

JOSHUA AND THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

April 2, 2023

Joshua 1:1-9; 6:1-7, 15-21

The book of Joshua gives us the history of the Israelite generation after the death of Moses. The people of God finally cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land of Canaan. God demonstrates that He keeps His promises by giving them victory after victory over the Canaanites, so long as the people were faithful to Him.

FOCUS ATTENTION:

ASK: Consider God's faithfulness. What are some ways God has demonstrated that He is faithful and that He always keeps His promises?

Essence of the Text

With the death of Moses, Joshua is commanded by God to lead the people of Israel into the land of promise. God demonstrates His power and faithfulness by giving the Israelites victory over the fortified city of Jericho.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Joshua 1:1-9: God Gives Joshua a Mission and Mandate

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

The opening chapter of the book of Joshua contains three parts, comprised of the Lord's charge to Joshua (vv. 1-9), Joshua's response (vv. 10-15), and the people's resolve to obey God and follow Joshua's leadership. (vv. 16-18). Here, we will focus on the first section, where God commissions Joshua to be the new leader of Israel.

Vv. 1-2 Twice in these opening verses, Moses is referred to as the Lord's servant. It was a lofty title given by the sovereign Lord, indicating Moses' status as leader of the nation and his faithful service. Joshua served Moses well as his assistant during the years of the Exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wanderings. Joshua, along with Caleb, were the only two members of the first generation to be allowed into the promised land. The two men, along with ten other men, went into Canaan to bring back a report to Moses and the people. Joshua and Caleb brought back a good report, encouraging the assembly to enter the land. Unfortunately, the other ten spies were fearful, ignored God's promise of protection and provision, and gave a bad report. (See Numbers 13 for a full account). God punished that faithless generation by making them wander in the wilderness until a new generation arose that would possess the land. Even Moses was forbidden to enter Canaan, due to his own disobedience. (See Numbers 20:8-11).

"Moses, my servant, is dead." Following thirty days of the people's mourning for Moses, the Lord immediately commands Joshua to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan river into "the land I am giving to them." God is fulfilling the promise made long ago to Abraham. Joshua understood that to step forward and take up the reins except under God's immediate direction would have been presumptuous. Although Joshua had long been the presumed successor, it remained God's prerogative to guide the transition and formally confer authority upon Joshua. The speech we read in these verses is Joshua's coronation, so to speak—his formal installation as the new head of the nation. Joshua had some big sandals to fill as the new leader of Israel!

Vv. 3-5 Hundreds of years after Abraham, God repeated the promise to Moses. Deuteronomy 11:24-25 states, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the western sea. 25 No one shall be able to stand against you. The Lord your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as he promised you." The promise was fulfilled for Joshua and the people of Israel, the generation that showed itself to be faithful to the Lord.

Joshua's task to lead Israel into the Promised Land is momentous for his people. Israel has been wandering in the

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wilderness waiting for this moment for forty years. But from a broader, theological perspective, Israel has been waiting for this for generations. Way back in the time of Abraham, before Israel even was a nation – before Abram had any children at all – the LORD promised that Abraham's children would become a great nation, and that they would inherit the land of Canaan. Now, the 400 years of waiting is over. Joshua's call is to lead God's people into this long-awaited fulfillment. It is likely that Joshua felt both the exhilaration and the pressure of leading in such a historic moment. He needed strength and courage. He needed the Lord.

God lays out the scope of the land He is giving the nation of Israel. It is a broad, general description; God gave Moses a more detailed outline of the boundaries in Numbers 34:1-12, information known to Joshua.

Most important for Joshua is God's assurance of His abiding presence. The obstacles ahead loom large. The Promised Land is not a land flowing with milk and honey. It is also filled with giant people who are well-prepared to fight (Num 13:31-33). From personal observation Joshua knew that the Canaanites and others were powerful people who lived in strongly fortified cities. Frequent battles kept their warriors in top fighting condition. And for the most part the land was mountainous, a fact that would make war maneuvers difficult. Thus, when God promised that "no man shall be able to stand before you," it did not mean that Joshua and the Israelites would not face opposition. On the contrary, there were many battles to come. But God would be there with Joshua as He had been with Moses, giving them victory over their enemies.

The promise, "I will not leave you or forsake you," holds true today for followers of Christ. (See Hebrews 13:5) In the same way that the Lord God would keep His promise to the Israelites and go before them into battle, the indwelling Holy Spirit helps us through the battles of life. No, we are not promised a life free from opposition or pain. But those in Christ can enjoy peace even in the midst of opposition. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10.

Vv. 6-9 Three times in these verses, the Lord commands Joshua to "be strong and courageous." "The need for Joshua to be strong and resolute was acute because he was the instrument for the people to inherit the land. The Hebrew grammatical construction here highlights Joshua himself: if he, of all people, was weak and irresolute, then the cause was in deep trouble." (David M. Howard, Jr. The New American Commentary: Joshua, p.85)

1. The first usage of "be strong and courageous" (v.6) is linked to God's promise to give the land of Canaan to the children of Israel. The Lord has a 100% track record of keeping His promises. Jehovah God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his offspring by means of a covenant, whereby the Lord stated, in essence, "May I be cut into two if I don't keep my promise to you" (Gen. 15). From generation to generation, our God has proven himself faithful in keeping his word. Joshua can be strong and courageous based on God's unfailing covenant promise.

2. With the second usage of "be strong and courageous" the focus is on practicing God's law (vv. 7-8). It is important to note that God's instructions are not about military matters, considering that Joshua and the Israelites face many battles ahead. For them, the keys to victory were the same as for a king – being rooted in God's Word, obeying God's precepts, and living out God's principles, rather than depending on military might. (See Deuteronomy 17:14-20) God placed a high priority on His people keeping the law. It puts Joshua in the proper posture of humility and submission to God's will. And, because God's commands provide a reflection of God's character, following the Law of Moses keeps Joshua close to God's heart. That's the kind of leader God's people need.

3. Finally, the Lord tells Joshua to "be strong and courageous" based on God's presence. Ultimately, the success of Joshua's leadership – and the welfare of God's people – is dependent on the abiding and guiding presence of God. When the Lord goes with His people, they have all the reason in the world to be strong and courageous. Even when they encounter raging rivers or rocky terrain. Even in battle. Even in the face of giants.

Over one thousand years later, it is this same God who again calls His people to His word and promises His presence. He is the promised one whose name, like Joshua's, means "the LORD saves." But rather than just saving His people from physical harm, he saves them from a far greater enemy: sin itself. "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). He is the only one who has ever perfectly kept God's law, and He is the one who brings all of God's promises to fulfillment (Matthew 5:17). Just as the Lord told Joshua, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," so Jesus promises His people, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20).

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DISCUSSION POINTS

- Have you experienced moments in your life where you knew that only God could see you through?
- Knowing that the Lord has promised to never leave or forsake you, how does that change your perspective about the challenges of life?

