

**THE CREATURES  
AS  
TEACHERS**  
*Job 12.7-8*

**by  
Jean Dougan**

**Everyday Publications Inc.**  
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# The Creatures as Teachers

Job 12.7-8

## Introduction

God in His wisdom has allowed man to share the earth with a multitude of creatures. At the beginning of creation He gave a definite command that man was to rule over the fish, the birds and every living creature, Genesis 1.28. So man has always felt superior to all these other creatures who live with us on this beautiful earth.

But man has much to learn from these creatures. All of them can teach us. God through Solomon even advised us to learn from the lowly ant, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise," Proverbs 6.6. Job said, "Ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. Or speak to the earth and let it teach you; and let the fish of the sea declare to you," Job 12. 7-8. Let us see some of the lessons God has recorded for us to learn from our fellow creatures.

# Animals



## Donkeys

Donkeys are mentioned over 70 times in the Bible. They were very useful animals and to own many was a sign of wealth, Judges 5.10; 10.4; 12.14; Job 1.3. They were used for riding, Exodus 4.20, carrying burdens, Genesis 45.23, plowing, and in mills, Isaiah 30.24. The Israeli were told not to yoke their donkey with an ox, Deuteronomy 22.10. These two animals walk at different speeds and it would cause discomfort to them to be yoked together.

The donkey is clever and cautious. It requires little food compared to the amount of work it does and it can work well into its old age (over 40 years). The donkey forms the main part of several stories of obedience.

## The Lord's Donkey

**Matthew 21. 1-9; Mark 11. 1-10; John 12. 12-16.**

The Lord Jesus owned nothing while He was here on earth. He had left all the riches and glories of heaven to come here as a Man, 2 Corinthians 8.9. But He did not replace His riches here.

**He had no home.** He said, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head," Matthew 8.20.

**He had no money.** One day the Pharisees came to Him with a question to set a trap for Him. It was tax time and that meant every Jew had to pay a tax to the hated Romans. No one likes taxes but the Jews were especially annoyed at paying it to their captors. They wanted to get out of paying but blame someone else. So they approached the Lord. If He said, "Pay it!" they would say He was not a real Jew. If He said, "Don't pay it!" they would be glad but would tell the Romans what He said.

So they asked Him, "Shall we pay this poll-tax to Caesar or not?" Jesus knew their deceitful hearts and He had an answer for them. But first He wanted to ask them a question about a coin. So He

said, "Show Me the coin used to pay the poll-tax." **He did not have one of His own.** Someone brought Him a coin and He said, "Whose likeness is this?" They answered "Caesar's!" "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," said the Lord. Even the Pharisees were impressed at His wisdom and they left Him alone, Matthew 22.15-22. But the Lord had to borrow a coin to make His point.

**He did not own a donkey.** Many people in Bible times owned a donkey. But not the Lord. But Zechariah had prophesied long before, "Behold your King is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey," Zechariah 9.9. The King was here though not acknowledged. But He had no donkey. To fulfill the Scripture He must ride on the foal of a donkey. Where would He get one?

The Lord knew all about this and His plans had already been made and the colt chosen. Now the Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. The time of His death was near. At the Mount of Olives He said to two of His disciples, "Go into the village opposite you and right away you will see a donkey tied there and her colt. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you just say, **The Lord has need of them.** Immediately he will let them go."

Here was an unusual order. The disciples were to go to a village where they would find a donkey tied up and her colt beside her. They were to calmly untie the two donkeys and take them back to the Lord! Who owned them? We don't know. Wasn't this just stealing? No. Jesus said if anyone asks you what you are doing say, **The Lord needs them.** Perhaps the Lord had spoken to the owner earlier. Or the Lord knew the owner was happy and willing to let his animals be used by Him. Are you that willing to let Him use what you have?

The disciples did just as the Lord had directed them and they brought back the two donkeys. Our Lord had no saddle so the disciples laid their coats on the backs of the beasts. The colt was untrained so people thought the Lord would have to ride the older donkey. But the prophecy said the King would ride on a **colt the foal of a beast of burden.** How can He possibly ride an untrained donkey? Because He is the Lord of creation and everything is under His control.

And the Lord did just that. As soon as the disciples threw their clothing on the young donkey the Lord mounted it and rode towards Jerusalem. John writes, "When Jesus had found a young donkey, He sat on it," John 12.14. The young donkey accepted its Master on its back where no one before had ridden. It did not try to shake off the clothes that were thrown over it. It allowed the clothes to cover it partly so that only its Master was seen.

But when the crowd saw the Lord they too began to throw their coats on the road for Him to ride over. They also cut down tree branches and spread them on the road. But the little donkey did not rear up or shy away. It walked quietly on. The people began to shout and cheer the Lord. The little donkey was not frightened by all this noise. It just kept going steadily along and carried its Master safely into Jerusalem.

The colt did not need special training. It did not need a bridle, Proverbs 26.3. It simply walked under its Master's control. What a delightful creature - an example to all.

## Balaam's Donkey

### Numbers 22

Balaam is an interesting man but his donkey is even more interesting. Balaam lived at the time the Israeli were travelling through the desert to Canaan. On this journey the Israeli had fought with many nations who had refused to let them pass through their country, Numbers 21.21-25, 33-35. Now they had reached the country of Moab and they pitched their tents on the plain of Moab. When the Moabites saw this they were terrified. They said to their neighbours the Midianites, "This mob is going to lick us up like an ox licks grass!" Both countries were in a state of panic.

Then Balak, king of Moab had a great idea. He sent leaders from both Moab and Midian to a distant city to hire a man called Balaam. This is the first we read of Balaam. The Bible says he was the son of Beor from Pethor near the Euphrates River. That was a long way from the land of Moab. Who was this man? Why would Balak send for him? Was he a great soldier? A statesman? No. We read that Balak sent the leaders to Balaam to say this, "A certain people has come out from Egypt. There are so many of them they cover the whole land and they have camped opposite **me!** I need help. Please come and curse these people for me!"

That seems a strange request. But the message continues. "These people are too much for me, but if **you** curse them I might have a chance. I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you

curse is cursed." It seems Balaam was a prophet of sorts who had gained a reputation of being successful at his work.

Balak was so desperate he was willing to try anything to get rid of the Israeli, **even to hiring a prophet to curse them**. So he sent these leaders **with money in their hand** to ask for Balaam's help. Here are men sent to Balaam with money. They want to give this money to the prophet if he will just go with them and curse the Israeli. It seems like a nice easy way to earn some extra cash.

What would a man of God do?

With regard to the money we know how Abraham acted when the king of Sodom tried to pay him for rescuing his people. Abraham said, "I have sworn to the Lord God most High that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours," Genesis 14. 22-23. Abraham could not be paid off.

Simon saw that the gift of the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, and he offered them money for this gift. But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money," Acts 8. 18-20.

So if Balaam is a man of God we would expect him to say the same, "Be gone! How dare you offer me money to curse someone!"

But alas! Those were not Balaam's words. Instead he actually considered both the cursing and the money. He invited the leaders to spend the night with him and he would "wait for the word from the Lord."

He did not have long to wait. God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" "Oh, those fellows? They are from Balak, the king of Moab. He says there is a large nation who came up from Egypt and they cover the whole land. Balak is afraid of them. He wants me to go over there and curse them and that might help to defeat them." No mention of money.

Then God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse these people, for they are blessed." That was brief and clear. Balaam got the point. Next morning he said to the leaders, "Go back to your land. The Lord has refused to let me go." But Balaam did not tell them the whole message. God had also said **the people are blessed**. Balaam left out that part.

So the messengers went back to Balak and said, "Balaam refuses to come." That did not discourage Balak. He just chose more important men and princes and sent them back to Balaam with a better offer.

This time the message centered more around Balaam himself. "I beg you, do not let anything stop you from coming here. I will

honor you richly. I will do anything you say. Please - just curse these people for me." Balak was a desperate man.

But now Balaam answered this group with great piety. "Even though Balak gave me his house full of silver and gold I could not do anything against the command of God." That has a nice firm sound to it. But then he added, "Please stay here tonight and I will find out what more the Lord has to say to me." Balaam already knew what God had to say. It was brief and plain. **"Do not go. You shall not curse these people for they are blessed."** He understood it the first time. **But Balaam wanted to go.** He wanted the money. He wanted the honor. He hoped perhaps God had changed His mind. Balaam is like us. We set our hearts on things we know are not right. The scripture says they are not right. But we keep hoping we can find some other scripture which will allow us to carry on.

Now God came to Balaam again in the night. This time He said, "If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them, but only the word I speak to you shall you do." God was allowing Balaam to have his own way and that is always a solemn thought. If we long to have our own way God may allow it. But as with the Israeli, we will pay a price and our spiritual life will suffer, Psalm 106.15.

Balaam did not waste any time. He got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and rode off with the princes. He had what he wanted.

But God was angry because he went. God knew Balaam and God knew his heart. He loved money no matter how he earned it, 2 Peter 2.15. And God knew the wicked counsel he would give against the Israeli, Numbers 31.16; Revelation 2.14. Balaam is mentioned in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Micah, Peter, Jude and Revelation. But there is no good thing said of him in any of these scriptures.

God chose a striking way to let Balaam know He was not pleased. And He was still willing to give Balaam another chance. First He appeared as the Angel of the Lord and stood directly in the path in front of Balaam and the donkey. Balaam's donkey saw the awful sight of the Angel standing with a sword in His hand and she was terrified and swerved off the road into a field.

But Balaam did not see the Angel. He only knew the donkey had gone off the road and he was annoyed and struck her to turn her back. Then the Angel of the Lord went on and stood in a narrow path that had a wall on either side. Again the donkey saw the Angel and pushed herself against the wall to avoid Him. The trouble with this was she also crushed Balaam's foot against the wall and he struck her again in anger.

Finally the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow place with no way for the donkey to turn. It was too much for the poor beast. She

just lay down under Balaam. Balaam was angry before but now he was furious and he gave the donkey a blow with his stick.

Then an amazing miracle happened. The Lord gave the donkey a man's voice! And she used it. "What have I done to you to make you hit me these three times?" she said. Balaam must have been in a wild temper for he was not even shaken by this voice. He did not sit in stunned silence. **He actually answered the donkey!** "Because you made a fool of me!" he said. "If I had a sword in my hand I would kill you!"

And the donkey answered him. This is one of the fascinating parts of this story. Balaam and the donkey carried on a conversation as though it were a common occurrence for an animal to talk with its master. Balaam was so angry and so out of touch with God that even his donkey speaking did not shock him to his senses.

"Am I not your own donkey? Haven't you ridden on me all your life? Have I ever done this before?" asked the donkey. Balaam was honest enough to say, "No."

Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His sword in His hand. Balaam bowed his head right down to join his donkey on the ground. Now he **was** speechless. His donkey talking with a man's voice had not silenced him. But the sight of the Angel of the Lord did.

The Angel then asked him the same question, "Why did you hit your donkey three times?" No answer from Balaam. Then the Angel said, "I have come out as an adversary because you have been opposite to Me." We read that Satan is our adversary in 1 Peter 5.8. But how sobering to read the **Lord Himself** was Balaam's adversary here.

Then the Angel added, "The donkey saw Me and turned aside three times. If she had not turned aside I would surely have killed you and let her live!" While Balaam was threatening to kill his donkey, the Angel had considered killing him. The donkey saved his life.

Part of Balaam's earlier conversation with the Lord may seem confusing to us, but Balaam had not been confused. He said at once, "I have sinned. I did not know you were in the way against me. If it displeases You I will turn back." But God allowed Balaam to go on. God was going to bless His people through the very man who was hired to curse them. Of course Balak was delighted to see Balaam. His plan was to take Balaam to a place where he could see the camp of the Israeli, and then he could stand and curse them. But it did not quite work out that way. Each time Balaam was brought to a spot where he could see the Israeli, **he blessed them**. Numbers 23,24. Each time he opened

his mouth he spoke what God told him, and later the blessings and prophecies all came to pass. But this was certainly not what Balak had planned. He was furious at Balaam. He shouted, "I called you to curse my enemies, but you have persisted in blessing them these three times!" Numbers 24.10. Joshua tells us why. God said, "Balak arose and fought against Israel and he sent and summoned Balaam but **I was not willing to listen to Balaam**. So he had to bless you and I delivered you from his hand," Joshua 24. 9,10. God had overruled.

But Balaam was clever and he did not give up easily. He wanted to please Balak more than he wanted to please God. And since God had not allowed him to curse the Israeli, Balaam showed Balak another way to defeat them. The Bible tells us he "counseled" Balak to invite the Israeli to come to their idol sacrifices and also to commit adultery, Numbers 25.1-3; 31.15-16. The Israeli fell into both these sins and grieved the Lord their God.

This gives us a true picture of Balaam. Balaam went his own way in spite of all God had said and done even to the remarkable use of his donkey. The donkey obeyed the Lord. The man did not. The Lord saved the donkey's life and even spared Balaam at that time. But after all his counseling for greed, Balaam was killed by the Israeli in a war with the very people he had counseled. What Balaam was doing there we do not know, but his time had come, Numbers 31.8.

So here we have a man described in the Bible as contrary before God, an evil counselor, hired to curse God's people and put a stumbling block before them, forsaking the right way, loving the wages of unrighteousness, and rebuked for his madness by a donkey. About the donkey we only know she was obedient.

## **Creatures as Teachers – TEST 1**

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### **Indicate the letter of the correct answer**

1. Donkeys
  - a. are rarely mentioned in the Bible.
  - b. are mentioned over 70 times in the Bible.
  - c. were often yoked with oxen.
  
2. Which of the gospels mention the prophecy of the King mounted on a donkey?
  - a. Matthew and John.
  - b. Mark and John.
  - c. Matthew and Mark.
  
3. In order to fulfil the OT prophecy, Jesus
  - a. needed a donkey.
  - b. hired a donkey.
  - c. owned a donkey.
  
4. Jesus' donkey is an example for us in that it
  - a. needed special training.
  - b. needed strict control.
  - c. simply walked under its Master's control.
  
5. Balaam's donkey is an example to us in that it
  - a. could talk.
  - b. was obedient.
  - c. saw an angel.

### **Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement**

6. Job said "Ask the beasts, and let them teach you;"
7. Jesus knew where He would get "a colt, the foal of a donkey".
8. The disciples had to pay for the donkey and its foal.
9. Balaam was a man of God.
10. Balaam loved money no matter how he earned it.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What lessons have you learned from these donkeys?



## Daniel's Lions

### Daniel 6

The kind of lion that lived in Bible lands is now almost all gone. Once they roamed from Israel to India where the last few still survive. However there are many lions in Africa today. The lion is a majestic strong creature, well named "the king of the beasts". No one who has ever heard a lion roar in the night can forget its hair-raising sound. Their prey is usually smaller animals but occasionally they attack humans.

It was a young lion that Samson met on his way to arrange his marriage, Judges 14. 5-6. With no warning a young lion came roaring towards him. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson with great power and he tore the lion to death as though it were a baby goat. It was an amazing act in a life full of such events. Samson had been given supernatural strength as a special gift from God.

It was such a lion that David faced while caring for his father's sheep. One carried off a lamb from the flock but David went after him and attacked him and rescued the lamb. The lion rose up against David, but he grasped it by the beard and killed it, 1 Samuel 17.34-36.

It was such lions that Daniel faced when he was thrown into their den. Daniel is one of the most outstanding men of the Bible. Ezekiel the prophet lived at the same time as Daniel and wrote of him as "righteous" and "wise", Ezekiel 14.14; 28.3. Our Lord described him as "the prophet", Matthew 24.15.

Daniel was one of the young nobles of Judah whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had captured. He had defeated the people of Judah as Jeremiah had prophesied, Jeremiah 25.8-11. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered that the best and brightest of the royal family and nobles receive special training for his court. These young men were to be educated in all the learning of the Chaldeans and then they were to go into the king's personal service. Daniel was one of those chosen. Daniel served faithfully under King Nebuchadnezzar for many years. Later Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar came to the throne and one night Daniel prophesied that his reign was about to end, Daniel 5. **That same night** Belshazzar

was killed and Darius the Mede took the throne. But even this new king from another country was impressed with Daniel. King Darius chose him as one of three men to be over his 120 assistants.

These 120 assistants were to account for their work in the government to Daniel and the other two leaders. The three leaders were to keep an eye on the finances and affairs of the land so that the king would not be cheated. As Ezekiel wrote, Daniel's reputation was that of a "righteous" man. In fact the more King Darius saw of Daniel the more impressed he was with him. He had an "extraordinary spirit" and King Darius planned to appoint him even higher over the whole kingdom.

That was a real tribute to Daniel but it also made enemies for him. The other leaders and the 120 assistants were jealous of Daniel's success. It is hard to be truly pleased at another person's success. But these men did not just resent Daniel. **They plotted how to get rid of him.** They let their jealousy take over. First they tried to find something against this honorable man. But they could find nothing. They tried hard and closely examined his work and his life. But they could only find that he was faithful. How closely could your life and work be examined? Are you always faithful? Never negligent? Never cheat? Daniel's work was above it all.

So these men got together again to find a different plan. And without knowing it they gave Daniel the highest praise anyone could receive. "We are not going to find anything against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God," they said. What a beautiful tribute!

Now they must plot how to do this. They came up with a crafty plan. All of them went to King Darius to make a flattering suggestion to him. First they addressed him in the usual court manner, "O Darius - may you live forever!" Then they went on. "All the leaders and officials and governors have a suggestion for your majesty." (ALL was not true as Daniel was not there). "Why don't you make a law stating that no one may ask any god or man **except you** for anything for 30 days? And if anyone disobeys he will be thrown into the den of lions. Isn't that a great idea? Now your majesty why don't you just sign this paper? We have it all written up here for you. And once it is signed we all know that the laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed."

The king was pleased. His pride was puffed up. Here were all his counselors suggesting that no one should pray to any god for 30 days. He alone would grant requests. He agreed. Without further thought or question he signed this deadly document.

What about Daniel? He was not among those who presented the document but it did not take long for him and the people to hear

about it. What would you have done? Made a little arrangement with God that you would just pray silently for the next 30 days? No bowing the knee unless in a closet? No praying aloud in thanks for your food? Or maybe you would do as Naaman did. He said he hoped the Lord would pardon him when he might have to bow to a heathen god when with his master the king, 2 Kings 5.18.

Daniel was not such a man. **When he knew the document was signed**, he entered his house and **before his open windows** he continued to kneel three times a day, **praying and giving thanks to God as he always did**. Not even facing death in a den of lions could interfere with Daniel's worship of the living God.

Of course his enemies were watching. They had planned to meet where they knew they could see Daniel praying. They were that sure of it. And they were not disappointed. They watched as he knelt in prayer to God as he did each day. And he was NOT praying to King Darius. It was all they needed.

They could hardly wait to rush to the palace to tell the king. There was none of the "O King, live forever!" business now. They got right down to the facts. "Didn't you sign a law that any man who asks anything of any god or man except you for 30 days will be cast into the den of lions?", they asked. The innocent king said happily, "That's right! And the law of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed."

They had the king where they wanted him. "Well - **that Daniel** - of the Jewish exiles - pays no attention to you!" they said smugly. "He keeps praying to **his** God three times a day."

The king was stunned. He realized they had set a trap for him. What a fool he had been! The Bible says he was "deeply distressed". And he made up his mind to save Daniel somehow. He worked all that day to try to rescue the man he had doomed to die by his foolish law.

But his leaders and counselors were not going to let him do it. They came again and said, "Face it, O King! It's a lost cause. The law of the Medes and Persians **cannot be changed even by you**."

Sadly the king gave the order and Daniel was brought in to be thrown into the lions' den. But the king spoke to him first. "Your God whom you serve constantly will personally deliver you," he said. The king only knew Daniel's God through Daniel's life. And Daniel's life spoke of a God of power. It had not been easy in a heathen court, but Daniel had done it. Does your life speak of the power of God that lives in you through the Holy Spirit? Do your friends and neighbours know you are a Christian by the way you live and speak?

A large stone was laid over the mouth of the den after Daniel

was thrown in. There was no escape. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and the signet rings of his nobles. The law could not be changed. Even the king could not rescue Daniel.

King Darius returned to the palace very upset. He spent the night fasting. He refused any entertainment. He could not sleep. He was a man fully aware of what his carelessness and pride had caused. He had said to Daniel, "Your God will save you." But his heart sank as he thought of a den full of lions. No one could survive a night in there, or even an hour.

The king was up at dawn and rushed to the lions' den. He came near the den and called out with a worried voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God saved you from the lions?" Back came Daniel's cheerful voice, "O King, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. They have not harmed me as I was innocent before God and have committed no crime toward you!"

But were these lions not the same vicious beasts faced by Samson and David? The same. And here was an unarmed man thrown into their midst? Right. And they did not touch him? They did not touch him. The king was overjoyed when he heard Daniel's voice and ordered that he be lifted out. **No injury whatever was found on him** because he had trusted in his God. Not because he was a president. Not because he was a Jew. But because he trusted in his God, Hebrews 11.33.

What had happened? The secret was in Daniel's statement, **My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths** and they have not harmed me. Here was a pack of untamed hungry lions kept in a den for just such cruel deaths. They were capable and willing to kill as can be seen by their treatment of the men who had accused Daniel, 6.24. Their punishment was swift and cruel. They were thrown to these same lions and killed instantly.

