

“AND BE THANKFUL”—A STUDY IN GRATITUDE TO GOD

Presented by

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As we read through God’s Word, we often find intriguing stories about fascinating historical events from the distant past. And, more often than not those stories contain important lessons that we today would do well to learn. For example, in 1 Samuel 15 we read how God told King Saul to destroy the Amalekites, their animals, and even their possessions because the Amalekites were so wicked. But in that same chapter we also read of how Saul disobeyed God and, as a result, lost his position as king. The moral to that story, of course, is that **it does not pay to disobey God!** Or, consider the account in Acts 5 where a husband and wife—Ananias and Sapphira—lied to Peter and the other apostles. Before that day had come to an end, God had struck both of them dead! The moral to that story is that when God says “Do not lie” (as He did in Leviticus 19:11), **He means it!**

But surely one story in the Bible that teaches us an incredibly valuable lesson is found in the Old Testament account about the people of Israel after they had left Egypt and were traveling to the Promised Land. Along the way, the Israelites began to gripe, bicker, and complain. In Exodus 16:2-3 we read,

“Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, ‘Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’”

But, as always, God took care of His people. Exodus 16:4 records God saying to the Israelites, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.” From that time on, every morning when they arose, the ground was covered with manna for them to eat. Then they began to complain about being tired of having only manna as food. In Numbers 11:13 we see the people crying out, “Give us meat, that we may eat!” So, God sent quail for them to eat. In fact, Numbers 11:20 tells us that they ate so much quail that it came out of their nostrils! Then they complained because they thought they were going to die of thirst. In Exodus 17:3 we find the Israelites saying to God, “Why have You brought us up out of Egypt to kill our children, our livestock, and us with thirst?” But, as Exodus 17:5-7 points out, in response to the Israelites’ complaints, God caused water to come out of rocks so they could drink as much as they wanted.

The Israelites were **really good** when it came to complaining. Yet when God responded in a favorable way to their numerous complaints by helping them, did they stop to **thank Him**? Not at all! While the Israelites were **experts** at complaining, they were **complete failures** when it came to expressing their gratitude.

The Scriptures make it clear that genuine, heartfelt gratitude is something on which God places a **very high** premium. For example, God once told King David, “The sacrifice that honors Me is a **thankful heart**” (Psalm 50:23, CEV). In addition, both the Old and New Testaments speak to us frequently

about the gratitude that we should express to God as a result of all He has done for us. David wrote, “**Tell the Lord how thankful you are** because He is kind and always merciful... The Lord is my God! I will praise Him and tell Him **how thankful I am**” (Psalm 118:1,28, NCV). The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:3-4, “You are God’s people, so do not let it be said that any of you are immoral, indecent, or greedy... Instead, **say how thankful you are**” (CEV). And in Colossians 3:15 Paul wrote, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you are called in one body; **and be thankful.**”

We often hear comments in Bible classes or sermons about “the **sin** of ingratitude.” Such comments are based in Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:2-4 Paul presented a lengthy list of all sorts of sins. During that discussion, Paul said that some people were “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, and unholy.” When we read statements such as those, they should serve to remind us that God has every right to **expect** us to be grateful to Him because He truly is, as the old song suggests, “the fount of every blessing.” As James put it, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).

In the Old Testament account of God’s dealings with King Hezekiah, we find a stern warning about just how seriously God views ingratitude on our part. The text of 2 Chronicles 32:24-25 reads as follows:

“About this same time, Hezekiah got sick and almost died. He prayed, and the Lord gave him a sign that he would recover. But Hezekiah was so proud that he refused to thank the Lord for everything He had done for him. This made the Lord angry, and He punished Hezekiah and the people of Judah and Jerusalem” (CEV).

Anytime we do something that “makes the Lord angry,” we **know** we are doing something **wrong**. What did Hezekiah do that made the Lord angry? He refused to express appropriate gratitude for what God had done for him. We should learn from Hezekiah’s mistake—and determine that we will not do what he did by failing to express our gratitude to God for the things He has done for us.

Learning how to say “Thank you” to God is something that **every** Christian ought to do. In fact, gratitude is a trait that we need to practice **often**. Our willingness to thank God shows Him that we are **not** ingrates, and that we **do** appreciate His efforts on our behalf. Let us adopt the same attitude expressed by David in Psalm 44:8 when he wrote, “**We boast about you, our God, and we are always grateful.**” How difficult should it be for us to offer praise and adoration to “the God of our salvation” (Psalm 65:5)? If we demonstrate such an attitude, then, and only then, will God know that we are genuinely grateful for everything He has done for us.