Joshua 6:1-7 God Gives Jericho into Joshua's Hand

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

² And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days.⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."⁶ So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord."⁷ And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the Lord."

Joshua chapters 1-5 set the stage for the Hebrew people's conquest of Canaan. Chapter 6 focuses on a major obstacle – the heavily fortified city of Jericho, which served as a guardian city for the Canaanites, controlling the route from the Jordan River to the high ridge (where Jerusalem would ultimately be located). This obstacle had to be removed for the Israelites to move into the high country.

V. 1 The inhabitants of Jericho knew of the advancing Israelite army and sealed the city. There was great fear of the Hebrew people, but the city dwellers probably felt safe in the fortress of Jericho. However, they were now cut off from any outside help or supplies as the Israelites camped around them. No one was allowed to leave; no one was permitted to enter.

V. 2-5 As God provides instruction to Joshua regarding the taking of Jericho, we note there is no mention of military strategy. Instead, the Lord establishes a ritualistic ceremony. These verses begin with God reminding Joshua that the battle is already won; it is now a matter of the Hebrew people carefully obeying God's instructions.

If most armies received such orders from their commander, they may have laughed or, at the very least, grumbled. How can walking and blowing trumpets knock down a strong wall? With man it is impossible, but with God it was not impossible. This was the first city the Israelites would attack; it would not be the last.

God wanted to teach his people an important lesson. It wasn't by strength of arms that they could gain the victory. It was only through His strength. They could not hope to do it by themselves but had to wholly depend on divine aid. (Psalm 20:7) Faith and obedience were essential. Here is the same lesson we have seen God teaching the Israelites in the first several chapters of this book. The lesson is that they must learn not to lean on their own understanding and not to trust in their own strength. God's ways are higher than our ways.

Notice that though the victory belonged to the Lord, the people also had a responsibility. If the Israelites did not obey God and do it His way, He would not have knocked the walls down. The people's role was very important. Disobedience would result in failure. It is interesting that God designed this plan (and many others like this) whereby success could only be attributed to God's power. But a failure would be the people's fault, due to their disobedience.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- God's chosen method of defeating Jericho certainly seems counterintuitive. Yet, God's way worked. Do you find it hard to live counter-culturally in a world that has moved far from God? How does trust and obedience figure in living for the Lord today?

Joshua 6:15-21 The Fall of Jericho

On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times.¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city."¹⁷ And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.¹⁸ But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for

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destruction and bring trouble upon it.¹⁹ But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord.”²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.²¹ Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

v. 15 The Israelites, led by Joshua, have faithfully followed the Lord's instructions for six days. The seventh day began early as, unlike the previous days, the army would march around Jericho a total of seven times. Note: The number 7 in Hebrew thought denotes completion or perfection.

Vv. 16-19 At the sounding of the trumpets, Joshua gives several commands. First, he called for a shout of triumph in recognition of God's promise about to be fulfilled. Then, he reminded them of the promise made to Rahab, the woman who hid the Israelite spies. She and her family are to be spared from harm. The “devoted things” are items used by the Canaanites for pagan worship. Joshua warns them against bringing any of the devoted things into the camp, lest they bring God's judgment upon themselves. The precious stones and jewels, along with the metal vessels were to be collected for the Lord's treasury.

With the trumpet fanfare and great shout of the people, the mighty walls of Jericho collapsed, allowing the army of Israel to close in from all directions. God gave them a swift and overwhelming victory. One may wonder why God ordered the complete destruction of the city and all its inhabitants. Keep in mind that God knows the heart of every person. He knew that these people were not innocent; on the contrary, the Canaanites were evil in their beliefs and practice, engaging in vile practices such as child sacrifice. In this manner, God brought judgment upon this city.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is the difference between God being “fair” and God being “just?” (If God were fair, we would all go to Hell. In His justice, God deals with sin properly, yet His grace allows us to escape the wrath we deserve for our sins because Jesus took our punishment and imparts His righteousness to those who repent and believe in Him.)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

- God is bigger than our circumstances. We can rest assured that He is always with us.
- If we hope to see God work in our lives, we must obey His Word.
- God is faithful in keeping His promises. His timetable is different from ours.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. Galatians 3:16

Through Christ, we enjoy the greater covenant and await the promise of His second coming.

Next week – Judges 16:1-12, 15-30

Judges 16

The time of the judges was a low point in the history of Israel. Following the death of Joshua, no individual stepped up as a faithful mediator between God and His people. Thus, the Israelites drifted from God, falling into the pagan practices of the surrounding people. Due to their disobedience, God removed His hand of protection and the Hebrew people suffered under the hands of the Philistines. As the people cried out to God, He would send judges to rescue the Hebrew people. These judges were military leaders who prevailed against their enemies. However, when a judge died, the people would turn away from God again.

Judges 13-16 provides the story of one of the last judges, Samson. Raised as a Nazarite from birth, he was supposed to abstain from strong drink, avoid touching anything dead or unclean, and he was to never cut his hair. God granted Samson amazing physical strength, with which he was able to defeat his enemies. Unfortunately, Samson did not keep his Nazarite vows and failed to uphold God's laws. His ego and pride would lead to his downfall. He did not realize until the end of his life that the source of his strength did not come from his hair. His strength came from God.

FOCUS ATTENTION: Samson was deeply flawed. He ignored God's laws, consorted with prostitutes, disregarded his Nazarite vows, and had a violent temper. Yet God chose to use this sinful judge to save his people from the Philistines. Samson's pride led to his downfall. But in his death, he killed more Philistines than during his life.

In contrast, Jesus lived a perfect life of humble obedience. He kept the law, reached out in love to prostitutes, tax collectors, and all sinners to save them from sin. He willingly laid down His life and rose from the grave on the third day. In His death and resurrection, He saved all those who would repent and place their faith in Him.

ASK: Why would a Holy God use such an unholy man such as Samson to save His people from the Philistines? For that matter, why would God bother to save the Hebrew people who continued to disobey Him?

Essence of the Text.

God uses imperfect people to fulfill His purposes, but there is always a cost for disobedience.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Judges 16:1-14 Samson and Delilah

Samson went to Gaza, and there he saw a prostitute, and he went in to her.² The Gazites were told, "Samson has come here." And they surrounded the place and set an ambush for him all night at the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, saying, "Let us wait till the light of the morning; then we will kill him."³ But Samson lay till midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.⁴ After this he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.⁵ And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver."

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."⁷ Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."

⁸ Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she bound him with them.⁹ Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound."

¹¹ And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."¹² So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in ambush were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.¹³ Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man."¹⁴ So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web. And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

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Judges chapter 16 is full of Samson's foolish, self-gratifying actions along with amazing but self-serving exploits. It is interesting to note that the Spirit of God, Samson's true source of power, is not mentioned in this chapter.

