

ECHOES[®]

ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

FALL 2026



GENERATIONS: FROM
CANAAN TO JERUSALEM

DAVID  COOK

ECHOES[®]

ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

FALL 2026

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David C Cook would like to thank the following lesson contributors:

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WHAT'S AHEAD

QUARTERLY PREVIEW

Beginning in Unit 1 with a study of Joshua, this quarter looks at ancient Israel's entry into Canaan. Becoming established is as much a spiritual task as a military or political one. In Unit 2, three lessons on Judges highlight Israel's propensity to ignore God and His ways. Their lack of unity meant that "everyone did as they saw fit" (Judg. 17:6). In Unit 3, lessons begin with Samuel, whose faithfulness as prophet and judge plays a pivotal role in Israel's success. He sets the stage for the reign of Israel's greatest king, David.

Here are some of the biblical principles that we will study and apply to situations in our lives:

Lesson 1: God does not forsake us: have courage.

Lesson 2: God's redemption isn't only for people in the past.

Lesson 3: Trust God beyond your own abilities.

Lesson 4: God is faithful to people who revere Him.

Lesson 5: Dedicate yourself to serving God always.

Lesson 6: Rejecting God means rejecting His blessing.

Lesson 7: God orchestrates the details to accomplish His plans.

Lesson 8: People are confused without God's help.

Lesson 9: God's call is beyond our understanding.

Lesson 10: God is not a prop for human purposes.

Lesson 11: Find opportunities to recommit to God.

Lesson 12: God sees the heart.

Lesson 13: A good leader listens to God.

JOSHUA LEADS COURAGEOUSLY

Aaron backed his way out of the men's restroom, swishing the mop from side to side as he went. It was the last of three at the small church. And he had diligently cleaned them all. He had to get there early Saturday morning instead of enjoying his weekend. But the church custodian was on medical leave, and Aaron's pastor had asked him to step in to clean the restrooms before the men's breakfast fellowship.

Aaron had happily agreed. The custodian left a list of responsibilities, which Aaron was careful to follow. As he checked one more thing off the list, it stood out to him how much was required to keep the church running. The custodian did a lot more than he realized.

Aaron's fiancé had expressed concern for him when she heard about his "Saturday morning plans." But he could tell how impressed she was by his attitude. "And when is Pastor going to let you lead Bible study again? When was the last time, three months ago?"

"Oh, it was something like that," Aaron had replied. "But I'm ready whenever Pastor calls on me. I've been studying the Word."

Coming back from the janitor's closet, Aaron washed up and made his way to the fellowship hall. He wanted to see if the hospitality committee needed any last-minute help for breakfast. He loved his church, and loved God. And for him, the two were closely connected.

1 What does it mean to be a leader?

2 Are we born with leadership skills, or do we become leaders through experience and practice?

¹ Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, ² Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. ⁵ There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ⁶ Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

God Commissions Joshua

At the close of Deuteronomy, Moses has just given his final sermon urging Israel to “choose life” by holding to the requirements of God’s covenant (Deut. 30:19). Moses prepares the people for the succession of leadership after his death, naming his assistant Joshua as next in line (Deut. 31:1–3). Moses climbs Mount Nebo, looks upon the land that he will not enter, and dies (Deut. 34:1–5).

The book of Joshua picks right up at the scene after Deuteronomy ends. God acknowledges the special relationship with Moses, “[God’s] servant” (Josh. 1:2). Now that the period of mourning is at an end, it is time for Joshua to take the momentous step of leading the people to cross the river that borders the territory of Abraham’s

inheritance (see Gen. 17:8). But Joshua faces a challenge. Even when they had Moses to guide them, the first generation to leave Egypt were hardhearted and rebellious. God delayed their entry into Canaan until every person had died, Moses last of all (see Num. 14:29–30).

A giant question mark hangs over this new generation. They have a fresh opportunity to obey, even though their parents had rebelled. Will they follow Joshua as they had followed Moses? Or will they falter? At this moment of great uncertainty, God steps in to reassure Joshua. God says that He shall give them “every place where you set your foot” (Josh. 1:3). Wherever they go, God is claiming territory for His presence to dwell with His people; each step forward is a small victory.

Their territory would extend from the desert currently occupied to Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea in the west, and north and east to the Euphrates River. God encourages Joshua that no one will be able to stand against him, as long as he lives. God’s promise to Joshua recalls the promise to Joshua’s mentor of forty years; as God was with Moses, He will be with the younger replacement: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (v. 5). Thus Joshua can stand up, strong and courageous, as he leads the people into the land that God has promised them since the days of Abraham (v. 6; see Gen. 12:7). If the great Moses felt fear at being sent to confront Pharaoh (Ex. 3:11–4:13), imagine how Moses’ successor must feel!

1 Put yourself in Joshua’s place. What’s going through your mind and heart?

2 How does God address Joshua’s concerns?

3 Joshua is told to take the concrete step of preparing to cross the Jordan. What obstacles might God be preparing you to face?

⁷ Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. ⁹ Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. ¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ¹¹ Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

⁷ “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” ¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Listen and Succeed

God repeats encouragement to Joshua to be “strong and very courageous” (v. 7). This time, the nature of God’s encouragement is about moral leadership. Joshua and the people are not only to occupy the land, but they first must check themselves for obedience to the law that God had given to Moses. Joshua had witnessed long years of wandering about in grumbling rebellion (see Num. 14:21–23). That simply would not work in this new territory. God reminds Joshua and the people to focus first on obeying His instructions, turning neither to the left nor to the right. If they will only be obedient, they shall be successful wherever they go.

Knowledge of what is good is one thing. But God promotes the close, intimate study of His instructions according to their every detail. The statutes of God should always be on His people's lips, a constant source of insight after everyone has meditated on what the words mean (v. 8). Pondering the word of God—for ordinary people, listening to it repeated by priests and leaders—would allow the kind of blessing that God's people long to achieve: victory in conflict, security in food supply, the gift of children (see Deut. 28:1–14).

A third time God encourages Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (v. 9). God has commanded him to lead the people, and Joshua does not need to be dismayed or hesitant. Joshua has not seen the land since spying it out decades earlier (see Num. 13–14), but the Creator would be Joshua's protector as he enters the territory.

And thus, the new leader of Israel springs into action. He orders officers to spread word through the camp on the plains of Moab: everyone must gather their provisions and ready themselves to move. In three days, they would cross the Jordan to “take possession of the land” (v. 11). Ultimately, it was God, not Joshua and his soldiers, who would clear the land for something never before seen: a nation of priests who could reflect the faithful presence of God.

1 What kind of instruction does God give for Joshua, beginning in verse 7?

2 What's the difference between reading God's words and meditating upon them?

3 How does Joshua respond?

Strength and Courage for the Work Ahead

Joshua knew that the task of leading Israel into the promised land was too big for him to do alone. Even his friend and mentor, Moses, with whom he served faithfully for forty years, had struggled and failed (see Num. 20:2–13). The people before Joshua were at a critical juncture of their relationship with God.

Sometimes people like to treat this story as demonstrating that God can use anyone (which is true). The thing is, Joshua was the obvious and expected choice of leader to replace Moses. He was as prepared and experienced as a person can be, and still God stepped in to offer reassurance. Joshua's story is a good reminder that experienced and mature people need God's guidance too.

All along, God had been preparing Joshua to succeed Moses. He was an established military leader—something critical in the work ahead. And Joshua was “filled with the spirit of wisdom” (Deut. 34:9). Those whose parents had disrespected Moses' leadership could recognize the anointing of God upon Joshua. Joshua is, in God's own words, a “man in whom is the spirit of leadership” (Num. 27:18). The Spirit would enable Joshua to be strong and courageous and to complete a work that Moses had started.

Our own futures may seem uncertain. We may doubt our capabilities. We may doubt whether others will follow or listen. But it's about God's capabilities, our willingness to follow wherever God leads, and our willingness to accept the mission of our calling, no matter how we might feel. God has put us here and now for a reason. With the Spirit, we can be strong and courageous for the tasks ahead (see Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 1:7). If we will be obedient to God's instruction, we will see the job to the end.

1 When has God prepared you for something new, even if you didn't feel ready?

2 How does knowing that God is always with you help you step into the unknown?

3 What's your “promised land” right now? Where and how do you need strength and courage?

We Are Not Alone

When God revealed His plan for Joshua to guide the Israelites to inherit the land, He emphasized a comforting promise: “The LORD your God will be with you” (Josh. 1:9). As believers under the new covenant, that same promise holds true. The Holy Spirit lives in us and goes with us. Place a sticky note in a prominent place as a reminder this week (by your keys, on your door, on the coffee pot, etc.). Write “God goes with me.” As you walk into the situations before you, whether familiar and comfortable or foreign and stressful, repeat those words as a quiet prayer before God and reminder to yourself. We are never alone!

In every moment, God goes with me.

Key Text

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. —Joshua 1:9 KJV

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” —Joshua 1:9 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 7 through September 12

Mon. 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17—Hold Fast to the Teachings.

Tue. Exodus 14:21–31—Victory at the Sea.

Wed. Numbers 10:29–36—The Lord Goes Before Us.

Thu. John 6:15–21—Do Not Be Afraid.

Fri. Psalm 77:10–20—Remember God’s Mighty Deeds.

Sat. 1 Corinthians 11:23–27—Remember Jesus’ Saving Work.

Next Week: Joshua 4:14–24

We will talk about God’s role as redeemer for all generations. Ask yourself, how do you keep the memory of family traditions alive?

ISRAEL REMEMBERS GOD'S DEEDS

Nicole tucked the corner of a piece of paper onto her bulletin board. Taped to it was a broken car key from her “only God” story.

About a month prior, Nicole’s maternal grandmother—affectionately known as Madear—had passed away. As a young college student, Nicole could never have afforded a plane ticket to attend the funeral. She had to make the ten-hour drive by herself.

Nicole grew up hearing Madear’s testimonies about the goodness of the Lord. These were often fantastic adventures! Nicole’s mother was also fond of sharing accounts of the Lord’s faithfulness. In each of their homes, Nicole always remembered the special places reserved for “trophy of intercession.” These were physical reminders of God’s faithfulness and answered prayers. Nicole hadn’t started collecting any trophies herself—until recently.

On the long drive home, she stopped at a busy rest area. As she turned off her car, the key broke in her hand, leaving a blade stuck in the ignition, with hardly any metal sticking out. She realized she would never be able to pull it out with fingernails, and Nicole began to cry and to pray, “Please, God, I don’t know what to do!”

She saw the couple in the car next to her notice, and a man stepped out to offer help. He returned with a tool to pull the key blank out, and Nicole said a silent prayer of thanks that she happened to have a spare in her purse. As she finished reminiscing, her roommate came into the room. “How come you’re keeping a broken car key?” she asked.

1 What kind of legacy with God does your family or church have to celebrate?

2 Have you ever considered keeping a physical item to help you remember God’s goodness? When?

¹⁴ On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵ And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, ¹⁶ Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.

¹⁷ Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

¹⁸ And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

¹⁴ That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses.

¹⁵ Then the LORD said to Joshua,

¹⁶ “Command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant law to come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁷ So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.”

¹⁸ And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

The Lord Directs Joshua

Our reading picks up just as crowds of people have crossed the Jordan, since God created a dry path for them. Crossing the Jordan River marks a pivotal moment in Joshua's leadership. It is the first of many responsibilities he assumes as Israel's leader as appointed by God. He wants to guide the people to receive the promises of the covenant and the bountiful goodness in the land. But before they can even enter the land, they need to remember that it is God's presence who goes before them.

On this day, the Lord exalts Joshua before the whole of Israel, thus fulfilling His earlier promise (see 3:7). God's exaltation is not about individual fame; but it publicly confirms that God is with Joshua, just as He had been with Moses. This affirmation mirrors Moses' own experience after crossing the Red Sea, when the people feared the Lord and trusted Him and Moses. Like the leader before, Joshua's authority relies on God, who works through him.

The Israelites stand “in awe” of Joshua, meaning they revere and

respect him (4:14). They followed his instructions to the letter, and everything happened as he had said. The ark of the covenant had been carried into the flooded river first, and the waters piled up from flowing downstream (see 3:13). Just try to imagine the feeling of walking past a deluge of water being held at bay by God's hand! Following the Lord's instructions and remembering these mighty deeds will be central to their life in Canaan, where success is directly tied to faithful observance of the covenant expectations.