But not Daniel. God had sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. And the lions obeyed. Not a lion bit Daniel. Not a lion mauled him. But think of Daniel. He was a good man. Even his enemies could find no fault in him. He had obeyed God by praying faithfully. Then surely God would save him from death? Perhaps up to the end he hoped for some great rescue? But no. He had the terrifying experience of being thrown into a pit full of wild lions. We can only imagine how Daniel felt. We do know what he did. He trusted in God. His life was in God's hands **whatever happened**.

Daniel's three friends felt the same way when faced with death in a burning furnace. "O Nebuchadnezzar we are not worried about what will happen to us. If we are thrown into the flaming furnace

our God is able to deliver us and will deliver us out of your hand. **But if He doesn't, please understand we will never serve or worship your gods,"** Daniel 3.16-18. That's courage.

Think of the lions. They had been taken from their natural home where they roamed wild and free. They had been confined by men into this small space. They could not escape. Now a man with neither whip nor club was thrown in their den with them. And they were used to eating flesh. But before they could lay a tooth on him an angel ordered them to close their mouths. We do not know how the lions felt. We do know what they did. They kept their mouths shut at the command from God.

Angels were used as God's messengers through the scriptures. Daniel had already been instructed by the angel Gabriel, Daniel 8.1, 15-27. Angels were also sent as guides, Numbers 20.16. Some brought good news, Judges 13, Luke 1.26-33. Some came to comfort, 1 Kings 19.5, Psalm 34.7, Matthew 28.5. Some came to warn, Genesis 19.1,15-17.

Lot was one who was warned by two angels that the city where he lived was about to be destroyed. They ordered him to leave that city at once. He knew this warning came from God but he dragged his feet about getting out. Finally the two angels grasped his hand and that of his wife and two daughters and rushed them out of the city to safety. He was **slow to obey** the word of God by the angels.

Not so these lions. They shut their mouths and kept them shut all night until Daniel was taken out of the den. Lot had to be forced to obey. The lions did not. God could have used other ways to rescue Daniel but He chose to use these obedient animals to save His servant's life.

## **The Lion and the Donkey**

### **1 Kings 12,13**

Solomon was the third king of Israel and well known for his wisdom and wealth. God had given him a wise and understanding heart such as no other king had, 1 Kings 3.12. After King Solomon died his son Rehoboam began to reign over Israel. But Rehoboam did not have his father's wisdom nor would he take his elders'

advice. As a result he soon lost the major portion of his kingdom. Ten tribes left him and made Jeroboam their king.

But Jeroboam did not follow the ways of the Lord. He did not trust the Lord to leave the ten tribes under his rule. He worried that they might return to Rehoboam. He worried especially at the times the people went back yearly to Jerusalem to worship. He thought they would again see the temple that Solomon built and might wish to return to the Lord. So he plotted how to keep them. First he made two gold calves. Then he said to his people, "It's too far for you to travel to Jerusalem to worship. Why not worship here? See - here are the gods that brought you up from the land of Egypt." Had he forgotten that Aaron had done that same thing with terrible results? Exodus 32.4, Psalm 106.19-21. In this way he broke two of the Lord's commands (1) they were not to worship idols, Exodus 20. 4,5 (2) they were to centre their worship at Jerusalem, 2 Chronicles 6.6.

Jeroboam was still not satisfied with this, but added more sins to it. First he appointed men who were not Levites to act as priests. And he dismissed those who were. The Levites then had no place in Israel so they left their homes and property and went back to Judah, 2 Chronicles 11. 13-16.

Jeroboam went even further and proclaimed a new day for the feast and he himself went up to the altar to burn incense. Unfortunately most of the people followed him in this idol worship. It was the sin that stained his whole reign. From then on he is described as "Jeroboam who made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God with their idols," 1 Kings 16.26.

But even then our ever gracious Lord gave him a chance to repent. He sent a prophet to warn him. We do not know this prophet's name. The Bible says, "A man of God from Judah", went up to Jeroboam as he stood by the altar to burn incense. In a loud voice the man of God condemned what was going on. He said the very bones of these false priests would some day be burned on this heathen altar. And he had the faith to add, "The Lord will give you a sign that this **will** happen. This very altar will be split open and the ashes shall fall out." This took real courage.

Jeroboam was furious at all this. He raised his arm and pointed to the prophet and shouted, "Seize him!" But his hand was suddenly paralyzed and he could not move it again. At the same time **the altar split open and the ashes poured out**. The Lord had immediately confirmed the prophet's words, Mark 16.20.

Jeroboam was shocked - especially as he could not move his arm. So he pleaded with the prophet to ask the Lord to forgive him? No. He pleaded with him to ask the Lord **to restore the use**

**of his hand.** That is all that concerned him. The prophet was gracious and prayed for Jeroboam, and the Lord in mercy answered his plea. The hand was healed. But we do not ever read that Jeroboam's **heart** was touched and his life changed.

The king was so pleased he asked the prophet to come home and eat with him. He also offered him a reward. It is here we find the prophet had his own special orders from the Lord. He said to the king, "I would not go with you nor eat bread here if you gave me half of your kingdom. For the Lord commanded me to eat no bread nor drink water here. Nor am I to return home the same way I came."

This was an unusual command. The Lord was so angry with these people and their idol worship that He did not want His servant even to eat with them. And the prophet obeyed. He refused to eat with the king or to accept his reward. And he started off home another way.

This whole scene at the altar had caused quite a stir in the city. Those who had witnessed it told others and the news spread. Nothing like this had ever happened in Bethel before. There was an old prophet living in Bethel and his sons went home and told their father all that had happened and what the unnamed prophet had said to the king. This makes us wonder why the Lord had to bring a prophet from Judah. Why was this old prophet not busy doing the Lord's work? We shall soon find out.

The old prophet was excited when he heard this news. "Where did the man go?" he asked his sons. The sons had seen the unnamed prophet leave and told their father which way he went. "Quick! Saddle the donkey for me!" said the old man. And off he rode to look for the unnamed prophet. He found him sitting under an oak. "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" he asked. "I am," said the prophet. "Well, come on home and eat with me," said the old man.

Why would he invite the prophet to eat with him? He already knew from his sons what the prophet had said to the king. **He was going straight home. He was not to eat here.** Was he testing the prophet? The prophet gave the old man the same answer he gave to the king. He could not go with him. He had been commanded by the Lord not to eat bread here and to go home another way. Now the old man **knew** this prophet wished to obey the Lord.

But the old man was determined to bring the prophet home with him. So he said, "I am a prophet like you. An angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord and said to bring you back to eat and drink with me." But the Bible says, **he lied.** The Bible does not offer excuses or reasons. It says simply, he **lied.** He lied to a

prophet of the Lord. He claimed to be one himself yet he deliberately lied to his fellow worker. He knew the great faith the man had shown in the presence of the king. He knew how the Lord had honored this faith. Yet he lied to the prophet. This is hard to understand and easy to condemn only because it is easier for us to see sin in someone else.

But it is difficult to understand the man of God at this point. For he got up and **went back to the old man's house and ate bread and drank water**. Why would he faithfully refuse to go with the **king** yet go off with this old prophet? Did he just **want** to believe the old man because he was tired and hungry? Did he think because the old man was a prophet he could go and eat in his house in spite of his express command from the Lord? Whatever his reason he put his own ideas ahead of God's command. And the Lord called it **disobedience**.

For as they were sitting at the table in the old man's house the word of the Lord came, **and it came directly to the old prophet**. Suddenly he cried aloud to the man of God, "Hear the word of the Lord! **You have disobeyed Me!** You did not keep the command I gave you. Now your body will not be buried with your ancestors." It was a prophecy of his early death.

Why did the Lord send the word to the old man and not to the prophet? Was it to shock the old man into seeing his own state and to confess he had lied? Was God speaking to his conscience? We do not know. We do not read that the man of God accused the old man of lying. Nor did he quarrel with the prophecy. He did not question God's judgment in condemning His faithful servant but leaving a wicked king and a lying prophet alive. He accepted the sentence upon himself as righteous. He was truly a "man of God".

The old man ate his own meal and then saddled a donkey for the prophet. It had been a strange day. What did they say in parting?

As the unnamed prophet rode towards home the Bible says simply, "A lion met him on the way and killed him." A lion met him. A lion sent by God. The lion then threw the prophet's body on the ground and the old man's donkey stood beside it. The lion stood there also. The lion did not tear the body. The lion did not touch the donkey. The donkey did not run away from the lion.

Later some men passed by and saw this unusual sight. They went back to the city and told others they had seen a dead man on the road and a lion and a donkey just standing beside it. This news came back to the old man. "It is the man of God," he said.

"He disobeyed the Lord and the Lord gave him to the lion who tore him and killed him. The Lord has fulfilled His word."

"Saddle the donkey for me," he said to his sons. The old man rode off and found the body of the man of God. The lion and the donkey still stood by it. The lion had not eaten the body of the man of God nor torn the donkey. The Lord had said the prophet's **body** would not be buried with his ancestors, so there had to be a body to bury. The old man laid the prophet's body on the donkey's back and brought it back to be buried in his own grave.

The lion and the donkey allowed themselves to be controlled by God. The lion was to kill the man but not the donkey. He was not to eat the man. He was to stand guard over the body until it was picked up. The donkey was to wait to carry it. This was against both their natures. It was not natural for the lion to kill and not eat nor to leave the donkey untouched. It was not natural for the lion to allow the old man to approach and carry away the body he had killed. Nor was it natural for the donkey to stand calmly side by side with a lion. But they did as God instructed them and His prophecy was fulfilled. The unnamed prophet had disobeyed. The lion and the donkey did not.



## Obedient Cattle

### 1 Samuel 4,5,6 Psalm 78.56-61

The people called "Philistines" were a strong sea nation living along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea as far north as Joppa. They were a constant enemy to the nation of Israel. From Genesis through the history of the kings there were battles between these two countries. The Philistines worshipped idols, their chief god being Dagon. He was an idol with the hands and face of a man and the tail of a fish. God often allowed the Philistines to defeat the Israeli as a punishment.

At one time Eli was the high priest and judge and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas were also priests in Israel. Eli was a good man but his sons were evil, 1 Samuel 2.12. Eli heard of their wicked doings and spoke to them, but did nothing else about it. So his sons ignored him. The Lord was very angry and sent a prophet to Eli to tell him so. "You have honored your sons above Me," said the Lord. "Those who honor Me I will honor and those who

despise Me will be lightly esteemed." Then the prophet went on, "All your family will die in their youth. And your two sons Hophni and Phinehas will both die on the same day," 1 Samuel 2.27-34.