V.1 Samson demonstrates his disregard for God's law and his tendency to make bad choices by visiting a prostitute in Gaza, a city of the Philistines. Why would Samson travel the length of Philistia to go to Gaza? There is no way that he would be welcome there amongst his enemies. In his arrogance, Samson acted on his impulses without considering the consequences of his rebellion against God. As God's chosen judge, Samson represented Israel. Perhaps God chose Samson because He saw Israel the same way he saw the rebellious judge – stubborn, arrogant, and indifferent to the Lord's commands.

Vv. 2-3 Samson's lack of shame indicated a lack of stealth as his appearance in Gaza was no secret. His enemies planned an ambush outside the house of the prostitute, with a plan to wait until dawn to attack and kill the Hebrew judge. Samson, however, had other plans. He arose at midnight and, instead of dying in an ambush, he pulled up the city gates and carried them nearly 40 miles uphill towards Hebron like some strange souvenir.

Michael Wilcock writes, "Yes, in one way it was another insignificant piece of self-indulgence. But once more the narrative is heavy with irony. For we, the readers, know what Samson does not know. We are aware of how the story will end. He went to Gaza; he could not resist a pretty woman; and when he realized his enemies were lying in wait for him, he seized the town gate bodily, uprooted them, and carried them off. All good fun at the time. But there would be another woman, with more far-reaching intentions; and another seizing, not of the gates but of the man who took them away; and another visit to Gaza, from which there would be no return. (The Message of Judges: The Bible Speaks Today Commentary, p. 146)

Vv. 4-12 Verse 4 introduces yet another woman, Delilah, the third woman with whom Samson would be entangled. His weakness for women of low morals would prove to be his undoing. Delilah, whose name means "darkness," is identified as being in the Valley of Sorek. It is not clear whether she was a Philistine, but her loyalties certainly lay with them. The Philistine lords, probably still stinging over the embarrassment Samson caused by taking away the gates of Gaza, seek to learn the secret of his amazing strength so they might have revenge. They persuade Delilah to seduce Samson to gain his secret, betraying him in a manner foreshadowing Judas betraying Jesus – a reward of silver. The sum was vast, each of the five lords of the Philistines promising eleven hundred pieces of silver.

Delilah plied her charms, leading Samson to play a game, teasing her with lies as to the source of his strength. In each case, he promised that if the false instructions were followed, he would become weak like any other man. But in each case, he easily broke whatever bonds were used. In his arrogance, he didn't realize that his resolve was weakening as Delilah pouted and accused Samson of mocking her. His resolve weakening, he moves the game in a dangerous direction, claiming that his strength would vanish if his hair was woven and pinned. While this was not true, it was only a step removed from disaster.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

- What are some instances where Samson's pride led him to sin and rebellion against God?

Judges 16:15-22: Delilah Betrays Samson

And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies."¹⁶ And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death.¹⁷ And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up again, for he has told me all his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands.¹⁹ She made him sleep on her knees. And she called a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.²⁰ And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.²¹ And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.²² But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Vv. 15-17 Delilah wore down Samson with a barrage of words. After three failed attempts, she uses the tactics of Samson's Timnite wife (See Judges 14:16-17). Delilah whined, she accused him of not loving her, of mocking her, lying to her, all the while persistently pleading with him to share the secret of his strength. Her persistence paid off; as "his soul

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was vexed to death." (The reference to "death" is both ominous and prophetic.) Like water eroding a rock over time, Samson underestimated Delilah's determination as she wore him down. His will to resist broken, Samson finally answers truthfully. As verse 17 states, "he told her all his heart;" He goes beyond simply saying, "cut my hair," which, to the modern reader would sound like an act of superstition. Daniel Bock states, "Like one who casts a pearl before a sow, albeit in a veiled manner, he (Samson) shares with this agent and representative of the uncircumcised Philistines the sacred truth that his strength comes from God: he has been a Nazarite of God from before his birth." (The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth, p. 459.) It is noteworthy that in this confession, Samson reveals he is aware of his high spiritual calling; he simply has not taken it seriously. Second, when Samson refers to God, he uses the generic designation 'elohim instead of Yahweh. So as far as Delilah was concerned, he could have been speaking of any random pagan god. Considering Samson's conduct, perhaps that limited the damage he was doing to the God of Israel's reputation.

Vv. 18-19 The focus shifts to Delilah as she wastes no time carrying out her betrayal of Samson. "In the process we observe a dramatic shift of power from the strong man to his "lover" and the fulfillment of the riddle in Judges 14:18: sweetness has won over strength. Samson has fallen. The real tragedy occurs not when Samson is overcome and tortured by the Philistine men but when he bares his soul to this pagan woman." (The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth, p. 460) While he slept, his hair was shaved off. Delilah "began to torment him." The same word also translated "afflict," is used to describe how she wore Samson down through her complaints. Perhaps she was mocking him for his foolishness. Regardless, the result was clear: Samson's legendary strength was gone.

Vv. 20-22 Once more, Delilah calls out to Samson that the Philistines are about to attack. Samson awakes, self-assured that he can easily handle his enemies like the previous times. "But he did not know that the Lord had left him." Herein lies the true secret of his strength. His Nazarite vow was symbolic of his allegiance to God. Over the years, he violated the vow in several ways. The cutting of his hair was literally the last straw. There was nothing left of the outward symbols of the Nazarite vow. The Lord Himself was the true source of Samson's strength. The Lord was patient with Samson, but the judge's flagrant disregard for his vow and the things of God now resulted in severe consequences. Without his strength, Samson is easily overpowered and blinded by the Philistines. Bound in bronze shackles, Samson is led back to Gaza, the city where he had

embarrassed his enemies, now as a helpless prisoner. The mighty judge, now humiliated, is forced to operate a millstone as a slave as the Philistines celebrate. But his hair started to grow...

Centuries later, on a Friday in Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth hung on a Roman cross. His enemies mocked him as His life slipped away. Most of His disciples had abandoned Him. A few wept at the foot of the cross. To those who gathered at Golgotha, it was evident that Jesus was defeated as He cried out, hung His head, and died. It was Friday.

But Sunday was coming.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- God extends mercy, usually not at our best times, but at our worst. Ask class members to share times when God rescued them during a bad season of life.

Judges 16:23-30 The Death of Samson

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand."

²⁴ And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has killed many of us." ²⁵ And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them.

They made him stand between the pillars. ²⁶ And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." ²⁷ Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. ²⁸

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

V. 23 The scene transitions from a prison to a palace. The Philistines celebrated the apparent defeat of Israel's champion by offering sacrifices to their false god. They credited and worshiped Dagon for giving Samson into their

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hands. Dagon was recognized as the father of Baal, the weather deity. It's interesting to note that the focus of their chant is not the nation of Israel, but Samson alone. This is probably because the Hebrew people had drifted far from the Lord and were content with coexisting with the Philistines on the Philistines' terms.

V. 25 The Philistines shift from worshiping their idol to demanding that Samson be brought out to entertain them. There is foreshadowing here as we consider how Jesus was mocked, forced to wear a robe and crown of thorns. As Samson was placed between two pillars, Jesus was crucified between two thieves.