Verses 15–18 complete the miracle, since the waters continue to wait until the priests are completely clear. The priests begin to clear the river at Joshua's signal, and God's control over nature is shown again by restoration of the river's rushing flow at the instant the last foot is clear (v. 18). This miraculous crossing has a theological message: entering the land happens only with God's help.

1 What is significant about God's exaltation of Joshua before all Israel?

2 What are some of the ways that the text emphasizes that this is a miracle?

3 How is this water crossing like and unlike the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus?



The use of standing stones or *matzevah* is known from several moments in Scripture. Standing stones mark key moments in Israel's history with God (see Gen. 28:18, 22; Ex. 24:4; Josh. 4:20).

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¹⁹ And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. ²¹ And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? ²² Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: ²⁴ That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

¹⁹ On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. ²⁰ And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. ²¹ He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’” ²² tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.”

Twelve Memorial Stones

After coming up from the Jordan, the people camp in Gilgal, located on the eastern border of Jericho (Josh. 4:19). Until this point, the narrative has not clarified the timing of the crossing of the Jordan, other than stating that the Jordan is flooding, which would be in the spring. Only now does the text clarify that the Israelites come out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. This is the month of Nisan, the time of Passover. Once again, the author is drawing a close connection between the events of Exodus and the crossing of the Jordan.

Twelve stones that had been gathered from the Jordan are set up in Gilgal. One day, the Israelites will be asked by their children and grandchildren, “What do these stones mean?” And in response, the parents will share the story of when Israel crossed the Jordan on dry land, even during the flood season. Thus the stones are a memorial

for future generations, a reminder of what God has done for them. In drying up the waters, God reveals that He alone has power over all—not only over Israel’s enemies, but over creation itself.

As Joshua instructs the people on these stones of remembrance, he makes a direct comparison between the crossing of the Jordan River and that of the Red Sea. God has once again performed an amazing act of power. For a moment, think about what it must have been like for this generation to have been raised in the wilderness, hearing all about an escape from Egypt when God’s mighty hand had overcome pursuing chariots. For the next generation, this sign at crossing the Jordan inspires them to have greater confidence. Perhaps where their parents had grumbled and showed ingratitude, they would set a new pattern of faithfulness before God.

And now as word of Israel’s crossing spreads, more people come to know the power of the Lord. God has been building a name for Himself among the people, including those who are not Israelites. As for the Israelites, they are to look upon these remembrance stones to see firsthand evidence of God’s power. They hope to walk before God in faithfulness, keeping the blessings of covenant before their eyes.

1 Why is the timing of the Jordan crossing significant?

2 What was the purpose of the twelve stones in Gilgal?

3 What were the two reasons God performed the miracle at the Jordan?

Remembering God's Faithfulness

For decades, my dad has kept a prayer journal. But after writing his requests, he always leaves some space. When God answers those prayers, my dad flips back in his journal to his request, and in that blank space writes every detail of how and when God answered it.

And wow, does he remember God's faithfulness! He recalls distant memories of what God has done in his life and in the lives of others. He connects the dots to find answered prayers in unexpected places. But as someone who doesn't keep a journal, I struggle to recall all of the goodness God has shown me. Even my most difficult struggles can, over time, fade from memory. How easy it is to forget what God has done! If Israel needed a monument of stones to remember the Jordan drying up, how much more do we need reminders of God's work, both large and small?

The twelve stones at Gilgal served as a memorial, reminding future generations of God's faithfulness. This theme of remembrance carries into the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to remember when God had sustained them through hardship, so that they would persevere in the present (see Heb. 10:32–36). Peter reminded believers of their calling and election so that they would “always be able to remember,” even after his death (2 Peter 1:12–15). Remembering is key to perseverance.

As believers under the new covenant, we, too, need to remember God's saving acts. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we do so in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice. But that's only one example of remembrance. Whether through the formality of a prayer journal or through ordinary items (a sticky note with a verse, a favorite piece of artwork, a picture), we should always find ways to remind ourselves and others of God's faithfulness.

1 Why do you think God wants His people to remember His saving works?

2 What memorial practices do we have today?

3 How can we encourage one another to remember God's faithfulness?

Stones of Remembrance

When in your life did God come through in a powerful way? Sometime this week, write down a prominent moment of God's faithfulness in a location where you can access it in the future (perhaps a journal). This will serve as a "stone of remembrance," helping you to trust the goodness of God in a time of uncertainty to come.

God showed His mighty power and faithfulness when . . .

Key Text

And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. —Joshua 4:21–22 KJV

He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'" —Joshua 4:21–22 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 14 through September 19

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 7:1–11—Live as Holy People.
- Tue.** Deuteronomy 7:12–26—God Will Love and Bless.
- Wed.** Philippians 4:10–19—Strengthened in Every Circumstance.
- Thu.** 2 Corinthians 10:1–5, 15–18—Armed for Spiritual Warfare.
- Fri.** John 16:23–33—Christ Has Overcome the World.
- Sat.** Joshua 10:40–11:5—God Fights for God's People.

Next Week: Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

Consider this question: What is a blessing in your life that can only be credited to God—not to you or your own abilities?

JOSHUA FIGHTS FOR GOD

“Marketing is what I love to do,” Kolby said to his favorite church elder.

He was on a campaign to become the new media director for his church. He felt the current person in the role was not doing an adequate job, but he didn’t want to come right out and say so. So he began to drop not-so-subtle hints wherever he could.

“Our church is growing, and the media department should expand with it,” Kolby continued. “I have such great ideas. I was the one who suggested using more social media.”

In the back of Kolby’s mind, he needed a new job, and he could see so many advantages to working for a church. But Alexandra, the current director, happened to be the only paid staff on the media team.

One Sunday morning, Kolby was in the kitchen and struck up a conversation with someone from the hospitality staff. “I’ve worked as a freelance writer for a few organizations,” he said to the sister at the sink who was washing out a pot. “No, I haven’t had any professional training. I didn’t realize that Alexandra had, but I am self-taught, which is probably better. I have my own video channel.”

A few weeks later Kolby cornered the pastor. “I’m between jobs right now, but I could be working day and night for some of these media projects. It sure seems like Alexandra is overwhelmed by all the extra things in the fall. Why don’t you let me try to handle it?”

1 Do you like to be the one making decisions in a group? Why or why not?

2 Does allowing others to lead make you a passive observer? Why or why not?

⁶ And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

⁷ So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them. ⁸ And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

⁹ And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

⁶ The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”

⁷ So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, ⁸ and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. ⁹ Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

God Defeats a Whole Army

How will the people respond to heavily armed opposition from ruthless kings who resist? That’s the question behind today’s reading. We have skipped forward a few years past the entry into Canaan. Under Joshua’s leadership, the Israelites experienced victories from God—times when God did all of the fighting for them (see Josh. 6). The Israelites also met defeat and setback when some of them tried to hold back spoils of war (see the sin of Achan in Josh. 7). The pattern shows that God expects His people to conduct themselves as a nation of priests: God isn’t devoted to their cause as much as they must seek to be aligned with God (see Josh. 5:13–14).

In some cases, Canaanites surrender and submit to what God is doing. Other times—as in Joshua 11—armed forces organize to oppose everything that God is wanting to accomplish through the establishment of Israel.

In Joshua 11:1–5, the most powerful leaders of northern Canaanite territories create an alliance. Their combined army is like “sand on

the seashore” (v. 4). Moreover, they are not just an army of foot soldiers; they have horse-drawn chariots (like armored tanks of the ancient world). A brilliant tactician such as Joshua might think to turn these weapons against the enemy, perhaps by capturing the chariots and arming them with Israelites who can win the next battle.

But we see a counterintuitive strategy described by God. First, God says that this army is not to be feared, that they shall be overcome in a single day. Second, God asks Joshua to order the destruction of their horses and chariots *after* they have already been successfully captured (v. 6). Joshua prepares himself to give this order, which would raise many eyebrows and might lead to the question, “Couldn’t these have been put to use?”

In the text that follows, we find only a brief description of the way the battle is won. The attack from Joshua’s forces is swift, showing their courage to oppose a strong army. And “the LORD gave [the Canaanites] into the hand of Israel” (v. 8). Nothing remains of the opposing army that seemed innumerable, like sand on the seashore.

1 What might Joshua have thought when God asked him to destroy horses and chariots?

2 Why would God command chariots and horses to be destroyed?

3 When have you been tempted to take shortcuts or to use wrong methods to do what is good?

¹⁶ So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; ¹⁷ Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. ¹⁸ Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. ¹⁹ There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. ²⁰ For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

²¹ And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

²² There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

²³ So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

¹⁶ So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, ¹⁷ from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and put them to death. ¹⁸ Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. ¹⁹ Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. ²⁰ For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²¹ At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. ²² No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.

²³ So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

God Overcomes All Other Kings

Joshua and his combined forces take possession of central and northern Canaan. This includes hills, desert, and mountainous regions—each with its own geography (v. 16). The various “kings” of each region should be understood as local tribal leaders in competition to hold power. According to Joshua 12, which includes a list extolling the victories that God gave, thirty-one kings were defeated in all.

The description of God’s “[hardening] their hearts” (Josh. 11:20) of these warrior-kings can easily be misunderstood. It doesn’t mean that they had no free choice or ability to respond with humility to God’s desire to resettle Canaan. Verse 19 mentions a counterexample—the Gibeonites—who chose to make peace with Israel rather than face their God in battle (Josh. 9). Frequently Scripture describes God as the one able to “drive out” inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 33:27; Josh. 24:12; compare Judg. 2:3). But for those who already made their decision to oppose this plan, God brings them together so that they can all be utterly defeated (Josh. 11:20). This includes the Anakites who are driven out and killed; they are descended from the Nephilim and the same people who were so large that Moses’ spies worried, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Num. 13:33).

God’s plan in all of this is found in Joshua 11:23. Again, Joshua is compared to Moses as a prophet and effective intermediary (one who can share what God desires). Faithfulness to what God expects results in Israel’s receipt of their “inheritance,” meaning the territory that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants. The phrase describing a “rest” from war shows that God’s design is for peace and security to reign among His people in their new homes.

1 What choices were available to the tribes of Canaanites?

2 Why does the text describe the destruction and driving out of the Anakites?

3 How would you explain why the Canaanites were driven out or destroyed?

Trust the Source of Strength

The first time that Moses ordered spies to enter the land of Canaan, they returned with fantastic reports of the land's potential. However, all they could talk about were obstacles: "The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large" (Num. 13:28). None of that mattered if God was inviting them to take the territory! Psalm 2 says, "The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed" (v. 2). No matter the odds, God is more powerful.

But when God uses us, we are constantly tempted to make a show of our involvement. We stand on our abilities and our strength, forgetting that God alone can provide these in the first place. We read today about a demonstration of epic proportions, when God asked Joshua and the other Israelites to go into battle without a single horse or chariot. Were I in their shoes, I might have called that crazy!

It reminds me of one of the hymns from Martin Luther, the words describing our ultimate enemy: "his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate." But in the next verse Luther writes, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." It means that we can put all of our energies into the battle against evil—emptying our storehouse of reserves—and still it would never be enough to overcome the enemy we face. Only with *faith* can we hope to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).

Here is how to make this truth practical. First, if God invites you to do something extraordinary, don't dismiss what seems too hard. Second, when you look back at a lifetime of struggles against opposing forces, assume that your skills and abilities didn't make the difference. Finally, don't go into your "battles" alone. When struggles are against evil, you need God to be your bulwark, His strength to be your hope. Invite others to join you in prayer and discernment, as you ask God to show faithfulness and protection.

1 What is a time that you have seen only the obstacles, instead of the invitation from God?

2 What makes our human striving a losing strategy?

3 Who are your allies in prayer for the next battle?

Clear Space for God

God wants to drive out the distractions, temptations, and vulnerabilities in our lives that would pull us away from honoring Him. Nothing can satisfy our deepest longings other than Him. What area might be preventing you from experiencing the joys of this relationship? Ask God to give you the strength to drive out whatever would keep you from living in the promise.

Lord God, be our protector as we stand against a fearsome enemy. Through faith, help me to clear this new territory for You (a distraction, temptation, or source of fear): _____.

Key Text

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. —Joshua 11:20 KJV

For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses. —Joshua 11:20 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 21 through September 26

- Mon.** Joshua 2:1–7—Welcoming Strangers.
- Tue.** James 2:14–26—Faith Without Works Is Dead.
- Wed.** Psalm 67—May the Nations Know God’s Salvation.
- Thu.** Hebrews 11:1–2, 29–31—Faith to Live By.
- Fri.** Acts 10:34–48—God Shows No Partiality.
- Sat.** Joshua 2:8–14—Rahab’s Faith in God.

