnership and walk in step with Him? Will you know His Friendship every day, as you trust Him to do what He has promised? May God bless you richly.

Chapter 10

Not Fit For the Scrapheap

Matthew 12:20

“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory.”

It may be that at this moment, you are feeling a failure. You have made a mess of your marriage, or being a parent has just not worked out. Your job has proved too much for you, or you are always falling out with your friends, and in your heart of hearts you know it is your fault. You try not to think about it too much, but you just cannot help wondering if there is any future in life at all; what hope is there for a man or woman who cannot handle a simple relationship! In fact, as you think about it, everyone seems to have written you off! Well there is One who has not! God has not written you off! This course is entitled ‘Failed but not Finished’, but it could just as well be called ‘The God Who has not written you off’! Chapter 1 reminded us of the potter who took the marred pot off the wheel, crumbled the clay into a ball, and started all over again, making a brand new pot with wonderful care and skill, and of The Great Potter of the Lives of Men and Women Who is still doing it!

‘The Great Potter’ is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Perfect Man who ever lived. And, of course, He is God as well as Man! In Matthew 12:20 He says that He “will not break a bruised reed, nor put out a smoking flax”. What does it mean? We will look at it under two headings: No Discarding and No Despising.

No Discarding

The picture is of the Eastern boy or man cutting a strong, but hollow reed from the water's edge, shaping it and cutting it in just the right way, so that when the owner puts it to his lips it plays a clear and melodious tune. He takes it with him everywhere, he plays his tunes as he watches his sheep, or as he fishes at the water's edge. As he walks over the fields and hills, the little pipe is his constant companion; people passing by are quite amazed at the lovely tunes he gets out of a little reed. He has become quite attached to it.

Then it happens... with no warning... it was by his side as he lay on the grassy slope, in the warm afternoon sun, and he just put out his hand. It was quite a casual movement, one which he could have done a hundred times without any accident. This time it was different. His hand rested heavily on the little flute, and when he picked it up, it was bruised. It looked quite forlorn... it was useless. He tried to blow through it, but nothing happened, there was no sound, no tune, no melody. "Now", says Jesus, in effect; "I know that in normal life the man or the boy will just throw it away and cut another one. This one is only fit for the scrapheap. No-one can do anything with a bruised reed, they just get rid of it. Well, I am not going to do that. I am going to take that reed in my powerful, yet gentle hand, and I am going to make it again. I am going to do what others would not do; give it another chance".

As Jesus now looks at you with all your mistakes and problems, your failures and difficulties, your sins and short-comings, He says "I am not throwing you on the scrapheap of life; I will take you into My powerful hands, and with love and care I will make you again. Your life will play sweet music for My glory. Will you hand yourself over to Me?" And that is not all, for as well as 'No Discarding', there is also ...

No Despising

The next illustration is similar, but there are differences. It is a picture of the old oil lamp, so familiar in Bible times, as it lights up the humble cottage. Suddenly the light flickers, splutters, and then it smokes! And it smells. There is only one reasonable thing to do; that is, put it out, throw the wick away and fit a new one. But Jesus says “the smouldering wick I will not snuff out.” He will trim it, care for it, and get it going again so that it will give light to the darkened room.

Do you feel that the light of your life is just like that spluttering, smoking wick? It is not giving light and comfort to those around you. Quite the opposite, you feel that you are just a nuisance, and people would be glad to see the back of you. Christ says that He is not in the business of despising those who have made a mess of their lives. He wants to take you with your smouldering wick, trim it, encourage it into a flame, fill you with the oil of His Holy Spirit and make you really useful for Him. How is He able to do that and does He really want to?

The Bible answers just those questions, and many more like them. Paul talks about “the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20) and he wrote to the Philippian Christians to tell them “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Phil 2:13). Are we prepared to put ourselves into the hands of the One who is able to ‘give another chance’; the One who has the power to fulfil every promise He makes? Do not pass up this opportunity, bring your broken reed to Him for repair, so that once again you can play a tune which will bring pleasure and joy to the people around you, and glory to the God who made you and saved you. Bring your smouldering lamp to the One who is willing and able to trim the wick, fill the bowl

with the fullness of His Holy Spirit, and make you a bright light for Him.