Vv.26-27 Samson asks a young boy to guide his hands to the pillars. It's a pathetic sight, certainly entertaining to the 3,000 Philistine men and women gathered there. The judge of Israel, renowned for his epic strength, is blind, ridiculed, weak, and at the mercy of a young boy to lead him around. Samson tells the boy he simply wants to lean on the pillars, but already a plan is forming in his mind.

Vv. 28-30 Humiliated and helpless, Samson finally looks beyond himself and calls out to God. Unlike his earlier use of the generic 'elōhîm, he prefacing his plea with 'ādōnāy YHWH, "O Sovereign LORD." His prayer consists of two parts: First, he calls upon Yahweh to remember him. That is not to indicate that the Lord forgot Samson, rather the verb means "to act on behalf of." Stripped of his strength, pride, and eyesight, he calls upon the One who can help. Second, he asks God to give him strength one more time. For the first time, we see Samson humbly pray to His Creator. Yet, even at this moment, his prayer is self-serving. Instead of praying for his people, the nation of Israel, his heart's focus is on revenge. Still, God answered Samson's prayer. Most likely, God did so for His own purposes. After all, the Lord raised up Samson to be Israel's "savior," a military leader to deliver them from the Philistines. Consider also, the offense of the pagan worship of the god Dagon, which not only mocked Samson, it mocked God also.

As strength flowed back into Samson's arm and his muscles surged, the columns parted, and the palace roof collapsed, killing the assembled Philistine lords and women plus the judge of Israel, Samson. In that moment, more of the enemies of Israel (and of the Lord) died than during all of Samson's life to that point. God's enemies were defeated; Israel was rescued.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Even if we don't pray correctly or with the proper motive, God always provides the right answer. How does that encourage (or discourage) you to pray?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

Michael Wilcock summarizes: "What does it all mean for the reader today? We must learn from Samson himself, and a tragic lesson he provides. We cannot assume that each of Israel's judges is 'Everyman,' with a life that set examples and warnings before the attentive reader. But it is not right to read Samson, at any rate, like this, because he is not only the savior, with more than a passing resemblance to Christ, but also the sinner, unmistakably reflecting the face of Israel, and therefore our own face as the people of God; called by grace, bound by vow, repeatedly empowered, greatly gifted, yet faithless, self-indulgent, and only too ready to fraternize with the enemy. (The Message of Judges: The Bible Speaks Today Commentary, p. 149.)

- Samson stands as a warning – a man of tremendous potential who never grasped the Spirit's call to holy obedience.
- "I Did it My Way" was certainly a popular Frank Sinatra song, but it's not the way for Christians to live. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death (Proverbs 14:12).
- Which is ultimately more important, the gifts of the Spirit or obedience to the Spirit?
- If God can use a self-centered, prideful, sinful man like Samson, how might God use you?

Next week – Ruth 1-4

Ruth 1-4

FOCUS ATTENTION: In ancient Hebrew culture, a kinsman (go'él) had certain obligations that arose out of familial relationships. A kinsman was the nearest living male blood relative, upon whom fell one of two possible responsibilities:

- 1. Blood Avenger.** Wrong done to a member of a family (clan) was a crime against the entire clan, particularly murder, the spilling of blood. The son was obligated to avenge the blood of his father. The brother was obligated to punish a crime against his sister, and so forth.
- 2. Redeemer.** It was the duty of a kinsman to redeem the land that had been sold by a brother in distress, usually through illness or poverty. Among the duties inferred (but not obligated) to a kinsman was marrying the widow of a deceased brother or close kin.

(Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, pp. 633-634.)

Based on their covenant relationship with YHWH (Jehovah), the Israelites were taught that they were a people belonging to the LORD. Thus "redemption" became a comprehensive term that referred to God's special intervention for the salvation of mankind. Its meaning ultimately centers on the atoning work of Christ as the price paid for human redemption, and on account of His death, **Christ is called the Redeemer.** (Unger's, p. 915.)

The relatively short book of Ruth provides a beautiful portrait of kindness, faith, patience, and yes, redemption. The word "redeemer" or "redemption" appears 23 times in this book. It is one of five scrolls read during the Jewish festivals, particularly the Feast of Weeks. The central character, Ruth, was a Moabite woman who would become the ancestor of David and Jesus. The book of Ruth connects the book of Judges with the books of Samuel. The first verse of Ruth points to the time of the Judges and the very last verse points to King David.

ASK: Why would anyone need a redeemer during ancient times? Why do we need a redeemer today?

Essence of the Text

Our Heavenly Father demonstrates His love for us by sending His Son to redeem us from the bondage of sin.

EXPLORE THE TEXT**Ruth 1:15-22: Faithful Ruth Refuses to Leave Naomi**

¹⁵ And she (Naomi) said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. ¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" ²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Neither the author nor exact date of writing of the book is known (although most scholars place the date as sometime after 1010 B.C.). However, we do know that a famine devastated the land of Israel during this period, the time of the Judges. It is likely that this was God's judgement on the people for their disobedience. Note the final verse from the book of Judges (21:25) In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own sight.

In that context, Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons abandoned their home in Bethlehem (which means "house of bread") because of the famine, moving to Moab – land still inhabited by the Canaanites. Shortly thereafter, Elimelech died. The two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Moabite women. There was no strict prohibition for them to marry women of Moab, but such marriages were discouraged because the inhabitants of Moab worshiped other gods, such as Baal and Molech. After ten years in Moab, the sons of Naomi died. The two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, were now also widows. Naomi was a childless widow with no sons or grandchildren. Such poor

widows were in a precarious position; there were no social safety nets, no life insurance, no government assistance of any kind. Her only hope was to return home to Bethlehem where she might receive help from extended family.

Her decision made to leave Moab; Naomi released her daughters-in-law from any obligation they might feel to remain with her. After all, they were Gentiles, still young, and their prospects to marry again were much better there than in Israel. Orpah, through tears, agrees to stay in Moab, but Ruth (whose name means "friendship" or "beauty") declares her strong devotion to Naomi. Perhaps her strongest declaration is in v. 16 – "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." This testimony gave evidence of Ruth's intention to worship YHWH (Jehovah), leaving behind the pagan gods of Moab. This was a huge step of faith for the young woman.

So, Naomi and Ruth journeyed together to Bethlehem. Their arrival created quite a stir, considering that Naomi and her family had been gone more than a decade. Note, however, Naomi's self-centered and bitter reply. Not once does she mention Ruth but refers to herself ("me" and "I") 8 times in vv. 20-21. While it is true that Naomi has suffered loss, to say that "the Lord has brought me back empty" is short-sighted. The sovereign God has been working behind the scenes, particularly through kind and faithful Ruth. They have returned at a time when the famine has passed and the barley harvest has begun, setting the stage for Ruth to meet Naomi's kinsman, Boaz.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Contrast Ruth's willingness to leave all she knew behind to follow Naomi and commit to YHWH and His people with Naomi's bitterness upon returning home.
- What are some instances where you can see God working in this passage?

