

Bible Characters Notes

for Your Weekly Bible Study

*Notes on the Bible characters mentioned in the weekly Bible Lesson
with correlative references from the Christian Science periodicals.*

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Soul and Body

For week of May 15 - 21, 2023

Cast of characters are listed in the order of appearance in this week's Lesson

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Joshua (mentioned in Joshua 22)

[Josh'ū uh] ("Jehovah is salvation")

Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim. He is first mentioned in the narratives of the events following the Exodus, where he appears as "Moses' assistant," or apprentice "and successor to Moses. In the book of Joshua, he functions as military commander in the 'conquest' of Canaan and as administrator of the allotment of the land to the tribes." (*Eerdmans Bible Commentary*) Facts about his life flow through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

"The narrative of the life of Joshua, the son of Nun, is naturally divided into two parts, in which he held entirely different positions with regard to the people of Israel, and discharged different duties. In the earlier period he is the servant and minister of Moses, loyal to his leader, and one of his most trusted and valiant captains. After the death of Moses he himself succeeds to the leadership of the Israelite host, and conducts them to a settlement in the Promised Land. The service of the earlier years of his life is a preparation and equipment for the office and responsibility that devolved upon him in the later period." (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

He was born in Egypt during the period of slavery and traveled with Moses from Egypt. "He first appears in Ex. 17:8-13, where Moses appoints him to lead the battle against Amalek, which he does successfully. In Exod. 33:11 he appears as a young man serving as Moses' assistant in the tent of meeting." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) His most famous battle as a military leader was at the liberation of Jericho [**East-central West Bank**], and that without a bow and arrow being launched. He was one of the twelve who surveyed the Promised Land (Canaan [**Israel**]). "Of the spies sent by Moses, only he and Caleb had reported favorably on the land and, of the Exodus generation, only they entered the land." (*Complete Bible Handbook*)

The Book of Joshua reflects the periods of his life:

The preparation for conquest (chapters 1-5:12)

The conquest of Canaan (chapters 5:13-12)

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The settlement of Canaan (chapters 13-22)

His farewell address (chapters 23, 24)

"At Moses' death Joshua was chosen as his successor (Josh 1:1,2)." (*Who Was Who in the Bible*) "Thereafter Joshua commanded the Israelites; his command, however, was that of a military chief or warlord, while Moses' was like that of a tribal leader." (*All the People of the Bible*) He led the Israelites to conquer the land (Joshua 1-2), supervised the division of the territory among the 12 tribes, and led the people to renew their covenant with God (Joshua 13-22)." (*Who Was Who in the Bible*) "The miraculous crossing of the Jordan (3:7-4:24) has many reminiscences of the crossing of the Red Sea." (*Interpreters Dictionary*)

"The history of Joshua in his new capacity as supreme head and leader of the people in several instances recapitulates as it were the history of his greater forerunner. It was not Head unnatural that it should be so; and the similarity of recorded events affords no real ground for doubt with regard to the reliability of the tradition concerned. The position in which Israel now found itself on the East of the Jordan was in some respects not unlike that which confronted Moses at Kadesh-barnea or before the crossing of the Red Sea. Joshua, however, was faced with a problem much less difficult, and in the war-tried and disciplined host at his command he possessed an instrument immensely more suitable and powerful for carrying out his purpose." (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

"*Capture of Jericho.* The narrative that follows, of the taking of Jericho, illustrates, as would naturally be expected in the case of a city so situated the effeminate and unwarlike character of its inhabitants. There was apparently little or no fighting, while for a whole week Joshua with priests and people paraded before the walls. A brief reference (*Joshua 6:1*) seems to indicate that the citizens were quickly driven to take refuge behind their fortifications. Twice seven times the city was compassed, with the ark of the covenant borne in solemn procession, and at the 7th circuit on the 7th day, while the people shouted, the wall of the city fell "in its place" (*Joshua 6:20* margin), and Jericho was taken by assault. Only Rahab and her household were spared. All the treasure was devoted to the service of the Lord, but the city itself was burnt, and a solemn curse pronounced upon the site and upon the man who should venture to rebuild its walls (*Joshua 6:26*). The curse was braved, whether deliberately or not, by a citizen of Bethel in the time of King Ahab; and the disasters foretold fell upon him in the loss of his children (*1 Kings 16:34*)." (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

"Timnath-serah in Mount Ephraim was assigned as Joshua's peculiar inheritance." (*Dummelow Commentary*) "Joshua...was buried at Timnath-serah,...in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim to which he belonged." (*Who's Who in the Old Testament*) His characteristics were faithfulness, consecration, single-mindedness, reverence, courage, obedience, and decision. "Like the era in which he lived, he has been magnified and idealized by the Deuteronomic historians in their presentation of the history of Israel in the land." (*Oxford Guide to People & Places*)