Why be satisfied with second best, when God can do so much more in your life? He told all of us who claim to know Him personally that we are to be “lights in the world” (Phil 2:15 NKJV). He is waiting for you to turn to Him in your need, and allow Him to re-make your life, so that you can shine brightly for Him, Who is “the Light of the world” (John 8:12).

Chapter 11

Care For My Sheep

John 21:15-19

All the Bible characters we have studied so far failed in some way but they were not finished! God tenderly picked them up, cleaned them up, and set them up. And many of them were able to serve God in even greater ways than before they failed.

These verses look at Peter, a really well known disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was used by God in special and powerful ways...but that was after he had failed. His story is found in three passages in the Gospels, Mark 14:27-31 and 66-72, Luke 22:54-62 and in John 21:15-17 which we will consider under the headings: The Claim, The Calamity and The Commission.

The Claim – Mark 14:27-31

Jesus knew that ‘His hour had come’, and the shadow of the cross was already falling upon His pathway.

The religious leaders had laid their plans for His crucifixion, and in a matter of hours He would be brutally executed, a totally innocent Man, dying as a sacrifice for sin. He was, of course, God in human form, but He was also a real man, who would experience the suffering in all its horror, “tasting death for every man”, as the writer to the Hebrews put it so graphically. If ever there was a time when He needed the support of His friends it was now. As He began to unfold a little of the coming events to His disciples, He told them that they would all fall away because

of Him. Peter was quick to respond, claiming that he would never fail Christ “Even if all fall away, I will not... even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You” - and he meant it! It is very likely that Jesus looked at him very tenderly, as He told him “today... before the cock crows twice, you will disown Me three times” .

It may be that you can recall the time when you told the Lord you were willing to do anything, go anywhere, for Him. And you, too, meant it. In those days you would do anything for Christ, you would go anywhere He directed. Well, you can understand how Peter felt, as Jesus told him that whilst he might mean it, he did not have the strength to fulfil it, which leads us on to our second point ...

The Calamity – Mark 14:66-72

It was the worst day of Peter’s life. He had seen His Lord and Master violently arrested. He had seen Him arraigned before a mock court, condemned as worthy of death, and then subjected to brutal treatment which no human being should ever have to endure. Peter was devastated; he did not know which way to turn or what action to take.

And it was just at that moment in his life, a really low point, when the worst temptation hit him. It started when he was warming his hands by the fire as Jesus was being blindfolded and struck by the guards. And it was a servant girl who caught him out. She looked at him and said “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus” (verse 67). Before he knew what he was saying his answer was out “I don’t know what you are talking about” (verse 68). Oh, if we could only recall words... if we could wipe the slate clean. Who has not at some time uttered words which they have wished a thousand times had never been said? Well, Peter was no exception.

The trouble was, that he had the opportunity to ‘stand up for Jesus’ twice more as others around that little fire challenged him, but each time he denied his Lord. Finally, in order to make the point crystal clear “He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them “I do not know this man you are talking about”” (verse 71). What a calamity, to deny his Lord with oaths and curses, just when Jesus needed him the most!

Then it happened! “The cock crowed a second time and Peter remembered...” (verse 72). Just put yourself in Peter’s shoes for a moment and think how he must have felt. He had failed his best friend, and after all the claims he had made about standing by Him. Life was finished; he would never lift up his head again! The gospel writer concludes with the very telling words “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered...And he went outside and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). And this was the big fisherman! The man who had said he would die for Jesus fell at the first hurdle, as a servant girl accused him of being a friend of the Master! Life could never be the same again ... he was finished! But no! Our last point is...

The Commission – John 21:15-17

A few days have passed since the sad events we have been recalling. Jesus has risen in power from the grave and has appeared to the disciples on several occasions. Peter has actually been present, although still feeling very uncomfortable; his position as one of the leaders of the little group seemed very uncertain.

He was not quite sure of his relationship with the Lord. Oh, the Lord smiled at him, included him in the conversation and never referred to his failure, but the thought was always there. Could he ever serve Jesus again, as he really desired. Surely the big cloud of his failure would for ever hang over him! Then, in

wonderful grace and mercy, Jesus had a special, private meeting with him. A number of them had fished overnight and then breakfasted with Jesus on the beach. Notice that Jesus did not question Peter until he had eaten. Perhaps that is a lesson we need to learn!