Ruth 2:8-13: Boaz Shows Kindness to Ruth

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your

father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.¹² The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"¹³ Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

Newly arrived in Bethlehem, the two women needed basic supplies to live. Ruth volunteered to glean the fields for food. Mosaic law commanded that the harvest should not be gathered to the corners of the field, not the gleanings picked up. These leftover stalks of grain were for the needy, especially widows. However, many in Israel were not inclined to follow this law, so there was a real element of risk of rejection or even harm for the young woman. However, as Ruth goes to glean, she ends up in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy man and close relative of Naomi's late husband, perhaps even a brother. God was certainly at work!

As Boaz visits the field he notices Ruth, discovering that she is the young Moabitess daughter-in-law of Naomi. As we pick up in 2:8, we quickly learn that Boaz is a kind and godly man, going well beyond the requirements of the law in both providing for basic needs and protection in the field. He outlines a benevolent program for Ruth, even though she is a Gentile.

1. Don't glean in another field.
2. And don't go away from here.
3. Stick close to my servant girls.
4. Watch the field where my servants are harvesting.
5. Follow after the girls.
6. I have ordered the men not to touch you. (or make cat-calls or whistle)
7. And whenever you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars the men have filled.

(The NIV Application Commentary: Judges/Ruth, K. Lawson Younger, Jr., p. 443)

Boaz is treating her like an Israelite, not a Gentile. His provision for Ruth is extraordinary!

Ruth is overwhelmed by the kindness of Boaz. She understood that Gentiles are not normally treated well by Israelites. As a foreigner, she conducted herself humbly, prostrating herself before Boaz, but curious as to his kind actions, she asked why he had extended grace to her? Her actions convey complete surprise, emphasizing again both Boaz's character and God's providence.

Boaz replies with words of praise and admiration for Ruth. He knows that she abandoned all she knew – extended family and homeland – to care for Naomi in a strange land. He hopes that God will bless and reward this remarkable woman. Scripture pictures God as catching Israel up on His wings in the Exodus. (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11). Boaz sees the young Moabitess as deserving of the same Divine protection, “the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” His statement connotes imagery of a mother bird gently protecting her young. Ruth sits securely under the strong and mighty wings of YHWH.

Ruth realizes that Boaz is sincere, and she is both grateful and relieved. As a poor foreign woman, she had no idea what she might encounter when she left to gather leftover grain. The possibility of trouble must have entered her mind. Still, despite Boaz’s kind words and deeds, Ruth still refers to herself as *śiphâ*, a servant on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- In what ways does Boaz extend grace (unmerited favor) to Ruth?
- How can we show grace and kindness to those of different cultures and faith traditions?

Ruth 3:6-13; 4:7-14: The Redemption of Ruth

⁶ So she (Ruth) went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!

⁹ He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” ¹⁰ And he said, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. ¹² And now it is true that I am a redeemer.

Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.” ⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to

the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel.

⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.” ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.” ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Chapter 3 begins with Naomi (encouraged by Ruth’s report of her encounter with Boaz) giving instructions as to how Ruth might secure redemption from Boaz. As in chapter 1:9, Naomi still feels a sense of responsibility for the younger woman, seeking for Ruth a husband, home, and security. Naomi’s plan involves an ancient Near Eastern ritual whereby Ruth would put on her best appearance and propose marriage to Boaz. Boaz was likely much older than Ruth and the gracious man probably thought Ruth “out of his league” and unlikely to propose marriage. Since Boaz was a clan relative of Naomi (with Ruth being her daughter-in-law), it is implied he would be receptive to a marriage proposal. Marriage would bring the Gentile woman, Ruth, into the covenant community of Israel.

There is some debate as to what transpired in vv. 3-16. It is clear enough that Ruth followed Naomi’s instructions. As Boaz went to sleep on the threshing floor, Ruth went in to him, uncovered his feet and lay down also.

THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

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Some commentators understand Naomi's instructions to be a bride's preparation, so that Ruth came to Boaz as a bride and their relationship was consummated that night. However, this is not borne out in comparison to other Old Testament bridal contexts. (NIV Application Commentary: Judges/Ruth, p. 459.) While there may be sexual overtones, Ruth's act of uncovering his feet is a non-verbal, apparently customary means of requesting marriage. This is reinforced by Naomi's instruction, "he will tell you what to do."

Not surprisingly, Boaz is startled to wake up and find a woman lying near him. Naturally, he exclaims, "Who are you?" Ruth replies with a different word for servant, 'āmā. Before she used the term denoting the lowest servant. Now, she refers to herself using a socially higher term to suggest a class of woman who might be married. But 'āmā also suggests a need of help or protection from a more powerful male. Ruth continues by requesting that Boaz "spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." To the modern reader, this may seem strange, but for an Israelite there would be no question that Ruth is requesting marriage to Boaz. To cover a woman with a garment was a symbolic promise of provision and sustenance for a future wife. (The New American Commentary, Judges/Ruth, Daniel I. Block, p. 91) She sees him as God's answer to Boaz's own wish for Ruth in chapter 2:12.

Boaz as redeemer and rescuer, foreshadows Jesus as our redeemer. Ruth was a foreigner, outside of God's covenant family. Apart from Boaz redeeming her, she would remain outside the covenant. Likewise, Christ is redeemer for all who are separated from the Lord because of sin. Christ purchased our pardon on the cross, drinking the cup of wrath we deserve and imputing His righteousness to those who humbly repent of their sin and put their faith in Him.

Another argument that this encounter was not intimate is that Boaz does not react with a curse and dismissal as if she were a prostitute. Instead, this godly man blesses her, a sign of respect and honor. He praises her remarkable demonstration of hesed, a display of family loyalty and devotion, first to Naomi and now to Boaz. He lauds her for not going after younger men, which one might assume, though Boaz was hardly elderly. The real clincher is Ruth's use of go'ēl, kinsman-redeemer. Boaz understands she is not after money or sex; she genuinely seeks hesed.

There remains an obstacle, however. Boaz is not the closest family relative. This revelation may have caused Ruth dismay, but Boaz is an honorable man and must reveal that he is a kinsman-redeemer, not the only one. But God is still at work!