Not long after this Israel was again at war with the Philistines and Israel was defeated in the first battle. When the army returned to camp the elders said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today?" (At least they knew the defeat came from the Lord.) But instead of asking Him they decided it would be a good idea to send to Shiloh for the ark of the covenant of the Lord. This ark was to remind the Israeli that God had said He would live with His people. It was a gold carved box carried by priests using two heavy rods fitted through gold rings attached to the box. It had never before been brought to a battle ground. This time it was carried by Eli's two wicked sons Hophni and Phinehas. God was working out His purposes.

The Israeli saw the ark arriving and they let out a great shout of joy. The ark was here! They were sure to win the next battle now! Nobody mentioned asking God why they had lost the first one.

In their camp the Philistines heard the noise of the shout and they wondered what that was all about. Then they heard that the ark of the Lord had come into the Israeli camp. It shook them. They remembered how the "mighty gods" of the Israeli had struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues. They said to each other, "We will be slaves to the Hebrews if we don't fight like men!" And they fought hard. And they defeated the Israeli and killed the two priests Hophni and Phinehas.

But they made one great mistake. They took the ark of God back with them. The Philistines had no idea of the living God of the Israeli. Their gods were idols carved out by their own hands. So they thought this gold box itself held some magic power of the God of Israel. Now they would have the help of this God too. So they took the ark to the house of their god Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. They had put the ark of the living God of Israel on an equal base with an idol. This could not be.

So when the Philistines got up the next morning, they found Dagon had fallen on his face before the ark of God. That made them wonder a bit, but they lifted Dagon up and put him in his place again.

But early the next morning they found Dagon had again fallen on his face before the ark of the Lord. This time Dagon's head and the palms of his hands were cut off. This was a shock to the Philistines. But still they thought perhaps it was just an accident.

Now the Lord went further. He caused a plague to fall on the people who lived in the Ashdod area where the ark was and they all had painful tumours growing in their bodies. The people of

Ashdod got the point. **It is the ark of God among us**, they said. So they sent it to the next town. At once the people of Gath were struck with the tumours. So they hastily shipped the ark off to Ekron. But when the people of Ekron saw the ark, they were having none of it. "They have brought the ark here to kill us!" they cried, "Get rid of it!" So they called for the leaders of the Philistines and held a conference with them. "Send back this ark of the God of Israel to its own place," they said, "otherwise we will all be killed!" Things were bad already in Ekron. The men who did not die were smitten with tumours. There was also a plague of mice.

By now the Philistines had had the ark for seven months and they had had enough. But they were not sure how to send it back. So they called for their priests to ask them, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? How shall we return it?"

The priests had a number of suggestions. First because they thought along the lines of their own religion, they said, "Don't send it back empty. You have to give their God something for a guilt offering." Many people today think like this. They feel they have to pay something to God for their salvation. But Christ has paid it all, Hebrews 10.10. There is nothing left for us to do but confess our guilt and accept this great gift.

Then the priests rebuked the leaders. "Why do you harden your hearts? You are like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They hardened their hearts against the Israeli until the Lord had to deal severely with them. Finally they let the Israeli go." This had happened many years before but was evidently still spoken about in other countries.

It sounds here as though the heathen priests were convinced that God really was the One who had brought this misery on the Philistines . . . Not quite. Maybe all those deaths and tumours and Dagon falling on his face were just by chance. They wanted to make sure. They would give the God of Israel an impossible test. If He passed the test - then it was indeed God who had punished them.

So the priests gave the Philistine leaders this great idea. First - when you return the ark don't have men carry it as the Israeli did. Instead make a new cart for it. Then get two milk cows with calves. These must be cows who had never been yoked or pulled anything. Hitch the cows to the cart and then take the calves away from their mothers. Put the ark of God on the cart and your guilt offerings of gold in a box by its side. Then send the cart off with the cows pulling it. Watch where it goes. If it goes towards Israel and the town of Bethshemesh, then we know that God has

done this evil to us. **But if not then we know that all that happened to us was just by chance.**

It was a challenge that only God could meet. And He used obedient cattle. The cattle were faced with three impossibilities. First **to leave their calves**. A cow has to be forced to leave her calf and will go to any lengths to avoid this. The second was **to pull a cart together when they had never before been yoked**. The third was **to be sent off on a highway on their own and to arrive at a place they had never been**. It could not be done. Except with God.

It was a clever plan and the Philistines were delighted with it. They built a new cart and hitched the cows to it. Then they removed their calves. Here was the first test. The cows will surely pull the cart the wrong way and go after their little calves. They did not. The Philistines put the ark on the cart while the cows stood there patiently. Then they set the cows on the road towards Israel. They will surely pull against each other and tear the cart in two. They did not. The cows will wander off into a field to find some grass? They did not.

Read what the Bible says, "The cows took the **straight way** in the direction of Bethshemesh. **They went along the highway, crying** (after their calves) as they went. **They did not turn aside to the right or the left.**"

It was a stirring sight. The leaders of the Philistines followed the cows to the border of Bethshemesh. There they saw them stop at a large stone in a field near Bethshemesh. The obedient cows had completed their work. Surely the next lines we read will be, "When the five leaders of the Philistines saw it they fell to their knees and worshipped the Lord God of Israel." It was not so. The Bible says, "When the five leaders of the Philistines saw it they returned to Ekron that day." They turned their backs on God. They returned to their idol worship and their hand-made gods and their cracked Dagon. They had put God to a test of their own choosing and God had not failed. The cattle had not failed. The men had.

## Creatures as Teachers – TEST 2

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. Samson killed a lion with
  - a. his bare hands.
  - b. a donkey's jaw-bone.
  - c. a spear.
  
2. Daniel was
  - a. one of the 120 assistants in Babylon.
  - b. one of three leaders over the satraps.
  - c. appointed by Darius as leader over the whole of Babylon.
  
3. King Darius
  - a. was able to change the law of the Medes and Persians.
  - b. was not able to save Daniel from the lion's den.
  - c. did not believe that God could deliver Daniel.
  
4. No injury whatever was found on Daniel because
  - a. he was a president.
  - b. he was a Jew.
  - c. he trusted in his God.
  
5. The prophet whom God sent to warn Jereboam
  - a. was named Shimei.
  - b. accepted the king's reward.
  - c. was truly a man of God.

### Write **TRUE** or **FALSE** after each statement

6. David killed a lion that had killed one of his lambs.
7. Not even facing death in a den of lions could interfere with Daniel's worship of the living God.
8. Obedient lions saved Daniel's life.
9. The old man dug a grave and buried the prophet's body.
10. The lion and the donkey allowed themselves to be controlled by God.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

In what ways is your life controlled by God?



## Abraham's Ram or The Ram in the Bushes

### Genesis 22

Sheep are mentioned about 500 times in the Bible. They were very important to the people who lived at that time, for food, Exodus 12.5-8, wool, 2 Kings 3.4 and especially for sacrifices, Leviticus 23.19, 1 Kings 8.63.

The ram, the male sheep, is a strong, stately animal with a crown of horns. It is full of energy and is the leader of the flock. We first read of the ram in the Bible when the Lord made a special covenant with Abraham, Genesis 15. God had earlier made a covenant with Noah when he brought his family and two of every creature into the ark. After the flood God promised that never again would there be such a flood and He put a rainbow in the clouds to confirm this, Genesis 6.18, 9.1-16.

Now God wanted Abraham to know He was going to make a great nation and Abraham was to be its head. But Abraham had no children and he and his wife Sarah were very old. So how could they have a child? But there is nothing too hard for God. When Abraham asked about this, God told him he would indeed have a son and that his descendants would be as the stars in number. This sounds impossible. Yet the Bible says, "Abraham believed God." Abraham considered who was making the promise and he believed Him. And God counted it to Abraham as righteousness.

Then God repeated to Abraham another promise. He would give him the land where Abraham was living. Abraham said, "How shall I know this?" And the Lord did a remarkable thing. He made His presence known in a special covenant with Abraham.

First He asked Abraham to bring Him a three year old goat, a three year old ram, a dove and a young pigeon. Abraham brought these creatures. Then Abraham cut the goat and the ram in half and laid each half opposite to one another. Why would he do this? An agreement was often made this way. An animal was cut in two and the persons making the vow walked between the pieces to seal the vow (see Jeremiah 34. 18-19). Since Abraham was not making the vow, the pieces were laid out for the Lord to walk between them.

Then Abraham fell into a deep sleep and God told Abraham what would happen to his descendants in the future. When the sun set and it became very dark, a smoking oven and a flaming

torch passed between these cut pieces. It was the sign of the presence of God going between the pieces to confirm His covenant with Abraham. A ram and a goat had been sacrificed for this great event, also two birds.

God did not fulfil His promises to Abraham the very next day. We always want our answers right away. But God's timing is not ours. Abraham had to wait **years**, but he still believed God. Finally the Lord "did as He had promised" and Sarah and Abraham had a baby boy, Isaac, Genesis 21.2-3. It was a wonderful day of rejoicing for this couple. Sarah was far past the age of bearing children, but God had performed a miracle and given them a son. The promised heir had arrived and the promised nation begun. Now everybody could go about and live their lives in peace.

Not quite. Abraham and Sarah were allowed to enjoy Isaac for many years and then a strange request came from God. This is where our story begins. It is the second mention of a ram in the Bible. By now Isaac was a young man and the time had come for God to test Abraham and to teach us through him.

God had spoken to Abraham three times before and appeared in a vision four times, Genesis 12.1; 13.14; 21.12; 12.7; 15.1; 17.1; 18.1. Abraham was familiar with the presence of God. So when God called "Abraham!" he answered at once, "Here I am!" It was the response of an obedient servant. Isaiah the prophet also responded this way when the Lord asked, "Who will go for us?" Isaiah answered, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah 6.8. The Lord Jesus as the perfect Servant said, "I have come to do Your will, O God," Hebrews 10.7.

But this time Abraham heard a very strange request from God. "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to Moriah and offer him up as a **burnt offering** on one of the mountains where I will tell you." No doubt Abraham could scarcely believe his ears. Here was the Lord God of heaven asking him to sacrifice the very son He had given him as promised. And God had made it very clear that He meant Isaac. There was no mistaking it. "Your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac." Abraham would have known of wicked sacrifices practised by some nations. But God could not approve of that, see Deuteronomy 12.31. Yet here was God Himself asking Abraham to do this heartbreaking thing! And wasn't Isaac the son who was to begin the new nation?

If these thoughts whirled around in Abraham's head we are not told about it. What we are told is that Abraham got up **early** the next morning and **prepared to go**. He did not wait several weeks to see if God might change His mind. He did not weep as did Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20.3. He did not even plead for Isaac's life

as he had for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 18.23-33. He had complete faith in God. He simply obeyed.