Then, when the disciple who had failed his Master was comfortable, Jesus asked him three times if he loved him. Three times Peter had denied Him, and three times He gave Peter the opportunity of declaring his love for Him. The first time he asked Peter “Do you love Me more than these?”. He may have been referring to the fishing boats and nets; in other words are you prepared to give up your secular job in order to work for me? It is more likely that he was gently reminding Peter that he had said that if all the other disciples let Jesus down, he would not, and he was now asking ‘Do you love me more than the other disciples?’. Peter responded by telling Jesus that He knew he loved Him. On each occasion, there was a gracious commission to shepherd His lambs and His sheep. There was work for Peter to do! He had failed but he was not finished!

If you have failed your Master, it is not the end of the road. Just as the Lord took Peter up and used Him again, even more powerfully in His service, so He can do the same for you. Come back to Him in repentance and faith, and He will restore you and use you for His glory!

Failed but not Finished

AK17

EXAM 5

[USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE](#)

Chapters 9-11

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. The promise of rest that Jesus gives to those who come to Him involves
 - a. a quiet and peaceful life
 - b. supernatural strength so we never grow weary
 - c. peace of heart and mind
2. The promise in Act 3:19
 - a. is as true now as when it was first spoken
 - b. was only for the Jews who had disowned Jesus
 - c. has no condition attached to it
3. The 'oil' to give power to our lives represents
 - a. prayer
 - b. the Holy Spirit
 - c. Bible study
4. Peter's initial response to denying Jesus was
 - a. remorse
 - b. restoration
 - c. restitution
5. John's Gospel describes the restored Peter as a
 - a. fisher of men
 - b. shepherd of sheep
 - c. sower of the gospel seed

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. The promise of Matthew 11:30 is for complete spiritual freedom.
7. The usual thing to do with a bruised reed is to throw it away.
8. When we act as a light to the world we are imitating Jesus.
9. Matthew is the only gospel writer who does not record Peter's restoration.
10. Peter had not spent any time with Jesus before their special, private meeting.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What does it mean to be 'given rest' by Jesus when we come to Him?

Chapter 12

Make Me Your Servant

Luke 15:11-24

There are very few stories as relevant to the day in which we live as the one told by Jesus, and recorded in the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel. It is often known as the story of the Prodigal Son. It touches the hearts of all but the hardest, and challenges all but the most insensitive. It is the all too familiar tale of the boy who left home to make his mark in the big wide world, and ended up homeless and friendless. We will look at it under three headings: Wanting, Wondering and Welcoming.

Wanting – Luke 15:11-13

The father is a well-to-do farmer and land-owner, with two sons and a good business. At first everything seems to be going well, until the younger son has itchy feet, longing for the excitement of big city life. As is so often the case, his whole life consisted of two words 'Give me'. As parents we have a great responsibility towards our children; not only to love them and care for them, but to help them acquire a true sense of values. Giving them what they want is not always the best course of action. It often encourages them along a path of selfish indulgence. Whether this father had given in to his younger son too easily in the past we are not told, but as he came of age his one desire was to have everything that was coming to him and enjoy the good time life. As he pressed his father for his share, perhaps he gave in to his demands too readily. Soon he had divided his fortune between the two boys, and the younger one left home for the

bright lights of the city. He had a great time! Friends were plentiful as long as the money held out. He had no shortage of company while he bought this popularity with his father's hard earned money. As Jesus told the story He said that the younger son "squandered his wealth in wild living". It does not need much imagination to picture the wine, women and song that made up his life. But as is so often the case, when the money ran out so did his friends, and we soon see him ...

Wondering – Luke 15:14-20

What went wrong? Where did he slip up? Why did he not stay at home with all the love, support and security that was always there? Well might he wonder, for he had a father who loved him, and a comfortable home where he need never be in real want. Whatever made him leave? These are the kind of questions that young people often ask, as they sink ever lower in the society which has rejected them. And, as hunger gripped this young man, with no money for food and no friends for support he did not know which way to turn.

He found work - but what work! It was feeding pigs! The religion of his father and family despised such creatures and looked upon them as unclean animals. How could he stoop that low? The answer is that he was so hungry he would even have eaten the pig-swill. What a failure he was!