Isaac = Rebekah

Esau

Jacob (Israel)

Leah

Reuben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

Issachar

Zubulun

Dinah

Zilpah (Leah's maid)

Gad

Asher

Rachel Bilhah (Rachel's maid)
Joseph Dan
 Manasseh = A Syrian Naphtali
 Ephraim
 Benjamin

Reubenites (mentioned in Joshua 22)

Reuben was "the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah and one of the twelve tribes of Israel." (*Oxford Guide to People & Places*)

"Moses gave permission to Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh to settle [East] of the Jordan, provided that they took part in the conquest of the territory assigned to the other tribes [Num 32]....Reuben was an important tribe in the age of the Judges, for it is severely upbraided for not taking any part in the common defense during the great crisis when the Northern tribes defeated Sisera (Judges 5:15-17). The Reubenites must have suffered greatly at the hands of the Moabites, whose territory adjoined, for their numbers dwindle and they are not heard of in later history." (*Funk & Wagnalls Dictionary*)

Gadites (mentioned in Joshua 22)

"[gad] (*good fortune*) — the name of the founder of a tribe in Israel" (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)

"Jacob's seventh son, the first-born of Zilpah, Leah's maid, and whole-brother to Asher. Gen 30:11-13; Gen 46:16; Gen 46:18. (B.C. 1753-1740)." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*)

"Moses praised Gad for his bravery and faithfulness to duty (Deu 33:20-21). With the possible exception of Ezbon, Gad's seven sons all founded tribal families (Num 26:15-18)." (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*) In the Blessing of Moses (Deu 33:20) Gad is compared to a lioness that teareth the arm and the crown of the head, and later (1Ch 12:8; 1Ch 12:14) the Gadites who joined David are described as leonine in appearance and incomparable in combat: 'Their faces are as the faces of lions, the smallest is equal to a hundred and the greatest to a thousand.'" (*Hastings Bible Dictionary*)

Manasseh (mentioned in Joshua 22)

[muh nass'uh] (Heb. "who makes to forget")

Manasseh was the elder of the two sons of Joseph. He and his brother Ephraim were afterwards adopted by Jacob as his own sons. There is an account of his marriage to a Syrian; and the only thing afterwards recorded of him is, that his grandchildren were "brought up upon Joseph's knees," i.e., were from their birth adopted by Joseph as his own children.

The tribe of Manasseh was associated with that of Ephraim and Benjamin during the wanderings in the wilderness. They encamped on the west side of the tabernacle. According to the census taken at Sinai, this tribe then numbered 32,200. Forty years afterwards its numbers had increased to 52,700, and it was at this time the most distinguished of all the tribes.

Elisha (mentioned in 2 Kings 4)

[Ē lī'sha] ("my God is salvation")

TIME LINE: 850-800 BC

[Click here for complete notes on Elisha](#)

Elisha was an early Hebrew prophet who succeeded the prophet Elijah when Elijah's time on earth was finished. "His name appears for the first time in a divine command given to Elijah, according to which Elijah had to anoint Elisha as his successor (I Kings 19:16-17)." (*Interpreter's Dictionary*) Elisha ministered for about 50 years in the northern kingdom of Israel, serving God during the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. Elisha's work consisted of presenting the Word of God through prophecy, advising kings, anointing kings, helping the needy, and performing several miracles.

Elisha was the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah, a town on the western side of the Jordan River, and on the southern side of the plain of Beth-shean. Elijah found Elisha plowing with a team of oxen. As Elijah walked past Elisha, he threw his mantle over the younger man's shoulders.

Elisha "arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant, but Elisha is not mentioned again until shortly before Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire. Before taking his leave, Elijah fulfilled the final request of Elisha by providing him with a double portion of his prophetic spirit, making him his spiritual firstborn. Upon receiving Elijah's mantle, Elisha demonstrated this gift by parting the waters of the Jordan River, allowing him to cross on dry land.

He feeds the Shunammite widow and raises her son from the dead:

"Elisha, probably on his way between Carmel and the Jordan valley, calls accidentally at Shunem." (*Smith's Dictionary*) Here, he befriends a wealthy family. The Shunammite woman displayed hospitality toward the prophet by regularly feeding him and building a room onto her home where he could lodge. Elisha repaid the childless couple by promising them a son. Later, when tragedy struck the child, Elisha, raised him from the dead.