He saddled his donkey and split wood for the burnt offering. He took two young men servants with him and Isaac his son and the four of them set off for Moriah. It was a long journey. It took three days before he saw the place in the distance. What were his thoughts as he travelled with the three young men? He was the only one who knew the real purpose of the trip. No doubt the others wondered why he could not have sacrificed a lot closer to home.

Once Abraham had seen the place he stopped and said to the two young men, "You stay here with the donkey and I and the boy will go on. **We will worship and then return to you.** This is the first use of the word "worship" in the Bible. It is interesting that Abraham used that word. Why didn't he say, "We will go and **offer a sacrifice**, and return to you? To worship is to pay divine honor to God. This can be done by praise and thanksgiving and in sacrifice. For true worship we must have a real **appreciation of the sacrifice that was made** for us. Abraham certainly knew the value of his sacrifice. It was his son. Then to worship we need time for **preparation**. Abraham had had three days of thinking and praying about his sacrifice. And he was **ready** with the wood and the fire and the knife.

And how could Abraham say he and Isaac would **return**? He was going to offer up Isaac as a **burnt offering**. How could Isaac return? Hebrews gives us the answer. We read there that Abraham "considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead," Hebrews 11.19. Abraham had never seen anyone raised from the dead. **But he believed God could bring Isaac back from the dead even if he burnt him on the altar.** That is the kind of faith that filled Abraham's life and made him the great man he was. By his words and actions we see that Abraham had already passed God's test for him. But God must show him His love.

But what about Isaac in all this? He was a strong young man so Abraham laid the firewood on him to carry. Then Abraham took fire in a pot and a knife and they set off together. But Isaac had a problem. He said to Abraham, "Father, we have fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?" (This is the first mention of a lamb in the Bible though Abel may have sacrificed one in Genesis 4.4). It was a sensible question. No doubt Isaac had seen his father offer many sacrifices. They had always included a lamb to be killed and offered on the fire. Now here was his father going off to sacrifice, but he had no animal with him. Had he forgotten?

So Isaac asked Abraham, "Where is the lamb?"

Abraham answered Isaac, "My son, God will provide Himself the lamb for the burnt offering." This is a remarkable reply. First we note Abraham's gentleness in answering his son. It was not the abrupt reply of a worried parent. It was, "My son." Then we see his confidence in God. "God will provide." But we see also something far more. God was going to provide Himself the lamb. It was to be God's provision of a sacrifice for **Himself**, not just for Abraham, Ephesians 5.2. Abraham was a prophet and this was a prophetic statement looking on to Christ, the Lamb of God, John 1.36.

Twice the Bible says, the two of them "**walked on together.**" There was a lovely communion between father and son, a picture of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally they came to the place of which God had told Abraham. There it was. There was no further walking needed. No reason for delay. All too soon the moment of death had arrived.

But Abraham wasted no time. He built the altar and arranged the wood. He laid it all in order. But there was still no lamb. The next statement is amazing. **Abraham bound his son Isaac and laid him on top of the wood.**

It is amazing for two reasons. Abraham was actually prepared to offer his beloved son. And the beloved son was actually ready to be offered. Isaac was a young man and Abraham was over 100 years old. When Isaac found out **he** was to be the sacrifice, he could easily have pushed Abraham away and run off. But he did not. He allowed himself to be bound on the altar. What a beautiful picture of God and His beloved Son! God was willing to give His Son and His Son was willing to die.

The last step was to kill the sacrifice - Isaac. Abraham reached for the knife to slay his son. What a moment for both of these men. We can only imagine their thoughts. But suddenly the voice of the Angel of the Lord called out "Abraham! Abraham!" How quickly Abraham replied again, "Here I am!" And the Angel said, "Do not harm the lad. Now I know that you fear God because you have not held back your son, your only son, from Me." Didn't God know this already? Of course. But in this trial Abraham's faith was put to the test and strengthened. The testing was for him and for a picture to us.

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by his horns in the bushes. God had caused a ram to wander up there and get his horns caught at the very place He knew Abraham would be. Abraham took the ram and killed him as an offering instead of Isaac. God would not allow His friend to suffer as He would suffer when His Son died.

What a joyful sacrifice that would be! Such rejoicing between Abraham and Isaac and their praise was to God!

This whole scene is a beautiful picture to us of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. The Father so loved the world He gave His Son to die for it. The Son was willing to go and He offered Himself as the sacrifice. But that time there was no substitute. There was no ram caught in the bushes. The Lord Jesus died. He died willingly. He died as the spotless Lamb of God for us. And all we have to do is accept the fact that the sacrifice was made for us. The price has been paid.

For this beautiful picture God used a ram. He caused the ram to be caught by his horns in the right spot at the right moment. What a God is ours! Here we have an obedient animal and two obedient men.



**Exodus 11, 12.**

## The Silent Dogs

In many countries today the dog is a beloved pet and thought of as part of the family. In some places the dog is taught to work pulling carts or sleighs, protecting sheep and leading the blind. In Eastern countries the dog is more often considered a pest, roving about in bands barking and howling, eating garbage and being a general nuisance. In the Bible dogs are often a picture of the enemies of God's children. In Exodus 11.7 we find the first mention of this animal.

The time had come for the Lord to deliver His people from Egypt where they had been captive for over 400 years. He chose Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to ask that His people be allowed to go off and worship together. But Pharaoh was not willing to let these slaves go even for a few days, Exodus 5.3-4. So God told Moses and Aaron He was going to lead Pharaoh to change his mind. He would do this by sending a series of plagues on the Egyptians. Of course God could have used other faster methods. But He chose to give Pharaoh every opportunity to obey Him and let the Israeli go. And through this we are given a picture of the long-suffering of God.

So God began to send one plague after another on the Egyptians. After some of the plagues Pharaoh would call for Moses and beg him to ask God to remove it. He would confess he had sinned

and promise to let the people go, Exodus 10.16-17, 24. Then when God removed the plague, Pharaoh would harden his heart and refuse. The Egyptians were plagued with everything from frogs to darkness, and the people, the animals and the land suffered terribly. But Pharaoh was stubborn. He kept on refusing. Why should he let all this cheap labour go even for a few days? Who would do all the hard work?

Finally God said to Moses, "There is one more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that he will let you go. In fact he will be so glad to see you go **he will drive you out completely.**" So Moses went to Pharaoh with this message, "The Lord has this to say to you. About midnight He will go out into the middle of Egypt and all the firstborn of each family will die. This means every family from Pharaoh to the lowest slave woman will have one dead. Even the cattle will suffer this loss. Such a terrible cry will rise up from the people as has never been heard before. There will never be such a cry again. But the Israeli will not be harmed. **Not even a dog will bark against them, man or beast.** For the Lord wants you to understand that He makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. And after that your servants will come and bow down before me and **beg us to leave.** Then we will go."

God had already shown a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israeli, for the plagues had not affected the Israeli, Exodus 8.22; 9.4,7; 9.26; 10.23. Now He was about to show a final distinction. In the land of Egypt the firstborn of every home would die. In the land of Israel no firstborn would die. The plague would not attack them. Nothing would be allowed to harm them. Not even ONE dog would bark at them nor at their beasts. This is a beautiful picture to us of the loving care God provides for His own. Nothing can harm us if He does not allow it, neither plague, nor man, nor beast.

This final word from God should have frightened Pharaoh. Sometimes Moses had come to Pharaoh and told him what plague the Lord would send next and the plague had come. Surely now Pharaoh would be fearful at this threat of losing his own firstborn? But he was not. Once again he refused Moses' request. The Bible says that Moses went out from Pharaoh's presence **in hot anger.** Moses was a meek man and it took a lot to make him angry. But the sight of this stubborn king defying God drove him to walk out in anger. He was furious that Pharaoh would harden his heart and take such a chance with the lives of his people and his own family. Are you taking the same chance by ignoring God's word?

Moses and Aaron went back to the Israeli and gave them the message from God. The firstborn of every home in Egypt was to be slain. But not in Israel if they did as God commanded. And this was

His command. Each family was to take a perfect little lamb and keep it for 14 days. Then they were to kill it in the evening and brush some of its blood on the two side posts of the door of their house and across the top. That night the Lord would go through the land of Egypt, and He would strike down all the firstborn of each family. But when He saw the blood on the door of each home in Israel, **He would pass over them**. They would not be harmed.

It happened as God had said. In the night all the firstborn of the land of Egypt died, from Pharaoh's firstborn to the firstborn of the lowest citizen. **There was not a house where there was not one dead**, Exodus 12.30. Think of the shock as each family found its dead child. Think of the cry of anguish that rose on the night air from thousands of Egyptians. There had never been a cry like that. There would never be one again. Think of the Israeli in their homes, shaken as they heard this terrible sound in the night. For they knew what it meant. But they had done as Moses told them and they were safe under the blood. Are you safe under the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Think of the dogs hearing this awful cry. Dogs don't like strange noises in the night and the first thing they do is to bark. One dog barking starts another and soon there is a chorus of howls and barks. But not this night. This terrifying cry in the night was the sound of human voices only. Not a dog moved its tongue against the Israeli or their beasts. For God had silenced them. The distinction between the Israeli and the Egyptians had to be shown to be complete. Nothing could rise against God's people unless He allowed it. The wailing and the commotion and death were in the homes and streets of the Egyptians. But with the Israeli there was quiet confidence and life and silent dogs. Silenced by their Creator.

## He Was With the Wild Beasts

### Mark 1.13

Our Lord was also in control of wild beasts when He was here on earth. Mark describes one event in six words. Just before the Lord began His ministry, the Holy Spirit led Him to go into the wilderness. There He ate no food for 40 days and 40 nights, Matthew 4.2. It was at this time that Satan tempted Him. But Satan failed. The Lord rebuked him three times with scripture, and Satan finally left Him, Matthew 4.3-11.

Forty days and nights alone in the wilderness would be a lonely experience. But Mark writes of two interesting things that happened to the Lord while He was there. **He was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to Him.** The wild beasts did not frighten or attack Him. Mark just says, **He was with them.** They were under His control. The Lord of glory had the company both of angels and of wild beasts. They were all part of His creation.

## **Creatures as Teachers – TEST 3**

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### **Indicate the letter of the correct answer**

1. The Philistines
  - a. were a desert people.
  - b. never defeated the nation of Israel.
  - c. were a constant enemy to the nation of Israel.
  
2. When the Ark of God was captured by the Philistines
  - a. Philistine victory was assured.
  - b. God was working out His purposes.
  - c. Hophni and Phineas were saved.
  
3. When the leaders of the Philistines saw the 'obedient' cows return the ark to Israel
  - a. they worshipped the Lord God of Israel.
  - b. they returned to their idol worship.
  - c. they forsook Dagon.
  