Next Week: Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17

Ask yourself, “When has God provided an ally in an unexpected place?”

RAHAB WELCOMES SPIES

Taylor was delighted to hear that the wife of her former pastor was coming to town for a conference. She offered to pick her up from the airport. Instead of a hotel, Taylor opened her home to Sister Irma—and the use of a vehicle to get back and forth for two days.

“I can’t put you out like that,” pleaded Irma. But Taylor was so insistent that the older woman relented to Taylor’s hospitality.

But it didn’t stop at a place to stay: Taylor had bought many of Sister Irma’s favorite foods. She cleaned her house from top to bottom. Most of all, she prepared her daughter to share a room with her while Sister Irma was staying with them, giving up the private bedroom. Somewhat surprisingly, her daughter didn’t seem to mind one bit. She was getting into the excitement of sharing their home and going out of the way to make a guest feel comfortable.

When they brought Irma home from the airport and showed her to a bedroom with her own bathroom, it brought tears of joy to the weary face of their friend.

“I can’t take your bedroom, Taylor,” Sister Irma said.

“You can, and you will,” said Taylor. “I’m so glad to have you visit us and be in our home.”

“Wait until you see what we have cooking for dinner!” added Taylor’s daughter, with a grin.

1 When have you had the opportunity to surprise someone else with hospitality?

2 Why do you think that breaking bread together is a way to build close fellowship?

⁸ And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; ⁹ And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. ¹¹ And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

⁸ Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. ¹⁰ We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Rahab Acknowledges God

After deceiving the men sent to search and kill Israelite spies, Rahab goes up to the roof where she has hidden them under stalks of flax, a plant used for making linen and rope. She explains why she sheltered spies from their pursuers and lied to the leaders of Jericho.

Rahab has heard that Yahweh (whose name is often rendered as “the LORD” in translation) has already given the land of Canaan over to the Israelites. She says that fear of the Israelites had gripped the people of the land, including those living in Jericho (Josh. 2:9). She describes the rest of the people as “melting in fear,” showing the degree of dread that the Canaanites are experiencing. Such fear explains why the king of Jericho, aware of the Israelite’s presence on the east side of the Jordan, was looking out for spies.

But why were the people of Jericho and the surrounding country so afraid? In verse 10, Rahab shares that they had heard about the mighty deeds of God. God had delivered the Israelites through the Red Sea when they came out of Egypt (Ex. 14:21, 29–31). God had

helped Israel defeat mighty Amorite kings, Sihon and Og (see Deut. 2:24–3:11). God says at that time, “I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble” (Deut. 2:25). God prepares the way by putting residents of Canaan to a decision: either face the same powerful God who defeated mighty opponents, or flee.

Rahab describes this fear in Jericho by saying: “When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you” (Josh. 2:11). This repeated image of melting, or dissolving, confirms to the Israelite spies that God has really given the land to them. Later, in their report to Joshua, they say, “The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us” (v. 24).

By her incredible testimony, Rahab acknowledges Yahweh. Reflecting on the reports about God and His people, as well as the fear that has gripped the Canaanites, Rahab says to the spies, “For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (v. 11). These words resemble Moses’ words to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:39, where Moses adds, “There is no other” (Deut. 4:39).

Rahab’s declaration is that Yahweh is very strong, exercising His power throughout heaven and earth. She knows that God is more than capable of defeating the Canaanites and coming into the land. Rahab expects Jericho to be conquered, and so she shows courageous hospitality to those in alignment with God’s will. She acknowledges that Yahweh reigns above all others.

1 What does Rahab acknowledge about Yahweh?

2 According to Rahab, why were the Canaanites melting in fear?

3 What might be a difference between fear of God and reverence for God?

¹² Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: ¹³ And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

...

¹⁶ And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city. ¹⁷ And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

¹² “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.”

...

¹⁶ The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! ¹⁷ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

God Is Faithful to Rahab

Rahab desires a covenantal arrangement with the spies she has housed and protected. Now with the danger abated, she asks for something in return—the very kindness she had shown to them. Given her conviction about Yahweh’s power and Jericho’s impending destruction, she requests safety, since she believes that the Lord can protect her and her family. She seeks the aid that is given to a covenant partner in need, for the God of the Israelites is compassionate and faithful to any who seek Him. She even requests that such kindness will extend to all her relatives—her father and mother, brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them. The spies accept her request, swearing an oath and instructing her on what to do when Israelites enter the city.

By Joshua 6:16, the Israelites have entered the land and spent six days marching around the city of Jericho. This is what the Lord instructed Joshua to do: “March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days” (Josh. 6:3). On the seventh day,

they were to march around the city seven times, while seven priests blew ram's horns in front of the ark of the covenant. On the seventh time around, the priests were to sound a long blast and the whole army was to give a loud shout. Then the walls of Jericho would collapse (vv. 4–5). These instructions from God were predicated on the promise that God had already delivered Jericho into the hands of the Israelites (v. 2).

The seventh time around the city, the priests sound a long blast and Joshua commands the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!” (v. 16). The city and all that is in it are to be “devoted to the LORD” (v. 17). The Israelites are instructed to keep away from the devoted things so that they do not bring destruction upon themselves. In other words, they are not to bring any of the Canaanites into their camp or take any plunder for themselves.

But one exception is made among the entire city. In verse 17, Joshua tells the army that Rahab and her household are to be spared because of her hospitality toward the Israelite spies. This demonstrates God's faithfulness and kindness to those who revere Him and seek His help. God heard Rahab's plea for safety after she acknowledged His power and showed kindness to His people. God accepted Rahab into His covenantal fellowship and gave help in her time of need. In that way, Rahab's salvation reminds us of Israel's salvation from Egypt. Through God's grace, she becomes part of God's people.

1 What does Rahab seek from the Israelite spies?

2 What does the sparing of Rahab's household communicate about God?

3 How is Rahab's story like the story of the Israelites coming out of Egypt?

What God Does

I did a double-take when he walked through the door. I hadn't seen this guy since high school, and I didn't particularly like seeing him now. I remembered him as a tough guy, a bully, even a villain—the kind of guy who liked to make others feel small. What on earth was he doing at a Bible study?

I could tell that he recognized me. I rummaged through my thoughts, trying to remember his name. “Hey,” I squeaked out with phony enthusiasm, “How’s it going, man?”

His response wasn't phony. He was excited to see a familiar face—excited to see me. And . . . was that light in his eyes? Was that joy? He introduced himself to the group and shared how Jesus had changed his life. He had been confronted with the reality of the living God, and he didn't shrink away or hide. He didn't cling to the false gods of his youth. Instead, he sought kindness from the God who is faithful to those who revere Him. He started following the way of Jesus.

God showed me a person who had been turned around—who had been an outsider like Rahab. Somehow, this new follower of Jesus was enthusiastic to have a share in God's future, by grace. He had a place in God's story and was playing a role in God's kingdom.

This is what God does. He accepts those who turn to Him in faith. He honors those who submit to His will and walk in obedience. He gives broken people a place in His future, no matter how jaded their past may be. He can work through a high school bully or a Canaanite woman within the walls of Jericho. He can work through you or me.

God is faithful to those who revere Him and seek Him. How will you respond today?

1 What does the faith and transformation of an unlikely follower tell us about God?

2 Share about a time you witnessed God work in and through an unlikely person.

3 How should we respond to the God who is faithful to those who revere Him?

God Draws Near

Although not an Israelite, Rahab nevertheless displays a fear of God and a desire to serve His people. She demonstrates that she is an ally to God's people and purposes. Who are the "kingdom allies" in your life? These might be people who are not yet believers, but who show that they desire the things of God. Write at least one name below and pray this over them:

God, _____ shows by their words and actions that they are not far from You.

Bring them to the foot of the cross, so that they may have faith in Jesus' name.

Key Text

And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

—Joshua 6:17 KJV

The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

—Joshua 6:17 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 28 through October 3

Mon. Joshua 23:1–11—Hold Fast to the Lord.

Tue. Joshua 24:1–13—Reaffirming the Covenant.

Wed. 1 John 1:8–2:5—Obey Christ's Commandments.

Thu. Luke 9:57–62—No Turning Back.

Fri. Matthew 22:34–40—The Greatest Commandments.

Sat. Psalm 25:12–22—God, Deliver Your People.

Next Week: Joshua 24:18–27

Consider this question: "What is a vow or a promise that you have seen tested over time?"

A COVENANT RENEWED

Dale beckoned for his niece and cousin to join the photo. A number of his family members were at his graduation ceremony, where he was receiving his doctorate in counseling and psychology. He finally did it! After six years and nearly quitting multiple times, Dale had a PhD after his name. He already had a lot on his plate when he started—he was a father of three, a full-time guidance counselor, and a men's ministry leader—so he knew that the goal would be demanding.

Still, Dale felt called to this as a mission. He wanted to be more effective as he led groups of men. Already, Dale understood the weight of his ministry. Several of the men whom Dale mentored had laid bare their struggles, and the pain broke Dale's heart. As he sought help and prayed through his responses, he faced feelings of inadequacy as a leader.

He would never have considered more schooling without the support of his wife. She had been the one to urge him along, and the triumph was hers to share. Dale learned to be intentional with his spare time, spending every spare moment with family. When he found himself wishing he had more time in the day, the Lord was still faithful.

"I didn't believe you were ever going to get your PhD," said Dale's cousin, walking up to the group.

"Well, get over here and get in the picture for proof," he said.

1 What kind of spiritual goals have you made?

2 How do goals shape our lives?

¹⁸ And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God.

¹⁹ And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

²⁰ If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

²¹ And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD.

²² And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

²³ Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

²⁴ And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

Choose God

If there is one quotable moment in Joshua, it is a few verses before today's reading. You may have seen Joshua's words framed over mantles or written on inspirational cards: “As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). But where do these words of commitment come into the story? Wasn't Israel already committed and ready to follow the Lord God?

The setting is near the end of Joshua's life, after the land has been settled. Joshua summons all the leaders of Israel to Shechem, where

he will share his last wishes (Josh. 24:1). Joshua gives a sermon to persuade and to strengthen Israel's desire to serve God faithfully (the word *serve* is repeated a number of times, you may notice).

Key to Joshua's exhortation is the imperative *choose*, a verb repeated in verse 22. God delivered the people from Egypt, struck down the Amorites, and drove out mighty kings so that the tribes could enjoy the fruits of a fertile land (vv. 5–13). Still, God desires their consent to be held accountable for putting aside the religious practices of their ancestors. In practice, it seems to be an easy decision—Joshua explains that choosing God is rational. As Moses said years earlier, “Choose life” (Deut. 30:19).

The responses of the leaders show that Joshua's sermon has its intended effect. Their affirmations harken back to their history with Moses, when the Sinai covenant was first ratified and the people said, “We will do everything the LORD has said” (Ex. 19:8). In this new context, the Israelites repeat the same history that Joshua has just reviewed: they were collectively brought out of slavery in Egypt, saved by signs and wonders, kept safe in the wilderness, and given a rich inheritance in the land of Canaan. The only conceivable thing to do is to put aside any other god they might be tempted to worship. Otherwise, Israel might begin to look like another version of the Canaanite tribes they had just expelled.

1 In what sense did Joshua give the people a choice?

2 In what sense was Joshua saying that there is only one valid choice to make?

3 How might we improve our ability to remember what God has done for us?

²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

²⁷ And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

²⁷ “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

A Stone for a Witness

The location of this event is not an accident. Shechem was a significant place in Israel’s history. Abraham and Jacob built altars there, and Joseph’s burial site was nearby (Gen. 12:6; 33:18–20; Josh. 24:32). It had already become a center for national meetings, covenant renewal, and sacred markers. Now it was the site of renewal again.

In the ancient world, treaties and covenants established terms of peace and were extremely important to all parties (usually kept in temples with their most prized possessions). Joshua led the Israelites through a similar commitment, presenting a formal covenant to God. God had established covenants with their ancestors and with the Israelites at Sinai, and the covenant was now this generation’s responsibility to keep. We are told that Joshua recorded this event in “the Book of the Law of God” (v. 26)—perhaps forming part of the same written traditions that we are reading.

Joshua had positioned the Israelites to make a firm decision. It shows that they were fully informed about the consequences of their future actions. Like Jacob before him, Joshua creates a monument to this covenant renewal: a standing stone set under a tree (Josh. 24:25–28). It’s another standing stone like we first saw in Lesson 2.