"the woman, whose son he had restored to life" (Shunammite woman) (mentioned in 2 Kings 4)

There are two "Shunammite" women mentioned in the Old Testament. Both were female natives or inhabitants of Shunem. The one in this week's lesson is the one who befriended Elisha, and whose son was revived by him. Her story is told in II Kings, chapter 4. "All that we know of this lady of social distinction is narrated in the chapter before us." (*All the Women of the Bible*)

MacArthur says that the reference to "a great woman" means that she "was great in wealth and in social prominence."

"In all likelihood she recalled the story of how Elisha had raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath. The Shunammite believed her lifeless son could in like manner be the center of a miracle. So firmly did she trust in the healing power of God, and in Elisha's ability to bring it forth, that not once did she say, 'My son is dead.'" (*All of the Women of the Bible*)

Later, "her move [fearing a famine] is but briefly told in the first two verses of II Kings 8.

In the next verse we learn that the Shunammite returned to her home seven years later, only to find that her house and land had been confiscated." (*Ibid*) After appealing to the king, the king ordered "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even now" (II Kings 8:6).

Gehazi (mentioned in 2 Kings 4)

[Geh hah'zih] (Heb. "servant"/"valley of vision")

Gehazi is a "servant or younger associate of the prophet Elisha." (HarperCollins Dictionary) "The Bible portrays him as a man of questionable character. On one occasion he tried to force a grieving woman away from the prophet (2 Kings 4:27)." (*Holman Dictionary*) He is "one of the many sad characters of the Bible who might have been great towers of righteousness and instead succumbed to worldliness." (*All the People of the Bible*)

"In the story of the wealthy Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4:8-37), Gehazi is portrayed as Elisha's faithful messenger and perhaps overzealous protector (v.27)." (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*) He is first mentioned when Elisha asked how he could reward the Shunammite woman who had welcomed him into her home. "Gehazi reveals that the woman has no son and that her husband is old." (*Eerdmans Dictionary*) "[He] suggested to Elisha the gift of a son to the childless woman and her husband as a reward for her extended hospitality to them." (*Interpreter's Dictionary*) A son was eventually born to the couple, but after a few years he died. The Shunammite woman sought Elisha's help. In an attempt to show Gehazi that faith healed, and not magic, Elisha sent him to lay the prophet's staff on the dead child's head "to pledge his personal involvement". (*Eerdmans Dictionary*) When Elisha himself went to the child, the child revived.

"If the 'servant of the man of God' in 2 Kgs 6:15-17, who is explicitly described as Elisha's 'boy' (*na'ar*, v 17) is also to be identified with Gehazi (cf. 2 Kgs 4:43), the other suggested meaning of his name as 'valley of vision' becomes relevant. "To the natural eye the situation seemed hopeless indeed for Elisha's-servant." (*King James Bible Commentary*) It was Elisha's prayer that opened his eyes so that he could see that 'the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (v.17)." (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

"During a famine, Elisha sends the Shunammite woman away [to Philistai]. On returning she seeks the restoration of her property from the king [of Israel]. At Gehazi's intervention this request is granted (2 Kgs. 8:4-6)." (*Ibid*)

"Gehazi's true character came out in the story of Naaman, the Syrian whom Elisha cured of a skin disease. Elisha refused any reward, but Gehazi ran after Naaman to claim something for himself. He told Naaman that Elisha wanted a talent of silver and two changes of clothing for the needy. Because of his greed, lying, and misuse of the prophetic office, Elisha cursed Gehazi with the same disease from which Naaman had been cured." (*Who Was Who in the Bible*)

"a man...which had a withered hand" (mentioned in Mark 3)

"Controversies continue, two of them concerning the Sabbath. Christian readers often focus on the legalistic demands of Sabbath observance, forgetting its attractions.... The second Sabbath controversy (Luke 6:6-11) pictures Jesus going to the synagogue to teach ([Luke]v.6) and meeting a man with a withered right hand." (*Eerdmans Commentary*) "In the light of [these Sabbath] considerations, the two scenes [Matt] 12:1-14 as rewritten by Matthew should be seen as picturing Jesus' participation in this Jewish debate concerning the proper observance of the Sabbath, not a Christian rejection of 'Jewish legalism.'" (*People's NT Commentary*)

"Although this is only the third chapter [of Mark], a decision has already been made. Two groups who used to despise each other now conspire together to destroy Jesus." (*On Your Mark*) "To observant Jews, the Sabbath was a joy, not a burden." (*Ibid*) Although nowhere does the Old Testament prohibit *healing on the Sabbath*, "Jewish tradition prohibited the practice of medicine on the Sabbath, except in life-threatening situations." (*MacArthur Commentary*)

"These two words [*Rise...stand*, Luke v.8] are also words used for Jesus' resurrection (literally: "arise, stand up"). They may have an ordinary meaning, as here, but may also be understood to have a deeper connotation resonant with the overtones of the new life mediated by Jesus' resurrection." (*People's NT Commentary*)