4. God promised Abraham, in his old age, that he would have a son.
  - a. and Abraham believed Him.
  - b. and that son was Ishmael.
  - c. but Abraham knew that it was impossible.
  
5. When God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice
  - a. he wept.
  - b. he pleaded for Isaac's life.
  - c. he simply obeyed.

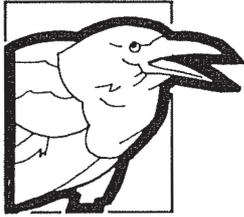
### **Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement**

6. The Philistine 'god', Dagon, fell on his face before the ark of the Lord.
7. The Philistines did not believe that the ark was the cause of their problems.
8. There is nothing too hard for God.
9. There was no substitute for the Lord Jesus –  
He died as the spotless Lamb of God for us.
10. For true worship we must have a real appreciation of the sacrifice  
that was made for us.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What is your appreciation of Jesus' death on Calvary?

# Birds



## Elijah's Ravens

### 1 Kings 17.1-6

The raven is the first bird mentioned by name in the Bible, Genesis 8.7. It was considered to be an unclean bird and the Israelites were commanded not to eat it, Leviticus 11.15. This was because it is part of the raven's nature to eat dead and decaying things. This thought is first suggested for us in the story of Noah and his ark.

God had saved Noah and his family from the terrible flood by telling Noah to build an ark large enough to hold his family and two of every creature. Noah obeyed God. It took him a long time but the day came when God told Noah to begin to put the animals into the ark. Finally Noah and his family entered and God closed the door behind him. Then it rained for 40 days and 40 nights and the fountains of the great deep and the flood gates of the sky opened. But the ark and all inside were saved. After many days the awful rains and floods stopped. Slowly the waters receded and one day the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. Ten weeks later the tops of the mountains could be seen.

Noah waited 40 more days and finally he opened up the window in the ark. He was anxious to know if the land was dry enough to live on. How could he find out? Noah chose the raven to give him that information. Noah knew that if the water had gone down enough the raven could feed itself from the decay on the soggy ground. He was right. The raven was let loose through the window but did not return to the ark. It was able to feed itself.

Then Noah sent out a dove. But the dove was not happy to stand in slime and eat decaying material. It was against her nature. She found no dry resting place for her foot. So she flew back to the ark, the only home she had known for months. Noah gently put out his hand and drew in the little dove. He waited seven more days and then sent out the dove again. This time the dutiful bird returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her beak. The Lord used her to tell Noah the earth was almost ready to live on again. Noah waited seven days and sent out his dove once more. She did not return to Noah. Her work was finished.

Most of the other references to ravens in the Bible also concern food. "Who prepares for the raven its nourishment when its young cry to God and wander about without food?" asks the Lord in Job

38.41. The psalmist answers, "He gives to the beast its food and to the young ravens which cry," Psalm 147.9. When our Lord was here He used ravens as a similar example. He said we were to think about the ravens. They don't sow any seed, or reap it. They do not own any barns or storerooms to hold food. Yet God feeds them, Luke 12.24. How much more valuable are you than the birds!

The raven is not a pleasant bird. It has beautiful black feathers, Song of Solomon 5.11, but a harsh croak. It is among the most intelligent birds but not sociable from man's point of view. And it steals eggs and young from the nests of other birds. This hardly seems a choice for God to use to perform one of His miracles. But God does not always use what is nice or the strong or the attractive. "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things to shame the things which are strong," 1 Corinthians 1.27. So He chose the ravens for a special job and the ravens obeyed. Here is their story.

Elijah was one of the greatest men who ever lived, a prophet and a man of God. He springs into the pages of the Bible with no previous introduction. We know nothing of his past or his family. We are just suddenly told, "Now Elijah the Tishbite who was one of the settlers of Gilead said to Ahab..." Ahab was the wicked king of Israel at that time. He was the one the Bible describes as doing "more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him," 1 Kings 16.33. He walked in the sins of wicked Jeroboam and he further angered God by marrying Jezebel, a heathen princess. **There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, stirred up by his wife Jezebel,** 1 Kings 21.25. He then proceeded to follow Jezebel's lead and to worship the idol Baal. Most of the nation of Israel followed him and did the same. Ahab was a blot on Israel's history and God was about to deal with him.

One of the ways God used to punish His people was by withholding rain. The land would not yield and so a famine would come, 2 Chronicles 6.26, Deuteronomy 11.16,17. Elijah had prayed for this for his own country Israel and he believed God would answer, James 5.17,18. Elijah knew the condition of Israel under Ahab. The worship of Baal was widespread. This meant God had been closed out and Baal was the object of praise. People thanked Baal for daily food - not the Lord God who gave it. The only way to bring the people to their knees was to send a famine. But if a famine crept over the land they might claim it came from some evil god, or by chance. Elijah wanted Ahab and the people to know **this came from the Lord God of Israel.**

Now it was time to tell Ahab exactly that. So suddenly one day Elijah arrived at the court of King Ahab and calmly announced, "As the Lord the God of Israel lives before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word," 1 Kings 17.1. Then he left.

No doubt King Ahab thought Elijah was completely mad. He was totally out of place in Ahab's palace. Here was this prophet wearing a hairy garment of sheepskin wrapped together with a leather girdle walking into his court to announce there would be no rain! It was too much. But the Lord knew it would not be too long before it became evident that Elijah's prophecy was true. And the Lord knew also that when that happened, Ahab would begin to blame Elijah for his troubles, and send soldiers even to other countries to find him, 1 Kings 18.10. So the Lord prepared a hiding place for Elijah, (see Isaiah 26.20).

Elijah's life was in double trouble. First the king would soon be after him and second he might starve in the famine. So God spoke to Elijah. **Go away from here.** Turn to the east. Hide yourself by the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan River. You will have food and drink there. You can **drink the water of the brook** and **I have commanded the ravens to feed you.**

How would you feel about that? God has ordered you out of your home and country where there is still some food, to go to a deserted spot by the brook Cherith. You can understand living by the brook - fresh water to drink as long as the stream flowed. But the food? **The ravens will feed you.** Ravens? Those big cawing noisy miserable thieves? Please! They would be hungry too and would certainly gulp down anything they could lay their beaks on. You would not see a crumb of it. No. Far better to stay here and take your chances....Would you speak like that?

Not Elijah. Elijah was a man of God. The Bible simply says, "He went and did according to the word of the Lord." It had not been easy for Elijah to go into the splendour of Ahab's ivory palace and tell him a drought was coming. But he went. The word of the Lord was enough for him. Now it was not easy for Elijah to go to the brook Cherith. But the Lord had told him **He had commanded the ravens to feed him there.** And Elijah believed God. He believed that somehow this miracle would take place. So he went.

Think of Elijah walking the 30 miles to the brook Cherith. How was this going to work out? And what about the ravens? They were still the same miserable noisy thieves they had always been. They had not changed their nature. How could they possibly carry food for Elijah? Where would they get it in a famine? How would

they know where to go? How would they know what to pick up? Why wouldn't they eat it themselves?

We do not know if Elijah worried about these things. But they were never a problem. The ravens simply obeyed God and He guided them. The Bible tells us "the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. And he would drink from the brook," 1 Kings 17.6. Every morning when Elijah awoke he was reminded of God's care for him. And every evening before the sun set the shiny black wings would appear as the ravens carried his meal to him again. Elijah was hidden from Ahab but known of God, Psalm 32.7; Genesis 16.13.

Elijah and the ravens both did the will of God. The result was a miracle and the prophet was fed. Later in his life Elijah was rebuked by the Lord when he ran away from his job. We do not read that about the ravens.

## Creatures as Teachers – TEST 4

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. In the Bible, dogs are often seen as
  - a. family pets.
  - b. guards.
  - c. a picture of the enemies of God's children.
  
2. During His temptation the Lord rebuked Satan
  - a. with Scriptures.
  - b. three times.
  - c. both a and b.
  
3. The fact that during His temptation Jesus 'was with the wild beasts' is mentioned in
  - a. Matthew's gospel.
  - b. Mark's gospel.
  - c. Luke's gospel.
  
4. Most references to ravens in the Bible mention
  - a. their intelligence.
  - b. their colour.
  - c. food.
  
5. For ravens to feed Elijah was
  - a. a miracle.
  - b. natural.
  - c. not unusual.

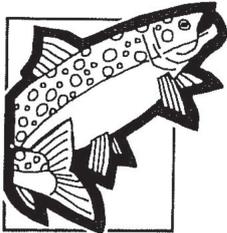
### Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. The first mention of a dog in the Bible is a beautiful picture of God's care for His own.
7. The dogs were silenced by their Creator.
8. The first bird mentioned in the Bible is a dove.
9. Peter tells us that 'Elijah was a man just like us'.
10. Elijah and the ravens did the will of God.

### WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How important is it to you to do the will of God?

# Fish



## Jonah's Great Fish and Jonah's Worm

We know very little about Jonah. In 2 Kings 14.25 he is said to be the son of Amittai from Gath-hepher, and a **prophet**. This was confirmed by the Lord Himself in Matthew 12.39. In Kings he was also called God's **servant**. We know that at least one of his prophecies was fulfilled during the reign of Jeroboam 2, so he lived at that time or just before. It is thought that he followed Elisha as the prophet of Israel.

Many of the prophetic books in the Bible begin, "The word of the Lord came to" the prophet. It is a simple fact. The word of the Lord came. The prophet recognized it as the word of the Lord and he acted upon it. He wrote it down or spoke it or did what the Lord told him to do. But not Jonah. Not this time.

Jonah recognized the word of the Lord all right, but he did not like what He said. "Get up and go to that great city of Nineveh and warn them that I have seen their wickedness," said the Lord. Why didn't Jonah like this command from God? Nineveh was indeed a wicked city. They were guilty of many things including extreme cruelty and idol worship. And they were Israel's enemies. Yet God was willing to warn them of judgment to come. He had warned his own people and they did not listen. Now He wished to warn their enemies. Maybe they would hear Him. He had done this also through Joseph and later through Daniel, Genesis 41; Daniel 2,5. God is ever gracious.

Nineveh was a Gentile city and Jonah was a Jew. He knew that God would forgive the people of Nineveh if they repented of their sins. Then these very Assyrians who were Israel's enemies would be sharing God's blessings with the Jews. Jonah did not want to be the one who brought about this blessing for his enemies. Besides it would make him look foolish.

Jonah appears mean and proud and without mercy. Just like us. So he got up in a hurry and took off for a city in the **opposite** direction. He had no intention of obeying God. The Bible says he "fled from the presence of the Lord." Jonah did not think he could run away from God Himself, Psalm 139.7. He just wanted

to avoid the **service** of God. He did not like the job God had given him. So he took what money he had and packed his bag and left for Tarshish as fast as he could.