This time, the stone would count as a witness to heaven, if the people become unfaithful to their word.

You might wonder, Why all the formality? Why does this act need witnesses at all? But Joshua is fully aware of the difficulty they will have in keeping their commitment. In other ancient treaties, the gods might be named as witnesses to keep each side in line. Since God is part of this arrangement, Joshua uses a stone—a wordless part of creation itself, one that will last for ages.

Following these words, the remainder of the book of Joshua records his death at the age of 110 (Josh. 24:29). His final words of warning stand at the end of his role as leader, when it was easy to see God's hand behind the many blessings that had come to the Israelites. His words call people of all times and places back to loyalty to God and the rejection of idols.

1 Why would a new generation need to make a new covenant with God?

2 What are some examples of firm commitments we make today?

3 What does it say about this covenant that Joshua requires a witness?

Say No

A few decades ago, well-meaning politicians created a marketing campaign as part of the so-called “war on drugs.” You might remember it from its memorable posters, commercials, and other advertising that encouraged children to “say no” to using drugs. The hope was that sharing a message with adolescents and children could persuade them to avoid going down a harmful path altogether. Yet most public policy experts consider the campaign unsuccessful. There has never been good evidence that the messaging altered individual behavior.

Joshua presented his own kind of “say no” campaign. “Say no” to religious compromise and adopting the worship of other gods. “Say no” to the grumbling that led the wilderness generation astray. “Say no” to becoming indistinguishable from the Canaanites. With the benefit of hindsight, we can add our voices of warning: *Don’t fall into the trap that would lead to destruction!*

Joshua seems to know that the road to obedience is narrow, that the people he was leading would not be able to keep their commitments. Without a designated successor, with many Canaanites left in the territory, with the force of gravity pulling the tribes back to past behaviors—Joshua was right to worry.

But the situation is different for followers of Jesus. Whereas the Israelites had the same sin problem as their ancestors, the victory of Jesus means we have the opportunity to experience freedom from the enslaving master of sin (Rom. 6:18). Whereas the Israelites were led by the Spirit sporadically and through chosen leaders, we have the opportunity to be filled with God’s holy presence. The Spirit helps us to choose life, for “the Spirit gives life” (Rom. 8:10). The Spirit helps in our weakness, enabling our obedience.

1 What are some temptations that we need to wholeheartedly reject?

2 What are ways that God enables us to live in freedom, now that Christ has conquered sin?

3 If we say no to idolatry, what can we say yes to doing instead?

Serving the Lord Alone

After seeing God's mighty hand at work, the Israelites committed to abandoning their idols and serving God alone. What idols stand between you and the Lord? Consider things like social media, games, caffeine, social affirmation, a task list, a clean house, a favorite television series, etc. Use this week's lesson to lay potential idols before the Lord in prayer:

Far be it from me to forsake You, Lord, by finding my sense of wellbeing in _____.

I commit to serve the Lord, because You alone are my God.

Key Text

Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

—Joshua 24:14b KJV

Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

—Joshua 24:14b NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 5 through October 10

Mon. Romans 5:1–10—Christ Died for All.

Tue. Romans 5:11–21—Grace Abounds Despite Sin.

Wed. Deuteronomy 12:1–14—Worship God at the Chosen Place.

Thu. Deuteronomy 12:20–32—Worship God in the Chosen Way.

Fri. Colossians 3:1–11—Put On the New Self.

Sat. Colossians 3:12–17—Clothe Yourself with Godliness.

Next Week: Judges 2:6–15

What is a disappointment that you have had a hard time putting in the past?

A FAITHLESS GENERATION

Tawanda held back a grimace as the young couple passed her. They seemed very sweet together, but years ago she had turned down a date with the man.

At the time, she had been hopping between churches—mostly to try to meet other singles. Even though she admired the way Jayden spoke in group and volunteered regularly, he seemed far too nerdy for her taste.

“Why do you seem to go for worldly guys?” her friend challenged. Tawanda said she was looking for someone with swagger.

Now, years later, she regretted judging so harshly. Jayden clearly loved the Lord, and he was going places. He was working as an engineer when he met someone else.

The whole experience had Tawanda questioning her motives for everything. Her spiritual mentor encouraged her to take a pause from dating, to really pursue what God might be trying to show her.

But every time she spotted Jayden, she thought about what she had rejected. Her real sense of loss was not about missing out on a romantic relationship, but about missing opportunities to deepen her relationship with Christ.

1 Have you ever rejected something only to regret it later?

2 How can we see God’s hand working more clearly in situations?

3 What are the consequences of rejecting God’s blessing as opposed to being faithful to Him?

⁶ And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

⁷ And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. ⁹ And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

⁶ After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. ⁷ The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

⁸ Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

The Fruits of Faithfulness

The beginning of this text describes the Israelites while they are in a privileged position. Each tribe is able to return to their “inheritance” (v. 6). These inheritances are not the ordinary kind, passed down from family members. Israel fought for the land, but it was God who granted it (Josh. 24:11). Their possession of the land is based on covenant fidelity. God gives the land for their inheritance, with the clear expectation that they remain faithful to Him (Deut. 11:8–12). Verse 6 thus invites readers to remember that gifts from God should encourage our relationship with Him.

The text draws a connection between the people’s faithfulness to covenant and the stewardship that leaders are called to provide. Leaders should be deeply concerned to keep alive the memory of God’s faithfulness and what He continues to do. Leaders like Joshua remind the people of what they have—a blessing—as a result of their special status and covenant with God.

But notice that the leadership is not limited to Joshua (v. 7). The text describes other leaders too. Not only does Joshua act as a head of the tribes, but he cultivates other effective leaders around him who can shepherd the people to do what is right.

These leaders would have had their own experiences of God's faithfulness. From the earliest days of entering Canaan out of their wilderness wanderings, they have seen miracles of deliverance—God's hand that had made taking the territory possible. Without this living testimony and broader kind of leadership, Israel would be vulnerable to rebellion and sin.

Joshua had reminded the people about the nature of their relationship to God at several moments in the previous book. After crossing the Jordan, he commanded twelve stones to be set up “to serve as a sign among you” (Josh. 4:6). After a major victory, he brings the people together to read and review the words of covenant: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel” (Josh. 8:35).

The book of Judges recounts Joshua's death in the manner of Israel's heroes like Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. And with a fitting addition, the text of verse 9 records that Joshua is buried in his own tribal inheritance. It's nearly an identical verse to Joshua 24:30, making a bridge between the two documents. Just as the story of Joshua began with the death of a great leader (Moses) and the passing of the torch, the narrative of Judges begins with the death of a leader—but without the mention of a designated successor.

1 How has a leader or mentor's sharing of their own experiences helped you to continue to serve God?

2 Why do you think humans can be quick to forget God's powerful works in our lives or the lives of relatives?

3 If you compare the death of Joshua to the way that Moses' death was described in Joshua 1, what is missing?

¹⁰ And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. ¹¹ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: ¹² And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. ¹⁴ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

Spurning God

If you are keeping track, we are now reading about the third generation of Israelites since coming out of Egypt. The first generation died in the wilderness, and the second generation experienced God's protection and provision when coming into Canaan. But this third generation had none of that shared context. These Israelites probably *knew* about God but did not grasp who God really was, nor experience His powerful saving acts. They flippantly cast aside the requirements of covenant—terms of their relationship with God. They actively run after the gods of their former antagonists.

“Baals” are Canaanite deities belonging to the people whom God had asked the Israelites to expel (*Baals* literally means “lords”). Worship of these idols was not only direct betrayal—showing no faith that God would provide for their needs—it opened them up to contemptible religious practices like ritual prostitution or even child sacrifice, things God calls detestable: “They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods” (Deut. 12:31).

Joshua warned against serving gods of the nations, or else the Lord’s anger would burn against them and remove them from the land of inheritance (Josh. 23:15–16). They were defiling themselves with the very practices that had brought judgment on the land’s former residents.

With the covenant broken once again, God’s protection is removed. Raiders begin to plunder the land, for Israel has no special status above others (Judg. 2:14). God is just, and He does not play favorites. Without righteous leaders to remind them why they were prospering, the Israelites’ prosperity bred complacency. Rather than build their relationship with God through obedience and trust, they turn away to worship gods promising success, fertility, power, and fame.

Like a partner who betrays and cheats on a spouse, the Israelites are showing with their actions that they no longer value their connection to God at all. We may struggle with the idea of God’s anger, but righteous anger is the other side of love. God’s love means loyalty and utter faithfulness, and God’s justice always has a redemptive purpose. Like a parent, or like a spouse who wants to reconcile, God allows Israel to experience the full consequences of their actions, hoping that they may learn the futility of idolatry. Through their distress, God wants them to return to the relationship they had rejected.

1 How different is your daily life from the life of your grandparents’ generation?

2 How was the experience of the new generation of Israelites different from the last?

3 What does it show about God, that He lets the Israelites experience oppression again?

Pick One: Control or Blessing

We may look at the Israelites' fatal attraction to Baals and Ash-toreths and be tempted just to shake our heads. *Why?* It's easy to have almost the same reaction we might have to a loved one who is going back to an abusive partner. These foreign gods were horrible to serve.

Instead of God's laws, which provided for the poor and vulnerable, other gods promised power and control. This kind of human religion makes a certain degree of sense—from a fallen perspective. Normally when we want something, we feel the need to give in return. If we want something beyond our power (like rain to fall immediately or success against a terrible foe), then perhaps we might be asked to sacrifice what is dear to us, even a child. It is human to do terrible things to feel in control.

Yahweh, on the other hand, is not a God we control. God values our faith and a relationship with us. God enjoys giving what truly leads to our good, rather than satiating our desire for control. Jesus tells us that God's grace is abundant, "[sending] rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). Serving our holy God means relinquishing our control in favor of what God desires.

We cannot chart a clean and reliable path to material riches if we follow Jesus. Following Jesus includes taking up a cross (Matt. 16:24). The new covenant comes with the most wonderful of promises, the fulfillment of the blessings that were offered to the Israelites in Deuteronomy. God's eternal blessing is more valuable than what any other god or ideology can offer.

So when we read of all of the terrible choices in this era, we can rejoice that we see the fuller picture. We can learn the lesson of our ancestors in the faith, that if we reject God's blessing, we are only harming ourselves.

1 What are ways that you see people seeking a sense of control?

2 When do you ever find yourself trying to control God?

3 Do you want to serve God and let go of other ways of feeling in control? Why?

Spiritual Mentors

The new generation of Israelites chose to worship idols, rather than trusting the God who faithfully led their ancestors. When we experience periods of spiritual dryness, we can remember the stories of a spiritual mentor, parents, or grandparents. Use this week to review a time when someone close to you experienced God's faithfulness through difficult circumstances. (If nothing comes to mind, ask a relative, pastor, or someone who led you to faith.)

God, thank You for working powerfully in the life of

When I am in distress, may my faith be bolstered as I remember Your deliverance.

Key Text

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim.
—Judges 2:11 KJV

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.
—Judges 2:11 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 12 through October 17

Mon. Philippians 1:21–30—Courage to Live or Die.

Tue. Matthew 5:11–16—Let Your Light Shine.

Wed. Psalm 84—Blessed Is One Who Trusts the Lord.

Thu. Hebrews 4:11–16—Let Us Strive for God's Rest.

Fri. Hebrews 6:1–12—Promise of Better Things.

Sat. Judges 3:1–7, 12–14—God Tests God's People.

Next Week: Judges 3:15–23, 30

Do you have any hidden talents or qualities about yourself that others would not expect?

AN UNLIKELY DELIVERER

“So the permit is good to go for our petting zoo? That’s great!” said Malcolm.

He was coordinating his church’s annual Harvest Festival, and they had one last meeting before the big day. The committee dedicated two and a half months to organizing every detail.

Malcolm knew how much work it would be, but it was a big outreach event that brought in the local community. Along with the petting zoo, this festival would have an array of entertainment and activities: performances by local gospel singers and Christian artists, hayrides, pumpkin bowling, face painting, a scavenger hunt, bounce houses, a photo booth, a wreath-making station, and a huge mural for everyone to doodle and paint.

He had someone lined up in charge of each offering, but there were others who had not been able to attend planning meetings. Malcolm assured them all that he would still need volunteers on the day of the festival.

“This year’s festival is going to be our biggest yet,” said Necie. “I didn’t think we would pull it all together. But we did!”