In Chapter 4, Boaz goes to the city where he encounters his relative, the one who would be first in line as kinsman-redeemer. There is a court of sorts as the elders would gather at the gate to witness contracts and agreements such as this. Boaz explains the situation regarding Naomi and the death of Elimelech. At first, the relative is ready to redeem the land. But upon learning that a second widow, "Ruth the Moabitess" was also involved and that marriage was implied as part of the bargain, the kinsman declined. Picking up in 4:7, we see the resolution. A sandal was exchanged in the presence of the witnesses as a sign that Boaz was purchasing (redeeming) the lands of Elimelech and taking Ruth as his wife to prolong the family bloodline. This was an exceedingly important aspect of redemption. A cruel curse of that day stated, "May your seed perish, and your name die out." (The New American Commentary, Judges/Ruth, p. 715.) There was a celebration with many words of blessing from the gathered witnesses. Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and they indeed had a son. Naomi's fortunes also turned around as friends reminded her that "the Lord has not left you this day without a redeemer." Naomi became nurse to the child Obed, who would one day be the father of Jesse, the father of David. So, Ruth became part of the lineage of the Messiah, Jesus. (See Matthew 1:1-16)

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is meant by the "sovereignty" or "providence" of God?
- What does the story of Ruth tell us about God's plan for the Gentile nations?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

The book of Ruth is a beautiful story of redemption amid tragedy. God used a young Gentile woman and a godly and kind Israelite man as part of His great redemptive plan for the world. The story moves from crisis to complication to resolution. Ruth's covenantal faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi and her God provided an example that those who were not ethnic Israelites could be incorporated into the people of God by faith. The family records of David at the end of the book show that the Lord worked providentially to provide for His people's need of a greater Redeemer.

THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

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- Your story is not over. Regardless of your past or any besetting sin, you can experience the redemption that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
- If you are a follower of Christ, your story of faith is worth sharing! Be ready to tell others how you turned from sin and believed in Jesus, the great Redeemer, for your salvation.

Next week – 1 Samuel 16-17

1 Samuel 17

FOCUS ATTENTION: In 1 Samuel 16, we are introduced to David, the youngest son of Jesse, who God chooses to be the next King of Israel following the Lord's rejection of King Saul (see chapters 13 & 15). While David had several older brothers who were tall and handsome (much like Saul), the Lord selected David based on the size of his character, not his appearance. In an ironic twist, young David would serve King Saul by playing the lyre (a type of harp) to soothe Saul who was tormented by an evil spirit. This took place during a period where Israel and the Philistines were at war.

ASK: David was only a teenager and a shepherd for the family at the time he was anointed to be the next King of Israel. What character traits did God see in David that would eventually serve the boy well as God's chosen leader for God's covenant people?

Essence of the Text.

The Lord God uses a young shepherd to defeat a powerful Philistine giant who mocked Israel and Israel's God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1 Samuel 17:1-16: A Philistine Giant Mocks the Army of Israel

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.² And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines.³ And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.⁴ And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.⁵ He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.⁶ And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.⁷ The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him.⁸ He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come

out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us."¹⁰ And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together."¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.¹² Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.¹³ The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.¹⁴ David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul,¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.¹⁶ For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

Chapter 17 shifts to focus on the armies of Israel and the Philistines gathered for battle. The Valley of Elah, located in the hill country of Judah, ran westward from Bethlehem toward Gath and Ekron. It was a strategic location as it would give the Philistines direct access to the Judean hill country if the Israelites failed to defend it. The two armies faced off against each other on the high hills on opposite sides of the valley.

The Philistines were a non-Semitic people comprised of a league of five great cities on the Mediterranean Sea, just west of Judah. Their pagan beliefs, warlike nature, and competition for the land of Palestine made them natural enemies of the Israelites. (Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, p. 859)

In vv. 4-7, we are introduced to the Philistine's champion, a giant named Goliath of Gath. He was a formidable enemy, terrifying in both size and weaponry. Here are some statistics about Goliath in modern units of measurement:

- Goliath's height: taking the cubit as 21 inches, he was 10 feet 6 inches tall. Even conservative estimates place him over 9 feet in height.
- Coat of mail (chain armor): 125 pounds
- Shield: As tall as Goliath, designed to give total body protection
- The spearhead alone weighed 15 pounds, not including the shaft of the spear which probably exceeded 100 pounds.

Vv. 8-11 Morning and evening, for forty days, Goliath would bellow across the valley, challenging the Israelites to send a warrior to meet for single combat. The survivor would represent their nation, winner take all. Of course, Goliath was far larger than any soldier of Israel, fierce, confident, and experienced as a warrior. As time passed and no Israelite accepted the challenge, Goliath began to mock the army of Israel. We might think of modern-day "trash-talking," as is common in sports and politics. But by mocking the covenant people of God, the Philistine giant was also insulting YHWH, the LORD of the universe. Verse 11 summarizes the defeatist attitude of King Saul and Israel: "they were dismayed and greatly afraid." Sadly, they forgot that all the battles they won throughout their history was because the one true God was with them. In this situation, like before, the battle would belong to the Lord.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How would you respond if confronted by a well-armed, battle-hardened, ten-foot-tall warrior?
- How did King Saul fail as a leader in this situation? (Mainly, he failed to seek the Lord for help.)

1 Samuel 17:24-26: David Responds to the Challenge

All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.²⁵ And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

²⁶ And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

The older sons of Jesse are soldiers in the army of Israel. But David, the youngest, is still tending sheep back home. After all, someone had to do it. News traveled slowly in the ancient near east. There was no social media, no 24-hour news reports, no newspapers, or media of any kind. Thus, David had little knowledge of the dire situation at the front lines when his father, Jesse, gave him the menial task of carrying supplies to his brothers and to bring back news. (See vv. 17-18)

In the meantime, the situation at the front lines grew worse for the army of Israel. Morale continued to decline, and a sense of panic grew as they continued to endure the mocking threats of Goliath. King Saul even stooped to

bribery, offering a reward of money, his daughter, and relief from paying taxes for the extended family of any Israelite who would go out to face the Philistine champion. But there were no takers. To the soldiers of Israel, it seemed to be a sure suicide mission.

It was to this scene that young David arrived with the supplies. What he witnesses appalls him! But rather than being struck down with fear like his brothers and the other soldiers, David is angry. The Spirit-filled future king (see 16:13) surveyed the scene from an entirely different perspective. Yes, the same Philistine giant was blustering and threatening. Yes, the soldiers of Israel were paralyzed with fear. Yes, the current King, Saul, (who should have taken up the challenge as the king, by the way) was dithering instead of leading. But David remembered something that the others forgot: the battle belongs to the Lord! Note how he refers to the "home team." The Philistine calls them "servants of Saul," the Israelites refer to themselves as "the army of Israel," but David sees them properly as "the armies of the living God!" He even turns the insults back on Goliath, mocking him as "this uncircumcised Philistine," not referring to him as a giant or warrior, or by name.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Contrast David's view of the situation with that of Saul and of Goliath.
- Why was David angry instead of afraid?

1 Samuel 17:32-52: Goliath Defeated, David Prevails

And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

³³ And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth."

³⁴ But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock,³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him.³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."³⁷ And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S

April 23, 2023

³⁸ Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹ and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off.

⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. ⁴¹ And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³ And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

⁴⁴ The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand." ⁴⁸ When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

⁴⁹ And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰ So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David.