From here on Jonah's life went **down**. Any time we try to avoid God's commands our life heads **down**. He went **down** to Joppa to look for a ship going to Tarshish. When he found one the Bible says he "paid the fare" and got aboard. Jonah was paying his own way on his trip **down**. Next he went **down** into the ship with the other passengers and crew. Again the Bible says he was going away "from the presence of the Lord." We do not know the purpose of the others aboard the ship. But we do know Jonah's. He was avoiding God's work. So the ship set sail for Tarshish.

But the Lord was not about to let Jonah sail away so easily. He had chosen Jonah to do this job and Jonah was going to do it. Even if it meant his going through one of the most unusual experiences ever given to a prophet.

First the Lord sent a strong wind on the sea, followed by a great storm. The ship was tossed about like a toy and those on board were sure it was going to break in pieces. Even the sailors were afraid and began to call on their gods for help. They threw out the cargo to try to lighten the ship, and were in a panic for their lives.

But Jonah was not there to help. He had gone **down** again into the hold of the ship and had fallen asleep. All the crew and passengers were praying and fighting for their lives and to save the ship, while Jonah was calmly sleeping. Are we asleep while those around us are in desperate need of help? Are we just concerned with caring for ourselves? Or exhausted from avoiding service?

The captain of the ship was shocked to find a man asleep in the middle of all this struggle. He rebuked Jonah. "Why are you sleeping?" he said. "Get up and call on your God! Maybe your God can help us!" Jonah got up and joined the group. By now the crew was desperate. They began to think this disaster must have been sent for a reason. Perhaps there was someone aboard who had done some evil thing and this was the punishment the gods were sending. They decided to cast lots to find out. Whoever the lot fell upon would be considered guilty (see 1 Samuel 14.42). The lot fell on Jonah. No doubt there were other worse sinners on board, but God had sent the storm for **Jonah**.

Immediately the other men began to ask him questions. "Why has this happened to us?... What is your work?....Where do you come from?...Who are your people?" And Jonah told them. He did not hide anything. "I am a Hebrew," he said. "I fear the Lord God of heaven who made everything." Then he went on to tell them **he was running from the presence of the Lord**. Now the

men were truly frightened. "How could you do this?" they asked. "What shall we do with you to calm this sea?" The storm had become worse and the sea was raging. The sailors were even more terrified both because they were in such a storm and because they had a man on board who had disobeyed his God.

Jonah had an answer. "There is only one thing to do. Pick me up and throw me overboard," he said, "then the sea will be calm. For I know this great storm has come because of me." We must admire Jonah at this point. How many of us would have suggested that we be thrown into a raging sea? How many of us would more likely have cried to God for help? But Jonah knew he was guilty and the only way to save the others was to get rid of him.

The sailors were not happy with this idea so they tried hard to row the ship to shore. But they could not. The sea was even stormier. This effort on the part of the sailors was a real rebuke to Jonah. These men struggled hard to save one life - his. He had been unwilling to try to save a city.

It was hard for these men to take Jonah at his word and toss him into such a wild sea. They made one last plea to Jonah's God. "Please Lord do not let us die because of this man's life. You have done as You pleased. So this must be Your will."

Then they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea. At once the sea became calm. When the men saw this they realized Jonah's God was God indeed and they feared Him. They also offered a sacrifice to Him and made vows. They believed.

Now Jonah was gone, the sea was calm and the men had accepted God. They went on their way. But Jonah was not gone. True, he was thrown into the sea. True he had vanished from sight. But he had not drowned. God was not finished with Jonah yet. The next sentence is wonderful. "God had appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights."

Jonah thought he was finished and so did the men who threw him overboard. But God had prepared a great fish to serve Him. Somewhere in the depths of that raging sea God had a special, obedient fish. Jonah had sunk **down** so low that the "weeds were wrapped about" his head. He was drowning with no help in sight. Then God's appointed servant - the great fish - swam up and swallowed the prophet. In one gulp Jonah was saved from the sea. Here we have an obedient creature with a disobedient prophet in his stomach.

Imagine Jonah's surprise. One moment he was sinking in a raging sea and the next moment he was in the warm, dark insides of a great fish. This might have been even more terrifying than

the sea. He was now in a prison from which there was no escape. He was there three days and three nights.

Then he prayed.

He did not cry for help. He prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. **Thanksgiving?** In the stomach of a fish? With no way out? How could he be thankful? **He was thankful for salvation from the raging sea.** But surely he was in a worse situation now? Perhaps. But he was still thankful and he praised the Lord.

A few thousand years after Jonah lived we may feel very critical of him. We may say, "You were wrong to run away from the Lord's service." But he is certainly an example at this point in his life. From the hopeless prison of a great creature's stomach **he gave thanks.** Many years later Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks," 1 Thessalonians 5.18. Not **for** everything - **in** everything. In every situation there is something for which we can thank the Lord. Jonah did this here.

Jonah ended his prayer with "Salvation is from the Lord." It was at that very moment that the Lord commanded the great fish and it vomited up Jonah on the dry land. This great, wonderful, prepared creature had again obeyed the Lord its Master. We do not read of it again.

But what of Jonah? Did he head off home for a change of clothes? No. The Lord was not yet finished with Jonah. The Bible reads, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a **second time,**" with the same command, "Go to Nineveh." This time Jonah got up at once. The Bible reads he "went to Nineveh **according to the word of the Lord,**" Jonah 3.3. He was now willing to obey. He had had enough of raging seas and his dark hotel room. He was on his way. Sometimes it takes that much to move us to obedience. The word of the Lord should be enough. But we resist it. And avoid it. And ignore it. Until God sometimes uses stronger methods to convince us.

So Jonah went. And he preached God's warning in the great city of Nineveh. "In 40 days Nineveh will be overthrown." Picture Jonah walking through the streets of Nineveh after his terrible experiences, his skin burned and his clothes a mess. Think of the people of Nineveh. They were guilty of much wickedness and idolatry. Suddenly this strange Jewish prophet arrived in their city to tell them his God had looked down on them and found them guilty. He gave them 40 days to repent or perish. The Ninevites repented. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth - all of them. Even the king laid aside his royal robes and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He also issued a proclamation that everyone

should do the same. "Who knows?" he said, "Maybe God will relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not die."

What a rebuke this was to Israel. For hundreds of years God had sent His servants to them to preach His messages. But they refused to hear. They had even killed God's messengers. Now the word is preached to the Ninevites for the first time and every person in the city repented. What about you? How many times has God offered His salvation? When will you repent?

Jonah was delighted at this response to his preaching and he went home rejoicing? Not at all. He was furious. Why would he be angry because people believed what he said? He told God why. "Didn't I say this when I was at home? Isn't that why I ran away? I **knew** You were gracious and kind. I **knew** You would forgive them if they repented. Now please take away my life for I want to die." Can this be the same Jonah who thanked the Lord from the stomach of the great fish? The same man. He actually would rather die than live to see his enemies forgiven. How could he be that mean and selfish? Easy. He was like us.

God's answer to Jonah was simple. "Do you have a good reason to be angry?" Here is a question we could ask ourselves the next time we are angry. Do we have a good reason for our anger?

Jonah had none. He gave God no reply. Instead he left the city in anger and on the east side of it he made a shelter. There he sat in its shade to wait and see what would happen to Nineveh. Was he hoping for fire from heaven? Or an earthquake? We don't know. But it was an odd place to sit.

But God was still watching over Jonah. No matter what we do, once we are a child of God He will never desert us. God prepared a lovely plant to grow swiftly over Jonah for a shade over his head in the extreme heat. Jonah was very happy about this plant. But the next day God appointed a worm to attack the plant and the plant withered. When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on poor Jonah's head. He almost fainted with the heat and begged the Lord to let him die.

But God was teaching Jonah with all this. Now He had a further question. "Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?" This time Jonah thought he was right. "Yes, I do have a good reason to be angry even to death," he said. Then the Lord gave His final word to Jonah. "You felt compassion for a mere plant. You did not work for it or make it. It came up in a night and died in a night. Should I then not have compassion on Nineveh

and its people and children and animals?" God had **created** all these. Was He not permitted to have compassion on them?

Jonah had no answer to that. Here the book ends, and Jonah leaves the scene surely embarrassed by God's question. He is shown to us as disobedient, selfish, thankful, courageous and without compassion. But meantime God had used an obedient fish, a plant, a worm and an east wind to rebuke His servant.

Yet Jonah is the person used by the Lord as a picture of His resurrection. **As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.** Matthew 12.40. We might not have chosen Jonah as among our top ten prophets to be honoured in this way. But the Lord chose him and he used an obedient fish to help him. Thank God for His mercy to all of us.

## **The Fish with a Coin**

### **Matthew 17.24-27**

We have seen how the Lord used a large fish in the story of Jonah. He also used a small one. This event took place when the Lord was here on earth.

Many years before this the Israeli had spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. During that time the Lord had given instructions to Moses about making a place where He could live among His people, Exodus 25.8. Moses did exactly as God had said and a beautiful portable building was made. They called it a tabernacle - a tent - and it was set up in the middle of the camp where all could see it. A cloud rested over it by day and a fiery cloud by night. It was a picture of the presence of the Lord God in their midst, Numbers 14.14. The Israeli carried the tabernacle with them all through their wilderness journeys. Later Solomon built a permanent building and it was called the temple, Matthew 4.5.

God had also told Moses how the Israeli should support the service in this place of worship. Every man from 20 years of age and older was to pay an offering of half a shekel a year, Exodus 30.11-16. No one was exempt. All had to pay the same amount; the rich did not

give more nor the poor less. As a boy reached manhood and was listed among the people of God, he began to pay this tax.

The Jews had done this for centuries. Now the Lord Jesus Himself was here and it happened to be temple tax time. It is interesting that it is Matthew, the former tax collector, who records this event. Jesus and some of His disciples happened to be in Capernaum at this time and of course the tax collectors were busy. They came to Peter and asked him, "Doesn't your Teacher pay the temple tax?" Peter quickly said, "Yes". Then he went into the house where the Lord was to tell Him what had happened.

But the Lord knew all about it. Before Peter had a chance to speak the Lord asked him a question, "What do you think, Simon? Do the kings of the earth take taxes from their sons or from strangers?" Peter said to Him, "From strangers." "Then the sons don't have to pay," said the Lord.

What did He mean? The Lord was giving Peter a message. When kings order a tax, they take such payment from the people they rule over. They do not tax their own sons. Peter agreed. Now the tax on the temple was due. Every man 20 and over had to pay it. But the temple was **God's house** and Jesus was the Son of God. Therefore He should not have to pay a tax to support His own Father's house.