Malcolm expressed gratitude for the committee’s support and dedication. Together they prayed, asking the Lord for guidance and protection for their efforts. “Let people come that day who would never think to come to church on Sunday.” The committee responded with a resounding “Amen!”

1 Where have you seen God’s orchestration of details in your life?

2 How can we remind ourselves that God is working through things unseen?

¹⁵ But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. ¹⁶ But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh. ¹⁷ And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸ And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

¹⁵ Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶ Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. ¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸ After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way those who had carried it.

All in the Details

A good book or movie often has lots of details that may seem meaningless at first but end up crucial to the plot. The account of Ehud and Eglon in Judges 3 is exactly that kind of story. The narrative gives lots of details that are later used by God to bring about the rescue of His people.

At this point in Judges, the Israelites have failed to drive out all other inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Consequently, they begin intermarrying with them and worshiping their gods (Judg. 3:5–6). God allows them to be subjugated by an enemy until they cry out and ask for help.

First, God raises up Othniel who delivers them (Judg. 3:7–11). But the pattern repeats. The Israelites do evil again before the Lord, who allows Eglon, king of Moab, to subjugate the Israelites. For eighteen years, Eglon rules over them (Judg. 3:14). The Israelites, burdened with their sin and the weight of their oppression, likely wanted God to answer their prayer for help immediately. But He didn't raise up a deliverer for eighteen years.

Eventually, God raises up Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin to deliver the Israelites. His job doesn't seem to be one of deliverance at

first. He is chosen to bring a tribute to King Eglon (v. 15). As part of the oppression they experienced, the Israelites had to pay taxes and bring gifts to Eglon. Ehud is simply a delivery man with the degrading task of bringing Israel's treasures to the person oppressing them.

The text explains that Ehud had a double-edged sword, likely about eighteen inches long and just the right size to be strapped to his right thigh without poking past the knee. Its size is an important detail, since Ehud is left-handed (v. 15). The text doesn't explain why this is relevant, but the idea we are supposed to understand is that weapons are normally strapped to the opposite side—where they would be carefully checked and removed by attendant guards. Since Ehud uses the opposite hand, his concealed weapon goes unnoticed.

Another detail shows up in verse 17—Ehud brings the tribute to Eglon. The exact tribute is not listed, but it could have been a combination of money, goods, food, and crops—perhaps contributing to the detail that King Eglon had grown to be a very fat man. His subjugation of the Israelites meant that Eglon could eat well, while conquered people would not be so lucky.

The next detail comes when Ehud sends away those who carried the tribute (v. 18). This lets the reader know two things: the tribute was large enough to be carried by several people, and now Ehud is separated from his larger group of allies. He is on his own. This sets the stage for the rest of the story, in which it becomes clear that God had orchestrated all of these details to deliver His people from oppression.

1 Why do you think the text in this passage of Scripture gives so many details?

2 Why do you think God allowed the Israelites to be subjugated for eighteen years?

3 When have you waited a long time for God to answer a prayer? How did this challenge or grow your faith?

¹⁹ But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

²⁰ And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. ²¹ And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: ²² And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. ²³ Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

...

³⁰ So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

¹⁹ But on reaching the stone images near Gilgal he himself went back to Eglon and said, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.”

The king said to his attendants, “Leave us!” And they all left.

²⁰ Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king rose from his seat, ²¹ Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. ²² Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. ²³ Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

...

³⁰ That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

Israel’s Deliverance

Have you ever gotten in the car, pulled out of the garage to run an errand, and realized that you left your phone or wallet in the house? Or maybe you were halfway to work before realizing you forgot to turn off the stove.

This is the sense the text gives in verse 19, when Ehud has already left and had almost reached Gilgal on his way back home (likely across the Jordan River), but then he abruptly turns around and goes back to King Eglon again. The reader, however, is meant to remember the previous details: (1) Ehud had sent those who accompanied him away, (2) he has a secret sword strapped to his right thigh, and

(3) he has delivered rich tribute and seemed content to leave. But Ehud returns to King Eglon and says that he has a secret message (literally in Hebrew, “a word” or “a thing” for him). Eglon seems eager to hear whatever Ehud has to say and immediately sends away all of his attendants.

Ehud does have something from God, but it is not the message Eglon is expecting or wanting (v. 20). The detail of the sword being on Ehud’s right thigh means that no one thought he had a weapon on him, especially not an eighteen-inch dagger. Ehud sinks the sword, handle and all, into the large belly of King Eglon and then leaves, locking the door behind him (vv. 22–23). The “message” from God to King Eglon brought the downfall of the one oppressing God’s people, starting a chain of events that will give them back their freedom.

In verses 24–29, Ehud escapes after the king’s attendants assume he’s using the bathroom. Ehud returns home and summons the Israelite tribes to assemble against Moab, and the tables are turned. The Israelites experience peace for eighty years (v. 30).

The narrative of Judges 3 paints a vivid picture of a dramatic rescue, including irony as the servant who brings tribute to Israel’s oppressor turns out to be an unlikely hero and the one to lead God’s people to freedom. A day that began as shameful for Israel turns into a humiliation for Moab. Together, all the details of the narrative show that God had a plan from the beginning. His intentions may not always be obvious in the moment (for instance, raising up a warrior who used the opposite hand). But God works through the details to bring rescue and to end a long era of oppression.

1 What was surprising to you about this passage? What is something you may not have noticed before?

2 Why do you think God decided to rescue in this way?

3 Have you ever looked back at a situation in your life and seen how God worked through small things? What were they?

God's Help in the Details

I work at a church where I meet regularly with a young woman who has struggled with mental health over the years. She recently went through a rough time and found herself spiraling. Thankfully, she has stabilized. In a recent conversation we ended up discussing the past few months and the ways she recognized God as showing up in the midst of her difficult situations.

At the start of the year, she recommitted to attending church. Soon after that decision, she began meeting with me on a regular basis. She joined a weekly Bible study where she met some mature Christian women who became her close friends. She went to a weekly recovery group and began opening up with others for the first time.

Then the mental health struggles began to plague her. It was challenging, and there were times when she felt like she didn't know what to do. But through it all, she had people at church who encouraged her, a Bible study commitment that kept her reading God's Word, and a weekly church service where she was reminded of what was true.

As we chatted, we noticed that all of those small steps—those details of the previous months—were God's way of providing protection all around her while she faced the difficult time. Small decisions, small steps, small details. Her church, friends, and Scripture all added up to give strength during her hard time. God orchestrated the details, and she followed His leading. Now her faith is stronger as a result.

We don't know God's plan or how the details of our lives might come together. But when we look back, we can see God working through circumstances and choices in our lives. We can see how He used people to accomplish His plans. And in looking back, our faith is buoyed when we remember that God truly cares for us in those small ways. A God in the details can be trusted for our future.

1 When was a time that seemingly small things helped you through a difficult circumstance?

2 What are some ways you make sure to remember what God has done in your life?

3 How can you be one of the “details” in someone else's life to help them through a hard time?

Expect the Unexpected

Ehud's unusual (and graphic!) interaction with King Eglon shows how God often employs unexpected means to deliver us. In what area of your life are you crying out to God for deliverance? Is there a medical concern, a financial worry, a frustration at work, or a recent tragedy to bring to God? Lay it before the Lord, expressing your trust in the God who handles details.

Faithful God, I bring _____ to You.

I trust You for the outcome, knowing You may choose to answer in an unexpected way.

Key Text

But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded. —Judges 3:15a KJV

Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. —Judges 3:15a NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 19 through October 24

Mon. Exodus 20:1–7—No Other Gods but the Lord.

Tue. 1 Corinthians 8:1–6—One God and One Lord.

Wed. Matthew 4:1–11—Worship God Alone.

Thu. Isaiah 44:9–20—The Worship of Worthless Idols.

Fri. Isaiah 44:21–28—Return to the Lord.

Sat. Luke 16:13–17—No One Can Serve Two Masters.

Next Week: Judges 17:1–6; 18:18–19, 27

What is a misunderstanding about God that you hear this week?

A LACK OF INSTRUCTION

LaVonne was standing at the deli counter, examining the prices of cold cuts at her local grocery store.

She glanced up to see someone she had just gotten to know—Madison, who happened to be a new member of her church.

“Catching you at a weak moment?” Madison said in a low voice.

“Oh, you mean what I’m thinking of buying?” LaVonne replied. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

“At church where I used to go, we weren’t supposed to eat anything that the Bible calls unclean. I met our pastor’s wife, and she didn’t eat meat at all,” Madison told her.

LaVonne bit her lip and paused, not knowing exactly what to say. Finally she said, “You’re right that our pastor’s wife doesn’t eat meat. But I think she’d be the first to tell you that her choice has nothing to do with clean and unclean foods. She has some medical issues that you might not know about.”

“Oh I see. I guess I misunderstood,” said Madison. “Actually, I’m relieved.”

“You should come to our women’s group next Wednesday!” said LaVonne. “We’re studying Acts together, and I think it has a few things to say about clean and unclean foods. I’ll warn you, when we bring food to share, there’s always plenty of options!”

1 When have you felt confused by something you heard at church?

2 Do you find it easy to follow the ways of God? Why or why not?

3 Where do you turn to have your questions about Scripture answered?

¹ And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. ² And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.

And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

³ And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

⁴ Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

⁵ And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

¹ Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim ² said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.”

Then his mother said, “The LORD bless you, my son!”

³ When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, “I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make an image overlaid with silver. I will give it back to you.”

⁴ So after he returned the silver to his mother, she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who used them to make the idol. And it was put in Micah’s house.

⁵ Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest. ⁶ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

Internal Familial Conflict

Imagine a filmmaker who is trying to communicate that crime is out of control. There might be a montage of brief episodes, showing people engaged in illegal activity. These minor characters will draw the viewer into the setting, showing what is going on and how bad it has gotten. The viewer will have a better sense of what life is like in this place.

It is similar to what we find in the final chapters of Judges. The text uses small scenes to show chaos at this time. The scenes do not all connect to one another, but they show concrete examples of people doing whatever is right in their own eyes, struggling without effective leadership or authentic knowledge of God. In Judges you'll find Israelites enslaving Canaanites (Judg. 1:28), a horrific case of a woman abused and dismembered (19:1–30), civil war between tribes (20:12–48), and the kidnapping of young women (21:15–25). No one is there to put a stop to the evil acts. In Judges 17, we read about the misdeeds surrounding Micah. They include theft, questionable understandings of God, and idolatry.

Sometimes a passage might seem odd or hard to read. Sometimes we are not sure what it all means. We may even wonder why it is in the Bible at all. In this case, the strangeness is intentional and part of the point that we need to understand. The author wants us to witness the unseemly behavior of Israel.

First, Micah steals silver from his mother; but eventually he confesses (Judg. 17:2). Instead of anger, her response is to consecrate the money to the God of Israel. She doesn't mean devoting the funds to the poor but making a graven image for the family and setting up their own local "priesthood" around their shrine (vv. 3–5).

Images of God were forbidden by the covenant and by one of the Ten Commandments. If you wanted to offer correction, where to begin? We are not even close to seeing rigorous observance of the Lord's instruction. It is just people, some of them still using God's name, but doing whatever seems right.

1 What can we do if we seem to suffer because of a lack of leadership in someone else?

2 How can we ensure that we fulfill our own leadership responsibilities?

3 Why is Micah's story found in Scripture?

¹⁸ And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

¹⁹ And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

...

²⁷ And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

¹⁸ When the five men went into Micah's house and took the idol, the ephod and the household gods, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"

¹⁹ They answered him, "Be quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?"

...

²⁷ Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a people at peace and secure. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city.

Family to Tribal Conflict

The odd events surrounding Micah continue. Remember, part of the point is to show confusion in a transitional period after the last of the judges. Instead of another episode when God would raise up a judge to lead the people once more, in Judges 17–21 the behavior keeps getting worse.

The motive for Micah's shrine is power and greed. The family wants direct access to "God" in the form of this idol that they hope will grant fertility, crops and animals, and protection from enemies. In Judges 17:5, Micah makes his son a priest, which probably violates all kinds of priestly rules—but does it even matter at this point? Next he makes a Levite his private priest instead—still questionable (17:10–12). Micah demonstrates foolishness by claiming that the Lord will bless him just because he now has a Levite as his priest (17:13), as if this will magically cover his wrongful behavior.

His idolatrous scheme is troubled not because the people object but when he becomes a victim of others' crimes. Just as he stole

silver from his mother, a large number of fighting men from the tribe of Dan steal his silver idol, as well as other ceremonial objects in his shrine (18:18). When the Levite priest challenges their theft, they persuade him to drop his objection and come along to continue the scheme elsewhere. If being a priest for one family is a decent living, acting as priest for a whole tribe could be better, they promise (v. 19).

