

## The Ant God's Teachers

"Four things are small (insignificant, unimportant) on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise (skillful, artful, intelligent): **The ants** are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; **The shephanim** (rock-rabbit, the hyrax – coney) are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; **The locusts** have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; **The lizard** (Poisonous – spider) you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces" (Proverbs 30:24-28). This passage points to the work ethic of the creatures mentioned. The continual activity to provide for the entire group is the primary lesson to be considered. However, there are other lessons to be learned by observing them. We will first consider the ant.

The organization of ants parallels the original organization of Israel after the conquest of Canaan. No king was sitting on a throne, but God was their ruler through the Law given to them at Sinai. Ants follow the way of life and rules of order given by their creator in the beginning. A study of Judges, however, highlights a big difference between the ants and Israel. Although neither group had a king, in Israel, *"every man did what was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 17:6), while the ants diligently obey the instructions given to them by God. Israel broke every commandment, and God allowed the nations to destroy them. The ants continued through the millenniums doing the tasks God gave to them and continue today. They devour dead plants and animals, contributing to cleaning and nourishing the earth. They ventilate the soil with their tunnels to improve plant growth. In arid, hot environments, they build their anthills upward in towers, as much as 25 feet tall, to provide cooling air through their homes. All while gathering food and caring for each other.

Ant society divides responsibilities so that every ant has a job. From incubating eggs, gathering food, cleaning the house, and fighting off enemies, all needed work gets done. As the church began and congregations grew, Paul outlined the duties necessary this way. *"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues"* (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). These were all necessary until the full gospel with all truth was fully revealed. Then some duties disappeared, and others were created. Today, elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers are visible, performing their duties by the authority of the gospel. Unseen are the other members, each doing their part to spread the gospel, care for the needy, encouraging each other, and doing works of hospitality.

In the world there are many different types of ants. Ants vary in size from nearly microscopic to inch long giants. Each type lives in an environment suited for its physical attributes. In comparison, we live in a human society that provides many delights and pleasures but lacks the gospel. Not all can preach or teach. Not all are equal in the ability to encourage and exhort. And not all can transport things to satisfy the needs of homebound. As Paul said, *"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another"* (Romans 12:4-5). The ants act as one unified body, going about doing many coordinated tasks, completing their God-given duties. We live and work in the unified Body of Christ, the church.

Following the example of the ants, members of the church should follow Paul's advice. *"Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness"* (Romans 12:6-8).

If we try to force the lesson of laying up food for winter in this passage, our study of ants would not include most ant types. Only the "harvester" ants cut and store food or use cut leaves to grow the fungus they eat., but all ants have jobs to do. So the parable Jesus told of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), serves best to illustrate our lesson. The two servants that stayed busy with the master's business received the reward. The servant that did nothing received punishment. Purposeful actions, directed by the gospel, will result in the spread of the gospel, the salvation of many, and our future reward.

*"For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:10-12).*