⁵¹ Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵² And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

David's indignation over Goliath and the standoff with Israel earned a rebuke from his brothers and skepticism from King Saul. To be fair, from an external comparison, there seemed to be no question that David was hopelessly outmatched.

As mentioned, Goliath was massive and protected by full armor and a body length shield. He had a spear the size of a telephone pole, plus a sword. He outweighed the young shepherd by hundreds of pounds and was a veteran warrior.

By contrast, David appeared to be a lamb before the slaughter. Saul's armor was hopelessly oversized, so David rejected it. He was youth, probably still in his growing phase. He had no sword, no spear, and no shield. To Goliath, he was a flea, a joke, an easily dispatched victim. But there was much more to David than met the eyes of any of the human players. As a shepherd, David had faced the extremes of weather, sleepless nights searching for missing sheep, and the danger of fighting off fierce, wild beasts to protect his flock. But it wasn't just toughness and courage that David brought to the fight. He also knew something that the Philistines did not know, and the Israelites had forgotten.

The battle belongs to the Lord!

David knew that the Lord had chosen him, and Samuel anointed him to be the next king of Israel. He did not need to know Goliath's strength, because David already knew the Lord's strength. Thus, he reasoned that God would see him through this particular battle. That's not to say that David knew he would be unscathed – God might use him as a horribly scarred and injured king. He might prevail, but possibly minus an arm or leg, blinded or mutilated perhaps. Yet, David would stand for the Lord God of Israel. He would defend the reputation of YHWH against the proud pagan and his insults. David would fight the giant in the same manner as he fought lions and bears, with a sling and stones. And he would do so in the strength of the Lord.

As the shepherd and the giant faced off, Goliath sneered at David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods." But David wasn't intimidated, seeing only the uncircumcised Philistine, a worshiper of dead deities, with the audacity to challenge and insult the armies of the Living God. The future king replied,

"You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."**

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In less time than it took for David to make his pronouncement, he ran toward the Philistine and with one accurately placed stone, felled the giant. Since he had no sword of his own, David took Goliath's and killed the giant, removing his massive head.

It's easy to imagine that, for a moment, there was stunned silence on both sides of the valley. The Philistine army, shocked at the sudden, decisive defeat of their champion. The Israelites were likewise stunned that victory was theirs as a young shepherd hefted the head of their dead and defeated antagonist.

The moment passed as the Philistines fled in a panic. After all, if a youth without armor or apparent weapons could so easily dispatch their greatest warrior, what might he do to the rest of them? The men of Israel and Judah recovered quickly, charging after their vanquished enemies and scattering Philistine casualties along the way to Gath and Ekron.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How did an unprotected, mostly unarmed, teenager defeat a heavily armed and armored giant in a one-on-one battle?
- What was David's greatest resource in this victory? (Hint: it wasn't the sling and stones.)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

There is a danger of taking the story of David and Goliath and turning it into a morality tale or a treatise on self-help ... "facing the giants in your life." Sounds good, but it's the wrong approach.

This is a story about God, His faithfulness, and the foreshadowing of a Great Shepherd who would eventually come from the line of David. Like the Great Shepherd, Jesus, David saw things from a spiritual perspective and acted based on his relationship with the Lord. Consider the ways this story foreshadows the promised Messiah:

- David and Jesus born in Bethlehem
- David and Jesus gave glory to the Father
- People underestimated them at first
- They delivered their people, David from their enemies, Jesus from our sins.
- David was King of Israel. Jesus is King of the Universe.
- They sought to glorify God. (Jesus perfectly, David imperfectly.)

As Christ-followers, we are indwelled with the Holy Spirit, as was David. The Spirit gives us wisdom, strength, and fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) to live lives that please God and represent Him well in this world.

Seek to walk in obedience, bearing spiritual fruit this week, giving glory to the Lord.

Next week – 2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51

2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-17, 26-27; 12:1-15; Psalm 51

FOCUS ATTENTION:

ASK: How can "a man after God's heart" fall into the grievous sins of adultery, deceit, and murder?

Essence of the Text.

Even a man after God's heart could fall into temptation and commit terrible sin. Yet God offers forgiveness and restoration when we confess our sin and repent.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-17, 26-27: Temptation Leads to a Downward Spiral of Sin

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die."¹⁶ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men.¹⁷ And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband.²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

V. 1 King David dealt successfully with the Ammonite rebellion (see 2 Sam. 10:6-14) but did not entirely eliminate the Ammonite threat with its continued challenges to his authority. So, the following spring, David sent Joab out to Rabbah Ammon a second time, but David remained in Jerusalem. This was most likely due to the pleading of his men to avoid an active military role out of concern for the king's safety and the best interest of the nation. After all, David was a proven military hero, so there was nothing for him to prove. Spring was the preferred time for battle; the weather conditions were best and crops such as barley and wheat provided food for armies on the move. (The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, Robert D. Bergen, pp. 363-364)

Vv. 2-5 Despite the plausible reasons for King David to stay in Jerusalem, it was highly unusual for a king to remain home at leisure while his men went into harm's way. In verse 2, David likely was enjoying the cool breezes of the evening atop the roof of his house. The king's house was situated on the highest point of the city with grand views of the surrounding area. It was there that David saw a beautiful woman bathing. This was not unusual; bathing was normally done on the roof of houses, not inside. There would have been a reasonable expectation of privacy, but David had an unusual vantage point. There was no indication that the woman, Bathsheba, was behaving in an alluring manner or intended to be seen. Likewise, nothing suggests that David expected to see an undressed woman. If this encounter at a distance ended there, all would have been well. Billy Graham once said, "You can't help it if the crows fly overhead, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair." Sadly, the first, accidental look turned into a leer of lust. Temptation led quickly to sin.

David learned that the woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. For him to pursue her further was to already commit adultery in his heart. (See Matthew 5:28)

Up to this point in his life, David had been exemplary in his obedience to God and His law. Thus, he was fully aware of the Torah's prohibition against adultery and the fact that the penalty was death. (See Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22.) Nevertheless, the king sent for her, ignoring the fact that "she was the daughter of one of David's best fighters, the granddaughter of his most trusted counselor, and the wife of one of his inner circle of honored soldiers." (The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel, p. 364)

Bathsheba came to David, and they had sexual relations. Perhaps she was afraid to refuse; after all, David was king and held the power of life and death over his subjects. She may have been forced. Or, she may have wanted to

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be unfaithful to her husband. The omission of her motives reinforces the point that this story is not really about Bathsheba's actions, but King David's. We know from v. 4 she had been "purifying herself from her uncleanness," following her menstrual cycle. Thus, when she sent word to David that she was pregnant, there was no doubt the baby could only be his.