Thus, Micah is reaping what he has sown. He had stolen, and others steal from him. This is only the beginning of the Danites' uncontrolled behavior. Micah gathers a host of fighting men to catch up with the thieves, but they turn back when threatened with losing their lives (18:22–26).

After this, our reading picks up when the Danites travel to a peaceful city called Laish, which they utterly destroy (18:27). Did God sanction this attack or tell them to do this? *Certainly not*. It's not like Joshua's taking of Jericho, which God had prepared the people to do.

Now it is not only one man (Micah) and his larger family who lack an understanding of God and the counsel of godly leadership. It is an entire tribe. The tribe of Dan continues to worship at the shrine of this idol for many years (18:29–31).

This story captures both small- and large-scale scenarios of people doing whatever seems right to them, to their own detriment.

1 When have you seen a time that one wrong deed leads to a chain of more?

2 What are indications that our conduct is not right in the sight of the Lord?

Doing Right in the Eyes of the Lord

Sometimes there are voids of leadership that we can do nothing to fix. More often, we hear a plurality of voices competing for our attention and allegiance. Often there are too many people claiming to lead, but they are pointing in different directions. You don't have to go far to find a clamor of voices vying for our loyalty.

The question is, "Which leader best promotes righteousness and justice?" and not, "Why is no one stepping up to lead?" One of the characteristics of a digital age is our constant access to more information than we could possibly process in a hundred lifetimes. Much of that noise includes opinions about how we should live, how we should structure the church and society, what is right and wrong, and how we should face the future. It might be tempting to throw up our hands and to choose what we ourselves think is right. At least then we can tune out all of the other overwhelming voices.

And yet an individualistic approach to morality is doomed to fail. None of us are so wise that we can perform all of the reasoning and reflection on our own without the insights of others who are doing their best to live holy lives. "Going it alone" might be a path to simplicity, but it narrows our imaginations and leaves us prone to self-deception. Complete independence is not a path to flourishing in our relationship with God.

I remind my fellow Christians that I need to hear and to see your faithful witness to the gospel, just as you need to hear mine. We may feel burdened by what seems like too much noise and disagreement. At the same time, who better to practice what it means to hear and to learn from one another than the people seated around you at church? When we dialogue with other trusted voices, it sets us on a path to doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord—instead of what is right in our own eyes.

1 How can we distinguish between godly and ungodly leaders?

2 How can we resist the temptation to isolate ourselves?

3 What are ways to take a break from the many voices trying to attract our attention?

Moral Drift

Without a reverence for God and a commitment to follow His ways, people do what seems right in their own eyes. As you go about your daily activities this week, pay attention to the messaging you see around, perhaps including small examples of confused thinking. Observe conversations among coworkers, advertisements, news reports, social media posts, and the like. Try to answer the following questions:

What moral statement is this person or post making? Who is the source of authority on right and wrong?

Key Text

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. —Judges 17:6 KJV

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. —Judges 17:6 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of October 26 through October 31

Mon. Amos 3:1–7—God Speaks Through the Prophets.

Tue. Hosea 12:7–14—The Prophets Warn and Guide.

Wed. 1 Corinthians 12:1–11—Many Gifts, One God.

Thu. 1 Corinthians 14:1–5, 26–31—Orderly Worship.

Fri. Isaiah 6—Here Am I; Send Me!

Sat. Ephesians 4:1–13—Live Worthy of Your Calling.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 3:8–20

What is a lesson about God that you have been able to learn from a young child?

THE PROPHET IS CALLED

Charmaine arrived at the hotel along with the other conference attendees and got the key to her room. As she made her way up to her floor, she prayed. She had registered at the last minute and didn't get to choose her roommate. Her pastor assigned her to stay with a complete stranger, a woman he had briefly met some weeks back.

When Charmaine got to her room, her roommate was already there. They exchanged introductions, and quickly began bonding. Over the course of the conference, the two women were vulnerable and got to know each other well. Charmaine's roommate had recently been hurt by a negative experience at her church, and as a result she had felt discouraged and disregarded.

Charmaine ached for her roommate, but she could feel that the Spirit was prompting her to walk alongside her. Charmaine had experienced church hurt as well, and could offer an arm of support.

The week was not long enough, of course, and by the end, Charmaine felt that her job was not finished. She was determined to keep in touch with this woman. She had grown to love her new companion and wanted to live as a reminder of the good that can come from Christian fellowship.

1 How and when does God speak to us?

2 Why is it important to heed a message from God?

3 Can you recall a time when God placed a *holy discontent* on you?

⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me.

And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. ⁹ Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. ¹³ For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. ¹⁴ And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

Hear and Obey the Word

As a young boy, Samuel was set apart by God to serve in the tabernacle of Shiloh, which was led by an older priest named Eli. In the days that Eli and his sons served, "the word of the LORD was rare" (1 Sam. 3:1). But Samuel is special, promised to God and a child of a miraculous birth (1 Sam. 1:19–20).

One night, something unexpected happens. A voice calls out to Samuel; but since Samuel had never heard God in this way before, he is confused. Eli had laid down for the night when Samuel heard someone call his name. Before the beginning of our reading, this actually happens twice—and each time that Samuel comes, Eli sends him back to bed. Finally, Eli, who is old and blind, realizes “the LORD [is] calling the boy” (1 Sam. 3:8). Eli gives Samuel directions to return to bed and to respond to the voice by saying, “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (v. 9).

Samuel obeys and waits for the Lord to speak his name again. The text even says, “The LORD came and stood there, calling” (v. 10). We could interpret this as a unique appearance of God, or perhaps as a vision (compare 1 Sam. 3:1).

Either way, Samuel replies this time. And at Samuel’s invitation, God shares astonishing news that would alter his world. As with most prophecies, the words give Samuel direct access to what God is thinking and planning to do. This news will cause the ringing of ears, as in Jeremiah 19:3—which means that this is hard news that will spread quickly. God is about to do a new thing that will bring judgment to the family of Eli (1 Sam. 3:12–13). Moreover, nothing that Eli or his household can do will change God’s resolve. There is no sacrifice or offering that would cover their behavior.

Now, remembering that Samuel is a young boy who is learning and training under Eli, what is Samuel to do? The test for Samuel is laid bare. He will either keep silent about what he has heard, or he will share what God has told him—despite the awkwardness and potential fallout it may cause.

1 Why didn’t Samuel recognize that God was speaking to him?

2 What was the message that God disclosed?

3 Why do you think God sent this message to a young boy like Samuel?

¹⁵ And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son.

And he answered, Here am I.

¹⁷ And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

¹⁸ And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

¹⁷ “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD.

God’s Word Will Come to Pass

The prophet Ezekiel says that what the Lord predicts *will* happen (Ezek. 12:25). So as Samuel lies in the darkness, the young boy faces his first test as a prophet. Eli was previously warned that his judgment was coming, but now Samuel must share that the pronouncement is final. Instead of bounding up to tell Eli immediately, Samuel waits for the morning. Perhaps he struggled to sleep as he processed this message for his caretaker.

Samuel’s day probably began by opening the tabernacle for worshipers to offer sacrifices. Knowing the Lord spoke to Samuel in a way no one had experienced in ages, Eli asks the young boy to share the message with him. What had God wakened them both to say? Eli wants a full report, saying that nothing should be hidden from him (1 Sam. 3:17). He may expect some resistance, so Eli utters a curse to try to compel the young prophet to speak it all or face consequences.

Samuel responds with obedience and shares everything. Like future prophets, he is called to “uproot and tear down, . . . to build and to plant” by sharing what is true (Jer. 1:10). Samuel shares the hard words and the pronouncement of unalterable consequences for Eli’s disobedience. But Eli accepts this message from God, since clearly this would not be something the young boy would invent (1 Sam. 3:18).

Eli may have realized in this moment that Samuel was his successor. The text does not say whether Eli was contrite or acted to confess his sin. But as he and his family passes from leadership, God has chosen Samuel to be judge, priest, and prophet. Instead of refusing to obey God, Samuel would be zealous in his obedience. One day he would say, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).

God was with Samuel and did not allow any of these words to go unfulfilled (1 Sam. 3:19). From “Dan to Beersheba,” or north to south, all of the Israelites would come to recognize Samuel’s unique role as the one chosen to speak for God (v. 20). God would use him to bring spiritual revival to the nation.

1 What would make Samuel fearful to tell Eli what God said to him?

2 What is the hardest news you have ever had to share?

3 How did God ensure that all of Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet?



The ancient site of Shiloh was the central place where Joshua had apportioned the land to each tribe. As 1 Samuel begins, it holds the tabernacle. Archaeological evidence points to a destruction by fire in the eleventh century BC, which matches the timeline of 1 Samuel 4 (next lesson).

Deror Avi

Answer the Call

I remember feeling excited when the phone rang. Before the days of caller ID, we couldn't screen our calls. A ringing phone was like a mystery: "Who is trying to reach us?" But later as mobile took over and became the norm that it is today, we no longer answer most calls from unknown numbers. We're more likely to get a call from a scammer than an unknown person with important news.

God desires us to listen and to answer His call. The Lord, by His grace, liberally pours out wisdom and direction through His Word and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Early in my walk with the Lord I desired to hear God speak audibly, as Samuel experienced. What I truly desired was to hear the voice of the Lord giving me step-by-step directions for my whole life. Wouldn't it be nice to have all the right answers from heaven?

I discovered that God does lead and guide in many ways. We can listen to God through His Word, which discloses timeless wisdom and direction (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Holy Spirit also gives us discernment and leads us through struggles, to help know His perfect will (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Recently my wife and I sought direction for our next step of ministry with prayer and fasting. We were not sure what God was calling us to do, but by faith we believed the Lord would order our steps. We listened for whatever God might say. As we fasted and prayed, the Lord began to clarify our direction. One day, while reading Jesus' words, "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), it was as if God had shown a spotlight on my heart. While I didn't hear an audible voice, God placed a burden on me to make disciples in one particular community of New Orleans.

Is God calling you today, and are you listening intently? God is good, and we don't have to screen His calls. Where He leads, He will not let us falter.

1 What are some ways God speaks to us today?

2 Share a time where you "answered God's call."

3 How does knowing the Word of God help us listen to God even better?

Speak, Lord

This week, let's take some time to heed Eli's advice and to ask for God to speak. Are you at a crossroads in life, wondering which way to turn? Are you feeling spiritually dry and seeking a new level of connection with God? Is there a worry plaguing you? Bring these before the Lord with a listening spirit. Specifically, if you are not in the habit of praying before bedtime, try the following simple prayer as you lie down.

Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.

Key Text

Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth.
—1 Samuel 3:9a KJV

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" —1 Samuel 3:9a NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 2 through November 7

- Mon.** Revelation 21:1–4, 9–27—The Holy City.
- Tue.** Ezekiel 10:1–7—The Glory of the Lord.
- Wed.** Ezekiel 10:15–19; 11:22–25—A Vision of God's Glory.
- Thu.** Galatians 6:1–10—We Reap What We Sow.
- Fri.** 1 Samuel 4:12–22—When All Is Lost.
- Sat.** 2 Corinthians 5:1–10—Promise of A New Body.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 4:12–22

What risks do we run when we try to make God follow our plans, instead of being devoted to His?

THE ARK IS LOST

Victor strolled through one audition after another. He had wanted to become a model since he was a teenager. As he grew older and worked on his physique, Victor was confident of his calling. He loved to recite God's promise that He will give you the desires of your heart, if you trust in Him (from Ps. 37:4). Never mind that a youth pastor had warned him not to take Scripture out of context. Victor attended church, prayed, and honored his parents. He persevered and thought that would be enough. A few years later, he was bitter and angry with God, who had not fulfilled his dream.

Regina went to the same university as her high school sweetheart, and they even got jobs working for the same law firm. Throughout their time together, Regina believed that God had given Robert as her soulmate. She just knew they would be married, have children, and live happily ever after some day. But after eight years, Robert decided that he didn't want to be married. Regina pleaded with God to change Robert's heart. But instead, he took a job in another state and moved away—without contacting her. Regina felt as if the world had betrayed her, as if God had betrayed her.

Victor and Regina assumed that they knew God's will for their lives. Neither spent time with God, studied His Word, or sought the counsel of brothers and sisters at church. They were too busy assuming that what they wanted most, God would provide.