When Jesus went into the synagogue, the man with the withered hand was already there, perhaps even planted by the Pharisees. "The scribes and Pharisees watched, wanting to find an accusation against him. Jesus asks a question (of the reader): 'Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?' (Luke 6:9)." (*Eerdmans Commentary*)

"Jesus looks around on them [[Luke]v.10], as he does in the Temple in Mk 11:11, with a scrutiny which sums up and judges." (*Peake's Commentary*)

"The man with the paralyzed hand [seems] not nearly as paralyzed as those whose hearts are hardened. They seem unable to breathe or to rejoice or to be open to new possibilities." (*On Your Mark*)

Pharisees (mentioned in Mark 3)

[Fair'uh see] (Heb. "to separate," Gr. "separated one")

The Pharisees were a small legalistic sect (about six thousand) of specially observant and influential Jews, mainly in Palestine, from the second century BC to the second century AD. They were probably the successors of the Assideans (i.e. the "pious"), a party that originated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in revolt against his heathenizing policy. "For the doctrines and beliefs of the Pharisees our main source is...Josephus." (*Interpreters Dictionary*) The first mention of them is in a description by him. "According to Josephus...[he] calls the Pharisees 'a choice [of life]' and a 'philosophy.' He gives some general characteristics of the Pharisees in contrast to the Sadducees and Essenes, recounts some of the activities and influence of this group, and mentions occasional influential Pharisees." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) "The Pharisees were the successors of the 'Holy Ones' who had fought for religious freedom during the Greek occupation of Palestine from 332 BC." (*Who's Who in the New Testament*) Josephus wrote for non-Jews in Greek of the three sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) or schools into which the Jews were divided during the Hasmonean period (145 BC).

References to the Pharisees occur widely throughout Jewish and Christian literature of the first two centuries AD. "In the land of promise they lived more or less separate—and sometimes competing—tribal existences, bound by their common history and their devotion to the God who dwelt in their midst in the shrine, which on occasion was moved from place to place." (*Cambridge Companion to the Bible*)

They "were the most numerous and influential of all the religious sects of Jesus' day. They were strict legalists. They stood for the rigid observance of the letter and forms of the Law, and also for the Traditions. There were some good men among them. But in the main they were known for their covetousness, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy." (*Halley's Bible Handbook*) They constituted the most important of the groups opposed to Jesus. "The Pharisees were a group that interpreted Torah so that its meaning could be applied to everyday life. Their name means 'interpreters,' but it can also mean 'separatists,' and they were called that by their opponents." (*Complete Bible Handbook*) "The synagogue was the peculiar institution of the Pharisees as the Temple was for the Sadducees." (*Funk & Wagnalls Dictionary*) "Luke's portrayal of the Pharisees recalls portraits of the Sophists in Hellenistic texts: the respected teachers of the common people, who come out to scrutinize Jesus' activities (Luke 5:17)." (*Eerdmans Dictionary*) "Jesus continually denounced their external observance of the Law, their multitude of petty traditions, and particularly their self-righteousness." (*Who's Who in the New Testament*)

"The Pharisees in John function both as government officials and as the learned doctors of the law who are interested in Jesus' teaching and dispute its truth." (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

The Pharisees are described by two first-century sources, the New Testament and Josephus, and also by rabbinic literature, which covers a broader period of time. Each source gives a different account of the Pharisees and modern descriptions differ widely depending on which sources are accepted and how conflicts are resolved. The picture of the Pharisees derived only from the Gospels and formerly accepted as historical, that they were little more than legalists and hypocrites and were culpably blind to Jesus' message, has largely been discredited as early Christian polemic against Jewish and rabbinic leadership. The interpretation of the Pharisees as religious liberals emanated from modern Jewish apologetics and is ill suited to antiquity. Though a comprehensive and secure description of the Pharisees eludes us, some insight can be gained from each of the ancient sources.

"The Pharisees were strongly monotheistic. They accepted the Old Testament as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body. They were missionary, seeking the conversion of Gentiles (Matt. 23:15). They saw God as concerned with the life of a person without denying that the individual was responsible for how he or she lived. They had little interest in politics. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept the teachings of the oral law." (*Holman Bible Dictionary*)

"The Pharisees and Sadducees appear as distinct parties in the latter half of the second century BC, though they represent tendencies traceable much earlier in Jewish history, tendencies which became pronounced after the return from Babylon (537 BC)...The opposition of both Pharisees and Sadducees (still mutually antagonistic, Acts 23:6-10) against the new 'sect' continued unabated during apostolic times." (*Baker Encyclopedia*)

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