Vv. 14-15 The king moves from the sin of adultery to the sin of deception. He is compelled to hide his sin, knowing that the penalty for adultery is death. David was well-versed in facing adversity, so in vv. 6-13, he devises a plan to bring Uriah back from the front lines of battle, the goal that he might have relations with his wife, Bathsheba, thus giving the illusion that the father would be Uriah, not David. But Uriah proves to be more honorable in his conduct than David. The Israelite soldiers were to abstain from intimacy with their wives while carrying out military assignments. If Uriah had been intimate with his wife, he would have been ritually "unfit for duty," and unable to return to the battle lines. Uriah therefore refused, despite pressure from the king.

Since David's "Plan A" failed, he resorted to "Plan B," setting up Uriah for certain death. The king sent a letter to General Joab by Uriah's hand, ordering that the husband of Bathsheba be sent to the place of fiercest fighting, then withdraw the other men. The plan, sadly, worked. Uriah the Hittite, one of David's thirty elite Mighty Men, was killed, along with other brave Israelite soldiers.

Vv. 26-27 Bathsheba mourned the loss of her husband, lending credibility that she was a victim of David's actions and not a willing participant. The mourning period was generally the time needed for the moon to change phases. Following that time, David could (and did) take Bathsheba as his wife and into his house, where she ultimately delivered a baby. Perhaps David thought his sin would go unnoticed, and perhaps it was by the public. But God knew. And God was displeased.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Was this just a case of David being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or was this more a matter of pride excusing sin?
- We can't always avoid temptation, but we can avoid places / situations where temptation is more likely to occur. What are the ways we can strive to lessen temptation? (pray for wisdom, seek accountability, acknowledge weak areas, go to God's Word for help and direction)

2 Samuel 12:1-15: Confrontation, Consequences, and Confession of Sin

And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.² The rich man had very many flocks and herds,³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die,⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul.⁸ And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die."

¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

How does one correct such abuse of power? How does one confront the sin of Israel's chosen king, a man with almost absolute earthly power? Will David become another failed king, like his predecessor, Saul? We see the answer in chapter 12 as God sends his prophet Nathan. He appears suddenly, comes to David, and tells the king a story.

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Vv. 1-6 Nathan shares the story of two men, one with vast riches and many flocks and herds, the other with only a single ewe lamb. This lamb was more like a pet, dear to the poor man as a daughter. Yet when the rich man wants to prepare a banquet for a guest, he does not take a lamb from the many he owns. Instead, he takes the poor man's beloved lamb, slaughters it, and serves it to his guest. As David listens, his anger grows into fury! How dare this rich man take this poor man's only lamb? There is irony as David invokes the Lord's name, oblivious to the fact the story describes his own sin. The king hypocritically declares the rich man deserves death for his crime but seems to settle for penalizing the rich man with a heavy fine "because he (the rich man in the story) had no pity." Without realizing it, David passed judgment upon himself.

Vv. 7-9 Abruptly, Nathan shifts from storyteller to accuser. "You are the man!" This was no simple parable, no hypothetical tale; Nathan was describing David's sin, how the most powerful man in Israel stole the wife of his friend and faithful soldier, even sending Uriah to his death to cover that sin. Perhaps David had forgotten, convinced that no one knew, that he got away with the crime. But God knew. God always knows. No sin is hidden from his eyes.

Nathan continues, reminding David how God Himself had chosen and anointed him as king over Israel. The Lord had blessed David abundantly; he lacked nothing. Even if David had a need, God would have provided for him. Then comes the heart-piercing question: **Why?** Why did David despise the word of the Lord (His law) to do evil in the Lord's sight? That was the most grievous of all his sins. He despised God's word by having Uriah killed (murder) at the hands of their enemies, the Ammonites. He took Bathsheba, though she was married (adultery), and worked hard to cover up the matter (deceit). The harsh reality is that David was a sinner from birth. So are you. So is every person who has ever lived since Adam and Eve sinned. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Vv. 10-12 The prophet now tells David of the consequences for his sin. Would this be the end of David's kingdom? Would he suffer rejection as did Saul? We learn that violence and bloodshed will haunt David and his family going forward. He will face evil from his own family, and family will suffer. The evil and shame he brought secretly to Uriah and Bathsheba will be multiplied upon his house and made public knowledge.

Vv. 13-15 The façade of lies has crumbled; David's secret sins are now known. The king could attempt to continue the cover-up. He could deny the accusations, even kill Nathan. Instead, David confesses. There are no excuses,

no finger-pointing, and no attempt to plead for mercy.

"I have sinned against the Lord." And that is the truth of the matter. In his confession, David reveals the character and courage that made him the ideal king of Israel. Ultimately, all sin is an affront to God. David may have thought his reign was at an end, and he seemed resigned to accept his punishment. But God shows both mercy and His faithfulness to keep His promises as Nathan states, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." God remembered His covenant with David, that his line would ultimately bring forth the child of promise, the Messiah. (See 2 Samuel 7:12) Yes, the hard consequences would come soon, beginning with the death of the child born to Bathsheba. His message delivered; Nathan left as abruptly as he appeared.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does David's confession tell us about him?
- What does this passage tell us about God? (He is gracious, desiring to forgive and restore. He keeps His promises. He is just and will punish sin.)

Psalm 51: David's Prayer of Repentance

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt

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offering.¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalm 51 is one of seven penitential psalms found in Scripture. It is David's "thank offering" of confession and a changed life made possible by a "broken and contrite heart." The king is seeking the restoration of the joy of God's salvation, following his sinful episode with Bathsheba. This psalm can be divided into six parts:

1. A plea for forgiveness (Vv. 1-2)
2. Confession of sin (Vv. 3-6)
3. Plea for cleansing (Vv. 7-9)
4. Plea for spiritual restoration (Vv. 10-12)
5. Vow of praise and public contrition (Vv. 13-17)
6. Plea for restoration of Zion/Jerusalem (Vv. 18-19)

While point 6 was likely a later addition by those in exile, longing to return home to Israel/Judah, the first 5 points are the heart cry of King David, a man after God's own heart, who still fell into deep sin. When confronted by Nathan, he confessed his guilt, perhaps relieved to be free of his secret burden. Although this psalm is deeply personal, it is deeply practical for all believers whenever we sin. (The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms Vol. 1. pp. 772-777)

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How should we define repentance? (Confession of sin and turning away from sin in faith to Jesus for forgiveness.)
- Are you struggling with besetting sin? Is there a stronghold in your life, a secret sin, that weighs you down with guilt and shame? Read Psalm 51, and pray the psalm with a sincere heart to our merciful Father who longs to heal and forgive.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

There is great danger in believing, "Oh, I would NEVER (insert name of sin).

David did not wake up one morning, planning to fall into horrible sin. But it happened.

Temptation by itself is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15. Sin occurs when we give in to temptation – we take the "second look" or justify a sinful act thinking, "it's just this once" or "this is harmless" or "no one will know." But God knows.

There is great joy in knowing that our sins can be forgiven.

Jesus Christ bore our sins on the cross, taking upon Himself the wrath we deserved and crediting us with His righteousness. Although we are still subject to temptation and too easily give in to sin, we can hope in His promises. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Next week – 1 Kings 3