1 When have you seen someone try to use God to justify what they wanted?

2 Is it wrong to make specific requests of God? Why or why not?

¹² And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. ¹³ And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

¹⁴ And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult?

And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. ¹⁵ Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. ¹⁶ And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army.

And he said, What is there done, my son?

¹⁷ And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

¹⁸ And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

¹² That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head.

¹³ When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

¹⁴ Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?" The man hurried over to Eli, ¹⁵ who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. ¹⁶ He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day."

Eli asked, "What happened, my son?"

¹⁷ The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

Domesticating Mystery

The Philistines were relative newcomers to Canaan, but Israel had not removed them at the time of the judges. They might be the most well-known of Israel's adversaries during the settlement period.

They were around in the days of Samson—one of the judges—and they continued to trouble Israel during the early days of the kings. For example, Goliath was a Philistine champion.

On this particular occasion early in the ministry of Samuel, Israel suffers a defeat at the hands Philistines, and thousands of Israelites are killed (1 Sam. 4:2). Instead of consulting with God, the Israelites take matters into their own hands. Eli's wicked sons aid in the plan to take the ark of the covenant into battle, using it as a charm or a protective, magical object (1 Sam. 4:3–4). After all, at least they are thinking of God as a protector—right?

At first, it appears that the strategy will work. The Philistines are afraid when they hear the shouts from the Israelite camp. Perhaps the Israelites were thinking of the capture of Jericho, which happened by marching around the city with the ark (Josh. 6:2–5). We are primed to think that the results might be the same, now against the Philistines.

But things do not go according to plan. Israel loses a second battle. This time, *tens of thousands* of fighting men are killed, and the ark—instead of assuring victory—becomes a spoil of the Philistines' triumph! They take it from the Israelites, slaughtering Eli's sons in the battle (1 Sam. 4:17). News of this calamity ends Eli's life; he meets a bad end as Samuel had predicted.

Without specific instructions from the Lord, this showed a poor understanding of God's provision. The Israelites are trying to use the ark as if it were a protective object that they can control—as if God were under their control.

1 Why would the Israelites think to carry the ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines?

2 What is your reaction to reading about Eli's death after the bad news is told?

3 Why might the text mention Eli's poor eyesight?

¹⁹ And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

²⁰ And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

²¹ And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. ²² And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

¹⁹ His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. ²⁰ As she was dying, the women attending her said, “Don’t despair; you have given birth to a son.” But she did not respond or pay any attention.

²¹ She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² She said, “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

Where Is God’s Glory?

The scene shifts to another person’s reaction to news about the capture of the ark. Still in Eli’s household, his widowed daughter-in-law happens to be full-term and ready to have a baby. The bad news is enough to send her into labor (1 Sam. 4:19).

Unfortunately, the mother is having a difficult birth (not uncommon in antiquity), and she is near death when her child is born. In a patriarchal culture, sons were prized for their ability to carry on the family name. The birth of a son could be one of the most joyous events for any woman at this time (compare to Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:20). But the widow of Phinehas gives only a muted reaction to meeting her newborn son (1 Sam. 4:20).

As her final act, she gives the infant a name of sorrow: Ichabod, which sounds like the Hebrew question, “Where is the honor?” The name has both a personal and a national meaning (vv. 21–22). For her family, the name expresses grief and shock at a sudden end. For

the nation, the name references the glory of God, which now seems long gone, along with the ark. What a road it must have been to grow up with this name and knowing the sorrow that arrived along with his birth!

The anguish over the ark is justified, since its loss means a loss of any priestly role until it returns. No sacrifices, no sanctuary, no alternative way for the nation to keep up the covenant expectations. In addition to being a symbol of the presence of Yahweh, the ark contained three treasured items from Israel's history: (1) the tablets of the Ten Commandments, (2) a preserved piece of manna from heaven, and (3) Aaron's rod, which had budded as if it were a flowering plant. It was a small record of the history of God's journey with Israel.

The grief also leaves us to question: Are Eli and his daughter-in-law mourning over the ark and Israel's loss of sacred items given by God? Or are they terrified, still thinking that their secret weapon has fallen into the hands of their enemies, who might turn around and use it? Maybe they mourn because they now see that the ark is not a "silver bullet" that they can use to overcome any enemy. Or, even worse, perhaps they think that they have lost access to God, as if God's glory were *only* with that box and nowhere else.

All of these questions encourage us to think about Israel's perspective at this moment. Before the nation is ready to listen to Samuel as God's prophet, they must first learn to set aside foolish attempts to make God an object to be used. The one, true God is the source and goal of all created things. He does not exist for our sake—we exist for His.

1 Does your name have a meaning? Do you think about it in relation to your identity and actions?

2 In what ways might we be tempted to try to tame God for our purposes?

3 How can we avoid trying to use God?

Prayerful Superstitions

Christianity is a way of life charged with mystery and wonder. We believe that the God of the universe is concerned with and involved in our day-to-day lives. Therefore, it is difficult sometimes not to become superstitious. Think of an athlete who tries to repeat exactly what she did before her last competition. I don't mean things like physical training or mental preparation, but rituals like arriving at a precise time or taking the same roads on the way—in other words, superstitions. Even if someone understands that these things have no bearing on results, it is easy to say, “Well, what can it hurt?” and to do them anyway.

The Christian life can have similar pitfalls. We might try to guarantee success through formulaic behavior that seemed to “work” last time, as if the outcome were up to our rigorous adherence to a set pattern. Maybe we think that things will go our way if we have a perfect church attendance record for an entire year, and we worry that we will fall out of God's favor if a family vacation takes us away. Or perhaps we pray word-for-word the same repeated prayer that we prayed the last time we received a provision or blessing from God.

God honors genuine devotion and faithfulness. Sincere repetition and habits are also an indispensable part of a consistent faith. But discipleship does not consist of metrics on the order of, “If this is given, this outcome is certain.” When we reduce the Christian life to mathematical equations, we are trying to take too much power into our own hands. None of us can make God do what we want. We must entrust ourselves to the one who judges faithfully.

1 What is a healthy and unhealthy way to think about routines as Christians?

2 How can we distinguish proper devotion from superstition?

3 How is God predictable? How is God mysterious?

Seeking Him First

What are some modern-day equivalents to carrying the ark into battle? Maybe we try to justify our own thoughts, words, or actions:

- Applying Scripture out of context
- Asking for God's blessing, rather than seeking His direction
- Rationalizing sin/assuming "God won't mind"

Lord, I know You can't be used as a good luck charm. In the decisions before me this week, help me to follow Your lead.

Key Text

And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken. —1 Samuel 4:22 KJV

She said, "The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." —1 Samuel 4:22 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 9 through November 14

- Mon.** 2 Peter 3:9–13—The Lord Is Patient.
Tue. Colossians 2:8–15—Avoid Worldly Entanglements.
Wed. Deuteronomy 20:1–9—The Lord Is with His People.
Thu. James 1:1–12—Remain Steadfast Under Trial.
Fri. Psalm 34:15–22—God Hears and Rescues.
Sat. 2 Chronicles 7:11–22—The Lord Speaks to the King.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17

What is a redemption story that moves you to tears, or that makes you want to celebrate God's mercy?

ISRAEL RECOMMITTS TO GOD

Amaya accepted Christ at a youth conference, while she was in high school. She had been surrounded by a community that encouraged her, and she had even seen another friend come to faith.

But after going away to college, something changed. She hadn't given up on God, but things just didn't feel the same. It seemed as if one thing after another was getting in the way of her spending time with God, or even finding the right church. Those Sunday mornings were brutal!

But when she attended a Christian fellowship group, she knew that she had finally found her people. Here were other students just as committed to Jesus as she wanted to be. One evening, a staff member visited Amaya and shared a booklet. It had a simple message: either Jesus was sitting on the throne and directing her life, or she was trying to do it all on her own. It helped her see that she had been stifling the Holy Spirit, who was telling her to slow down.

That evening, she prayed like she had when she accepted Christ. She was ready to surrender control to God in a new way and in this new context. With the Holy Spirit to guide her, she was ready to face all the challenges ahead.

1 What distinguishes a committed relationship?

2 What are a few biblical examples of people who recommitted to God?

³ And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. ⁴ Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only. ⁵ And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD. ⁶ And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

³ So Samuel said to all the Israelites, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.” ⁴ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only. ⁵ Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you.” ⁶ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.” Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

Israel Returns to the Lord

In 1 Samuel 7, God’s people are turning back to Him after the return of the ark. Israel has been floundering since the death of Eli, whose household God judged (see 1 Sam. 2:27–36; 4:17–22). But in 1 Samuel 7:3, Samuel emerges to address God’s people, telling them to return to the Lord with all their hearts, ridding themselves of false gods, and committing to serve God alone. The people’s idolatry explains their suffering at the hands of the Philistines. Instead of remaining faithful to God, they have been serving and depending on idols from the Canaanites, notably Baal and his supposed partner or consort, Astarte, or Ashtar.

But Samuel says that if they put away their idols and serve the Lord, God will deliver them from the Philistines. In verse 4, the Israelites respond by doing just that. The plural “Baals and Ashtoreths” likely denotes the various places and objects associated with Baal and Ashtar worship, including shrines, high places, altars, pillars, and depictions of the deities. Thus, “putting away” idols means

tearing down or destroying these and worshiping false gods no more. The people recommit to serving God alone.

In verse 5, Samuel calls for an assembly of all Israel at Mizpah, which means “outpost” or “garrison.” This is a location in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, about eight miles north of Jerusalem. Samuel’s years of leadership were centered around Benjamite cities (see 1 Sam. 7:16–17). Mizpah was strategically between the hill countries of Judah and Ephraim and fortified by a three-foot-thick wall. Samuel plans to intercede with the Lord on their behalf, in his priestly role.

In verse 6, the people pour water before the Lord. This ritual of drawing and pouring water doesn’t have an explanation in the Bible, except perhaps the “drink offerings” of wine poured out with other sacrifices (see Num. 15:4–7, 10). Here the ritual involves water and seems to serve a different purpose—perhaps expressing confidence that God could return water as rain. Given the context of verse 6, it is probably an expression of repentance and desire to return to the Lord. Additionally, the people fast and confess their sins (1 Sam. 7:6). In the Old Testament, fasting was a way to show humility and the seriousness of prayers before God. It also accompanied mourning (see Ps. 69:10) and here might stand for the people’s grief over their own sin.

Samuel, who is the one overseeing the national assembly and repentance at Mizpah, is now the clear leader of Israel. The word used for “leader” (1 Sam. 7:6) is the same as “judge” in the book of Judges. Samuel becomes Israel’s last in the line of judges. This great man, a priest and a prophet, is God’s instrument to deliver the nation from their enemies and to tend to his people’s spiritual health.

1 What was the sin of the Israelites?

2 What was the purpose of Israel’s assembly at Mizpah?

3 How does Samuel lead the people during this time?

⁷ And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

⁸ And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. ⁹ And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

¹⁰ And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

...

¹⁵ And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

⁷ When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. ⁸ They said to Samuel, “Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁹ Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel’s behalf, and the LORD answered him.

¹⁰ While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. ¹¹ The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

...

¹⁵ Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

The Lord Answers

In verse 7, the coming together of all Israel is seen as a threat (or inviting target) by the Philistines, who prepare to mount an attack. This strikes fear into the hearts of the Israelites after their recent defeats and the crushing battle described in 1 Samuel 4 last week.

After hearing of the Philistines' movement, the Israelites urge Samuel to keep interceding and calling out to God for rescue (v. 7). In keeping with their repentance, the people are choosing to depend on God for help instead of turning back to idols. Thus Samuel sacrifices a young lamb with choice meat as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. Exodus 29:38–41 prescribes such offerings as part of Israel's daily offerings, which were recently disrupted. Such sacrifices were also connected to purification (see Lev. 12:6, 14:10–11). In 1 Samuel 7:9, Samuel cries out to God on Israel's behalf, putting his leadership to the test. Will the Lord answer?

As the Philistines draw near for the attack, Samuel is still sacrificing. The opportunistic Philistines get more than they bargain for when the Lord Himself thunders against them (v. 10). This could mean actual thunder and lightning, which were signs of divine anger and judgment. The Canaanite god Baal was supposed to hold thunderbolts in his hands. But it is not Baal thundering against the Philistines, but the one, true God.