Just how long this went on for is not told, but as he sat by the pigs, wondering why they had food to eat and he did not, the misery of the whole situation struck him with full force. Here he was, the son of a wealthy farmer, who had food enough and to spare back home, sitting by the pigs of a stranger, making sure that they were well fed, whilst he was starving to death. It just did not make sense. Slowly but surely he came to his senses and a plan began to form in his mind. At last he plucked up

courage and said “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your servants” (verses 18-19).

And so we see the young man, in his dirty and ragged clothes, making his way back to his father, truly repentant and ready to take the lowly place. Perhaps you are far away from home and your family do not know where you are or how to get in touch with you. Why do you not make the first move and make it now? You know they love you, despite all the rows and arguments. This man had failed but he was not finished and the next section is ...

Welcoming – Luke 15:20

As Jesus continued to tell the story, it took a beautiful turn, for He said “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

What a brilliant development to the story, as the loving, caring father threw his arms around the boy who had taken his share of the family fortune and had spent it in wild living. This is a lovely picture of a God who really cares; a God who gave His Son to recover men and women from their sinful lives. If there is genuine repentance He, too, will give us a warm and loving welcome. You may have wanted to return to God for a long time. You feel as though you have sunk to the same level as this young man. If God is speaking to you, then He has a purpose in it. You may have failed but God has not finished with you yet. Come back to Him now in repentance and faith, asking for His forgiveness and cleansing.

Then make sure you tell someone what you have done. And if there are family and friends who are worrying about you, why

not make contact, and share with them the good news of your return to God ?

It was very obvious that the prodigal son was 'away' from his father but it is also possible that men and women whom others see as those who are 'walking with the Lord' are also away from their Father. They are just like the young man in our story; they are away from God. It may be that you are seen as a respectable Christian man or woman, but you know the truth... and God knows! Why do you not return to Him today in genuine repentance? You will find Him waiting, with wide open arms! Then humbly take your rightful place again amongst His people.

Chapter 13

Not Fit to Serve God!

Acts 15:36 - 39

In the last of these studies on 'Failed but not Finished' we are looking at a keen Christian worker who failed, and there is something very sad about such a worker who does not go on with God. There are many men and women who have faithfully prayed and worked to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and His saving work upon the cross, but who are no longer walking with the Lord because of failure in their lives. This should never be! The God who saved them and kept them for so many years, and in some cases used them very powerfully in His service, does not want them to be thrown on the world's scrapheap.

We have already looked at some people in the Bible who passed through an experience like this, but came out of the long tunnel of failure and disappointment, and were used of God once again for His glory. Today's character is one of the lesser known disciples of Jesus, and you may well identify with him. You may be thinking that you have never really done great things for God, but you can remember a time when you taught boys and girls in a Sunday School class, or stood up in front of a few people to witness for Jesus Christ. But that was in the past; you think those days have gone for ever! Think again, because God may well be speaking to you! The young man we are looking at is named John Mark, and we will consider him under four simple headings: His Mother, His Mission, His Mistake and His Ministry.

His Mother

There is a beautiful tradition, that seems to have a fairly good foundation, that John Mark's mother's house was where Jesus and His disciples regularly met when in Jerusalem. It was here that they held the Last Supper. If this is so, then this young man probably sat and listened spell-bound as the Lord Jesus taught those who were gathered in the house. Certain it is, that it was in this house the early church had gathered for prayer when Peter was imprisoned by King Herod (Acts 12:12). As they prayed, Peter was released in a most remarkable way, and this probably made a deep impression upon the young man. It seems as though John Mark had a mother who loved the Lord, and this is a tremendous privilege. Next we see ...

His Mission – Acts 13:1-5

What a thrill it was for the young man to be hand-picked to accompany his uncle Barnabas and the Apostle Paul as they set out on their first missionary journey. There is a lovely touch by the writer Dr. Luke, as he adds "John was with them as their helper". No doubt he had to perform the menial tasks, but he was ministering to two men of God. He was playing a small but important part in spreading the good news about Jesus Christ amongst people who really needed the message. He accompanied the apostles on the boat to Cyprus. There he witnessed the stirring events involving the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus, resulting in the conversion of the pro-consul, Sergius Paulus. This was followed by a further boat trip to Perga in Pamphylia where we read of ...