It was a striking statement. By rights then the Lord should not have to pay this tax. But our Lord never demanded His rights. He said to Peter, "We don't want to offend anyone about this so we shall take care of it." But He had no money. The Lord of glory did not have a coin to pay the tax (see Matthew 22.17-22). What could He do? It is here we see another beautiful miracle performed by the Lord.

"Go to the sea", He said to Peter, "and cast in a hook. Take the **first fish** that comes up. Open its mouth and you will find a coin there. Take the coin and pay the tax for you and Me." It was that simple for Him.

Here we find what appears to be a Man with no money. He is unable to pay His tax and the tax collectors are at the door. What will happen? But this same Man is the Lord of Creation. He has the wind and sea and all creatures under His control. He showed this once again and **did what only He could have done**.

He began by letting Peter know that we are not to give offense in these matters. It was just and right to pay a tax for the support of the house of God. Then He allowed Peter to have

a share in it. He let him use his natural skills as a fisherman to obtain the money.

The Lord knew a coin had fallen into the water. Then He caused a fish to catch the shiny coin in its mouth. The same fish was then directed to an area where the Lord knew Peter would cast in his hook. This same fish was to catch the hook and Peter was to take up the **first fish** that did so. Peter was then to open its mouth and take out the coin. That coin would be the **exact amount** needed to pay the tax for both of them. No more and no less. No extra and no shortage. How little we know of the power of God! And this is the same all powerful, all knowing God who cares for us.

## Schools of Fish

### **Luke 5.1-11, John 21.1-14**

We have seen how the Lord used a large fish and a small one for His miracles. Now we see how He controlled **schools** of fish. When the Lord was here He had much to do with the sea and lakes and fishermen and fish. He taught on the sea shore, Mark 2.13, and from a boat, Luke 5.3. His first disciples were four fishermen, Mark 1.16-20. He ate fish, Luke 24.42 and gave it to others to eat, Matthew 14.15-21. And here we shall see how large numbers of fish were under His control.

Luke wrote about one of these miracles. It was the Lord's practice to teach the word of God wherever He went. He also cured the sick, healed the lame and gave sight to the blind. He raised people from the dead. Crowds followed Him everywhere. All who came for help were cured and they listened to what the Lord taught. They were an example to us. We are quite anxious to come to the Lord in time of need. But are we willing to listen to what He has to say in His word?

This day the Lord stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee surrounded by a great crowd eager to listen to Him. They pushed each other to get closer to hear Him. It happened that four of the Lord's friends had been fishing nearby from two boats. Andrew, Peter, James and John had worked all night but caught nothing. Now they brought their boats to shore and began to wash out their nets.

The Lord saw the empty boats and got into the one that belonged to Peter. He asked Peter to put the boat out a little further from the shore. Peter did that and then the Lord sat down in the boat and began to teach the crowd on the beach.

It must have been a delightful scene. A large crowd of people sat on the sand right up to the edge of the water. The Lord sat in Simon Peter's fishing boat a few yards from shore, the boat rocking gently on the water. The only sound was the voice of the Son of God and the quiet lapping of the waves on the beach. Don't you wish you had been there?

When the Lord finished His teaching He said to Peter, "Put your boat out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." But they had been doing that for hours! Peter said to the Lord, "Master, we have worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if You say so, I will let down the nets." As a good fisherman Peter thought this was hopeless, yet he trusted the Lord enough to obey.

Do you have a situation in your life that seems hopeless? You feel you have done all you could? Maybe so. But have you let the Lord take over? Peter did. He took his boat back out into the deep waters and threw out the nets once again.

Immediately the nets were filled with a great mass of fish! There were so many fish the nets were strained to the limit and began to tear. Andrew and Peter waved to their partners James and John to come and help them. James and John drew their boat over quickly and helped pull in the fish. They filled Peter's boat and their own as well, and still the nets were not emptied. Finally the boats were so full they began to sink.

It was too much for Peter. He and his friends were completely astonished. They had fished here all their lives and they knew there was no way this could have happened except by a miracle. Peter threw himself down at Jesus' feet and said, "Leave me! I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Peter recognized the presence of the holy Son of God. And the result was to make Peter aware of the deepness of his own sin. Isaiah had the same type of experience when he had a vision of the Lord in all His holiness. In the vision even the seraphim could only say, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" in the presence of the Lord. All Isaiah could say was, "Woe is me for I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," Isaiah 6.1-5. Job finally realized some of the majesty of God and said,

"I have heard of You by the ear, but now my eye sees You and I repent in dust and ashes," Job 42.1-6.

Here our gracious Lord said to Peter, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch men." It was a call to follow Him in the service of the gospel. Peter had confessed his sin, and Jesus as his Lord. The other three men were also quite willing. They brought their boats full of fish to the shore and **left everything and followed Jesus**. This was the day of their greatest success in business but they knew it was **because the Lord had been with them**. Now they wanted to be with Him.

The Lord's timing is always perfect. He had **taught the people** on shore and then **finished speaking**. He had asked Simon to **push the boat out into the deep** and **let down the nets**. He had caused a huge school of fish to **swim by at that moment**, and **to be caught in Simon's nets**. And four men saw it, were convinced He was the Son of God and left all to follow Him. He did it with a school of fish.

## **Creatures as Teachers – TEST 5**

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### **Indicate the letter of the correct answer**

1. Jonah was told by God to go and warn the Ninevites
  - a. because they were Israel's enemies.
  - b. because He had seen their wickedness.
  - c. and he went.
  
2. Jonah
  - a. obeyed God and went to Nineveh.
  - b. had no intention of obeying God.
  - c. took a job on a ship sailing to Tarshish.
  
3. The Lord
  - a. gave up on Jonah.
  - b. gave up on Nineveh.
  - c. used a special, obedient fish to save Jonah.
  
4. In the stomach of the great fish Jonah
  - a. cried out for help.
  - b. was thankful and praised the Lord.
  - c. despaired.
  
5. 1 Thessalonians says
  - a. "for everything give thanks".
  - b. "give thanks for the good things in life".
  - c. "in everything give thanks".

### **Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement**

6. Jonah did not recognise the word of the Lord.
7. Jonah knew that God would forgive the Ninevites if they repented.
8. When we try to avoid God's commands our life heads down.
9. Jonah was delighted with the result of his preaching.
10. The Lord used Jonah as a picture of His resurrection.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

How has the story of Jonah affected your life?

**John 21. 1--14**

The Lord Jesus performed the miracle of the school of fish in Luke 5 at the beginning of His work. He performed a similar miracle in John 21 at the end of His work. Both miracles were for the benefit of His disciples and both times the disciples were at their usual work of fishing. They were not in some strange situation. The Lord can work His miracles just where we are.

By this time the Lord Jesus had died on the cross, been buried and rose again the third day. He had appeared twice to a group of His disciples after His resurrection, but had not yet ascended to heaven.

This particular evening seven of the Lord's disciples were together - Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others. Evidently they had met in a home - possibly Peter's - near the water. We are not told why they had met nor where the others were. No doubt they discussed the recent events about the Lord. Suddenly Peter said, "I am going fishing!" The others said, "We are going with you!" And they all went out immediately and got into the boat. There was nothing unusual about this as several of them were fishermen. But they fished all that night and caught nothing. Did they remember another such night three years before?

Finally when morning came they headed for shore. Ahead of them they saw a Man standing on the beach. The Man was Jesus, but the disciples did not know this. He called out to them, "Boys, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered "No!" Then Jesus called to them, "Let down the net on the right hand side of the boat and you will find some!" Here we have seven tired men who have fished all night and caught nothing. A Stranger on shore calls to them to try again on the right hand side of the ship. What would you do? The Bible says simply, "So they cast." They threw out their net on the right hand side. Suddenly the net was so full of fish they could not pull it back into the ship.

It was then that John realized who the Man was. Who but the Lord would know there was a school of fish on the right side of the boat at that very moment? John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Peter immediately wrapped his fishing coat around him and jumped into the water. At that moment nothing else mattered to him - not his friends, nor the boat, nor the fish. He had to get to the Lord. We see here the totally different natures of Peter and John. John was gentle and loving, quick to understand. Peter acted suddenly. Yet each was used of the Lord. Each Christian too has his own abilities and character and we should not despise each other. The Lord can use us all.

The other disciples came in the little boat, dragging the net full of fish behind them. But they were not far from shore and when they reached it they saw a welcome sight. There was a glowing fire of coals with fish sizzling on it and bread ready for them to eat. The Lord had prepared a meal for His weary friends. He showed them His care for their physical welfare as well as their spiritual. Then He added, "Bring up the fish you just caught." They were to see for themselves what working with Him could do. Peter went up to the little boat to help draw the net to land. There were 153 large fish in it, yet the net was not broken. It was another miracle. Now the Lord invited them to His prepared meal. "Come and eat breakfast," He said to them. No one dared to say, "Who are You?" They knew it was the Lord. The Lord then served them His meal of bread and fish. Surely they remembered it was bread and fish that had been served to the crowds at two earlier miracles. Now once again they had seen miracles performed by the Lord, but this time by the risen Lord. He was different only because He had His resurrected body. But He was their same loving, caring Lord. How often they must have remembered these events later and thought upon their meaning. They were to

**be fishers of men. They would be blessed when they followed His word. Their needs would be met. The Lord cared for them.**

And it was another proof of His resurrection. The Lord appeared to them in places where they had often seen Him - in the garden, on a road, in an upper room where they met, on a mountain in Galilee and here on the beach. They had not had visions in dark places, but He had been seen by all of them in scenes familiar to them and to Him.

And the Lord began these lessons by guiding a school of fish into a net.

## **Creatures as Teachers – TEST 6**

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

### **Indicate the letter of the correct answer**

1. Jesus
  - a. refused to pay the temple tax.
  - b. gave Peter the money for their tax.
  - c. let Peter use his skills as a fisherman to obtain the money.
  
2. Jesus
  - a. did not demand His rights as the Son of God.
  - b. refused to pay the tax.
  - c. asked Judas, the keeper of the money bag, for the money.
  
3. After Jesus' resurrection
  - a. all His disciples decided to go fishing.
  - b. seven of His disciples decided to go fishing.
  - c. His disciples gave up fishing.
  
4. The disciples
  - a. fished all night and caught nothing.
  - b. had a successful night's fishing.
  - c. expected to see Jesus.
  
5. The disciples
  - a. were too tired to obey the Stranger.
  - b. did not believe the Stranger.
  - c. obeyed the Stranger.

### **Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement**

6. In the time of Jesus all Jewish males (over 13) had to pay an annual temple tax.
7. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation.
8. Peter, Andrew, James and John left everything and followed Jesus.
9. As soon as John realised who the Stranger was, he jumped into the water.
10. Each Christian has his own abilities and character, and God can use them all.

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What is the most important lesson that we can learn from these creatures?