His Mistake – Acts 13:13

The Bible record tells us "John left them to return to Jerusalem". Was the young man home-sick? Did he tire of the constant experience of 'living out of a suitcase' after the ease and convenience of home-comforts? Did he feel that his task was relatively unimportant? We are not told, and we do not know,

but we do know that he left the little group who were eagerly preaching the good Word of God. And we are left in no doubt as to what the Apostle Paul thought about his conduct.

When they were setting out on their second missionary journey sometime later, Barnabas wanted to take his young nephew with them again, but we read “Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work” (Acts 15:37). The young man had proved a great disappointment to Paul, and he considered him to be a failure... someone who could not be trusted a second time. He had failed and it looks as if the great Apostle Paul was not willing to give him another chance. How did John Mark feel about that? He probably thought that God had written him off. There could not possibly be another chance for him.

Perhaps you feel that you are a failure; you know you have let God’s people down; you feel as though you have let God down. You can recall all the things you have failed to do for God; you think of all the wrong things you have done. You just feel a total failure. Well, read on as the story unfolds! In a wonderfully encouraging way, we read that Mark’s uncle, Barnabas, was prepared to trust him again and taking the young man with him, he set sail for Cyprus once more. (Acts 15:39)

If that was the end of the story we would be left wondering if Barnabas should have given him that second opportunity after the way in which he had deserted them, and returned to his home in Jerusalem. We would have reasoned that Barnabas took him only because he was his uncle, and after all blood is thicker than water. We would probably have felt that Paul must have known best, and no doubt Barnabas would be let down once again. Thankfully that is not how the story ends, for finally, many years later, we read of ...

His Ministry – 2 Timothy 4:6-11

Paul is in prison, and is writing to his friend, Timothy. He fully expects that the time of his execution is near.

He writes “the time has come for my departure”; then he asks Timothy to come to him quickly, before it is too late. He says “only Luke is with me”. The Apostle Paul is obviously a lonely man; one who has served His Lord conscientiously and faithfully for many years, and now awaits the horror of being executed for his faith. He has only the doctor, Luke, as a companion, and he is longing for further Christian fellowship and friendship. He wants to see his good friend, Timothy, once more before he leaves this earth.

And who is the other man that he wants with him? Is it Silas, or Barnabas, who had shared his travels? Or perhaps Titus, who could minister the Word of God so effectively? No, it is none of these! It is young John Mark, the man who had forsaken him in Pamphylia, the companion who had let him down, the very man who had failed God. He continues to write “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry”.

What an encouragement that word is for us! John Mark, the young man who gave up in his work for God may have failed but he was not finished. God had further work for him to do. Although not one of the best known disciples, he was chosen to write one of the gospels, the gospel of Mark, a part of the Word of God with which we are familiar today.

If you have failed God in the past, He is willing to forgive. He is calling you back to Himself. Return to Him in repentance and faith knowing that He has further work for you to do. God bless you and use you in His service.

Failed but not Finished

AK17

EXAM 6

[USE EXAM FORM B ON THE WEBSITE](#)

Chapters 12-13

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Giving our children what they want is likely to lead to
 - a. a contented family life
 - b. selfish indulgence
 - c. a sense of personal achievement
2. Which of the following is untrue about the prodigal son?
 - a. He had no money for food
 - b. He had no friends for support
 - c. He had no home to turn to
3. How did the father first show his love for his wayward son?
 - a. He kissed him
 - b. He threw his arms around him
 - c. He ran to meet him
4. John Mark had left Paul and Barnabas when they were in
 - a. Pamphylia
 - b. Cilia
 - c. Cyprus
5. Towards the end of his life, who did Paul have with him in prison?
 - a. Timothy
 - b. Mark
 - c. Luke
6. Feeding pigs was offensive to Jews as they were viewed as unclean animals.
7. It is not possible for those who appear to be walking with the Lord to be away from God.
8. It is certain that John Mark's mother's house was where the Last Supper was held.
9. The fact that Paul wrote Mark off is proof that God had also written him off.
10. Paul viewed Mark as helpful to him in his ministry.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What kinds of behaviour can limit God's ability to use us?