Terror seizes them, and they are thrown into a hasty, chaotic retreat from Mizpah. The men of Israel rush out after them, slaughtering them in a crushing defeat (v. 11). The Lord has come to Israel's rescue. After the assembly, Samuel continues as judge of Israel "all the days of His life" (v. 15). He travels a circuit between cities, settling disputes and making decisions for the people's good. He resides in Ramah, where he keeps an altar (vv. 16–17).

1 How did the Israelites respond to news of the impending Philistine attack?

2 How did God respond to the Israelites' cry for rescue?

3 Why did God deliver Israel?

If You Hear Him Calling

A young man stood before our congregation. He was twenty-something and had a story to tell—a story of return. He had grown up in the church, believing the truth. But then he wandered away—sowed his wild oats, slopped it out with the hogs like the prodigal son. But God never let go. A series of events and relationships drew the young man back into the church, and over time he found that God had never left. More than that, he found that God still loved him, despite his sin. If he was like the prodigal son, then God was like the father who ran down the road with open arms to embrace him. And so the young man stood before the congregation to recommit himself to the Lord.

I was a little taken aback. At the time, shame was getting the best of me; and I was mostly convinced that God didn't like me and didn't want to hear from me. But the young man's story stirred something deep within my heart. Or was that God doing the stirring? Was that God calling me back?

Over the years I've learned to listen to those stirrings. As a follower of Jesus, there have been plenty of times when I've wandered off to follow my own way. But then God called me back. He opened a door that I thought was locked. He provided an opportunity to return—to recommit myself to Him.

What will you do if you hear Him calling today? What will you do if you feel a stirring in the halls of your heart? Are there rooms inside yourself that are closed off to Jesus? Then throw open the doors. Let the light of the Lord drive out the darkness. Look for opportunities to recommit yourself—every part—to Jesus, because the opportunities are there. God graciously provides them. So, chin up. You might just see the Father running toward you with open arms.

1 Share a time when someone else's story encouraged you to seek God more.

2 How does God provide opportunities to recommit to Him?

3 What parts of your life do you need to recommit to the Lord?

My Recommitment

The reality of our sinful human condition is that we are prone to stray from God's path. In His mercy, God is always ready to forgive and invite us to choose life. What is one area of your spiritual life that has become complacent? Has your prayer life lacked intentionality? Does your worship need vibrancy? Have you stopped looking for opportunities to share your faith? Are there some fruits of the Spirit that are shriveling on the vine? Pick one to request as you recommit to the Lord this week.

Father, I want to serve You only. Give me new life as I commit to You, the source of life abundant.

Key Text

And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

—1 Samuel 7:15 KJV

Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life.

—1 Samuel 7:15 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 16 through November 21

Mon. Proverbs 29:1–14—Blessings of a Righteous Ruler.

Tue. Daniel 2:16–23—God Appoints Authorities.

Wed. Luke 4:14–21—Anointed for God's Service.

Thu. 1 Samuel 15:10–23—God Rejects Saul.

Fri. Matthew 12:14–21—God's Righteous Servant.

Sat. John 7:14–24—Do Not Judge by Appearances.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 16:4–13

Do you notice any common qualities among the leaders in your workplace? What about leaders in your church?

DAVID IS ANOINTED KING

Peter couldn't believe who was next to him in line. *There was his former pastor.* When they made eye contact, the man came right up to him, putting a hand on his shoulder and asking if he could apologize.

A year earlier was when Peter had come to the church office, and he walked into a room where the pastor and two elders were seated. He knew his estranged wife and her family were connected at the church, but he hadn't expected to feel so misjudged. Peter had been the one to suggest couple's therapy and to offer to make changes, and he had moved out of the home only when his wife insisted. That certainly was not the story she had shared.

It took some time to explain this to his church leadership, and he resolved never to go back. He was ready to reconcile with *her*, but why was he the one being asked to defend his actions? He knew that, eventually, the truth would come out. He just didn't expect it to take a year.

But there was his pastor, asking for his forgiveness. Peter didn't realize until that moment how hurt he had been and how much he had needed more support while going through a painful divorce.

"Thanks for taking the time to apologize," he heard himself saying. "I didn't mean to disappear. Actually, now that Priscilla has taken a new job and moved away, I wonder if I'd be welcome back at church?"

1 Why do we pretend that we can know a person's heart and motives?

2 Have your actions ever been misunderstood? How did you respond?

⁴ And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

⁵ And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

⁶ And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

⁷ But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. ¹⁰ Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"

⁵ Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." ⁹ Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these."

Preparing for an Anointing

The time has come to anoint a new king, and God sends Samuel to Bethlehem. This passage starts out when the prophet hears and obeys the word of God. When Samuel arrives, the elders or leaders in that community "trembled" and ask if he comes in peace (v. 4). The people were likely afraid because of the growing tension between

the prophet and the existing king, Saul. Just prior to his arrival, Samuel confronted Saul for his disobedience in his dealings with the Amalekites, and the two had parted ways (1 Sam. 15:34–35). The people of Bethlehem want no part in this conflict.

Samuel reassures them that his purpose is peaceful. His visit is not related to his dealings with King Saul. Rather he has come to worship (1 Sam. 16:5). These intentions are made clear by repeating the words “consecrate” and “sacrifice.” Samuel has a religious duty in mind and a desire to offer sacrifices. But unbeknownst to the people, he is also preparing for an anointing. As part of his preparations, Samuel consecrates Jesse and his sons and invites them to the sacrifice—perhaps with some awareness from God to carefully inspect Jesse’s sons.

When the family arrives, Samuel looks at them and begins to wonder which of these fine young men will be Israel’s next leader. The eldest son, Eliab, appears to be an obvious choice. In these verses there is a contrast between what Samuel can “see” and what God “looks at” (vv. 6–7). The text contrasts the sons Jesse presents first with God’s choice for the next king. God and people do not look at the same things. Verse 7 explicitly says, “People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” When selecting a future king, the Lord is looking at the inner desires and inclinations of each person. God is choosing based on characteristics unseen by the human eye.

This passage demonstrates that God’s value system is separate and superior to the flawed judgments of the world. We might look at the tall and handsome candidate as being right for the job. Notably, however, tall and handsome was what led people to nominate Saul (1 Sam. 9:2). God has a better approach to offer.

1 What would be wrong with choosing a tall and handsome son of Jesse to be the next king?

2 What differences do you see between Samuel’s perspective and God’s in this passage?

3 How might it impact the way we make decisions if we could look at others’ hearts like God does?

¹¹ And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children?

And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep.

And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

¹² And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.

And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

¹¹ So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

¹² So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Samuel Anoints David

After rejecting seven of Jesse’s sons, the prophet asks, “Are these all the sons you have?” (v. 11). Jesse reports that there is one more tending sheep, and he sends for David. But the first two things said about David are that he is the youngest and he is tending sheep. These descriptions, by human standards, make him unlikely to be chosen as king of Israel. With seven older brothers, David was not in line for any special role. And as a shepherd, David was doing menial work while his brothers had time with the prophet.

But his role as shepherd connects David to royalty. In the surrounding cultures, shepherding was often used as a metaphor for kingship. Shepherds have a protective role, like kings; they care for sheep. In 1 Samuel, David’s former job of shepherding comes up three separate times, which suggests this mark of kingship potential (16:19; 17:15, 34–36). David’s identity as a shepherd-king also foreshadows the coming of a future shepherd-king, who will rule with authority and care as God does.

The characters seem unaware of David's potential. Jesse did not find it necessary to call his youngest son to meet Samuel, and Samuel does not make any explicit connections between David's role as a shepherd and his future role as king. Samuel simply listens for God's direction as each son passes before him; he waits for God's affirmation.

Samuel requests David be brought, and he declares that they will not sit until he arrives (v. 11). Everyone has to wait until the youngest is in attendance. When David finally arrives, he is described as "glowing with health" and "handsome" (v. 12). His appearance is not a return to selection by physical appearance, but it is a secondary consideration that helps to confirm what Samuel is already hearing.

Upon seeing David, Samuel hears a clear directive: "Rise and anoint him; this is the one" (v. 12). Thus David, a man of God's choosing, is to be a future king. This is signaled by pouring oil on his head, in this private setting. Here before his family, God has made the unlikely choice. He has honored the youngest brother from an average family in a small city.

At the moment of his anointing, the text describes the "Spirit of the LORD" rushing upon David (v. 13). The anointing ritually marks David for kingship, physically and spiritually. He was being empowered for his leadership role. From that moment forward, David was set apart as Israel's rightful king.

1 Based on what we see in these verses, why is David an unlikely choice for king?

2 If physical appearance is not important, why might the author mention David's fine appearance?

3 Can you think of other examples when the Spirit of the Lord came upon someone? What do these passages have in common?

Listening to God's Voice

The story of David's anointing illustrates the need for divine guidance in human decisions. When Samuel first looked at Jesse's sons, human wisdom told him to choose the oldest, who was also handsome. Divine guidance told him the eldest was not the one.

Samuel could have easily trusted his first impression but chose to listen for God's voice, rejecting seven of Jesse's sons, one by one. Samuel would not perform the act of anointing until he heard God say, "This is the one" (1 Sam. 16:12).

I admire Samuel's patience and humility. It would have been easy for him to trust the systems and the realities that he had known. King Saul had been an attractive man of impressive stature. Eldest sons were typically good leaders. Samuel could have relied on his wisdom and experience to choose the next king, but he didn't. Samuel listened for God's voice and did what the Lord required.

Samuel didn't develop attentiveness to God's voice in an instant. He had cultivated a habit of listening to God from the time he was a young boy. Back when he had been assistant to Eli, the priest, he had learned to respond to God by saying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3:9–10). I can't help but wonder if he whispered that same prayer as Jesse's sons passed before him.

Today's text emphasizes the differences between our human values and God's. As 1 Samuel 16:7 points out, "The LORD does not look at the things people look at." And Samuel's example demonstrates one way to surrender our human vision and embrace the values of God: listening to God's voice. The key is not to be more clever. The key is to surrender the decision and invite God to speak.

1 What are some decisions you have made by relying on human wisdom?

2 What might it look like to hear God's voice today?

3 What are ways we can practice listening to God's voice?

A Heart Worth Emulating

When you think of a man or woman after God's own heart, who comes to mind? Was there a pastor, small group leader, mentor, or friend whose humble and God-focused life made a particular impact on you? Take some time to thank God for that person's influence. Ask the heavenly Father to build your character in the same ways you observed in that person. If possible, consider reaching out to give a word of encouragement.

Heavenly Father, thank You for seeing to the heart. Give me a heart for Jesus like _____.

Key Text

And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. —1 Samuel 16:12 KJV

So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."

—1 Samuel 16:12 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 23 through November 28

- Mon.** Psalm 2—God Defends the Chosen King.
- Tue.** Acts 13:21–25, 32–39—Heir of God's Promises to David.
- Wed.** Romans 11:22–32—A Deliverer out of Zion.
- Thu.** Isaiah 33:15–22—Look upon Zion!
- Fri.** Psalm 132:8–18—The Lord Has Chosen Zion.
- Sat.** Luke 24:44–49—From Jerusalem to the Nations.

Next Week: 2 Samuel 5:1–12

What would you call your greatest accomplishment—something that you enjoy sharing with others?

THE CITY OF DAVID

At the age of eight, Joel came to live on a farm with his uncle. The couple couldn't have children, so Joel was like their son. But instead of treating him like a son, he was more like their servant. Every morning before school, Joel tended to his uncle's animals in his bare feet.

After school, instead of doing his homework, he had to tend to his uncle's animals and complete any other chores his aunt would give. In his life with his aunt and uncle, Joel experienced none of the emotional warmth that most children have at home. Still, Joel did well in primary school. In the evenings, his grandmother would hold his hand and pray for him. She witnessed Joel's mistreatment but was powerless to stop it.

When he was old enough to leave home and go to a boarding school, Joel finally could enjoy friends and experience greater freedom. One Sunday during the chapel service, he responded to the message to accept Jesus as his personal Savior. It brought peace like never before, knowing that God was in control of his life. In the heavenly Father, Joel found more acceptance than he had ever experienced with an earthy family.

This young boy grew to be a faithful follower of Christ. When he heard the call to train to be a pastor, it made sense. All of those mornings and evenings caring for animals had prepared him with patience and compassion. He would be a shepherd in a different way.

1 What actions can we take to seek the best outcome from a challenging situation?

2 How has God prevented you from disaster or helped you achieve a goal?

¹ Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

² Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.

³ So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel.

⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

⁵ In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

¹ All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your own flesh and blood. ² In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’”

³ When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

⁴ David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

The Crown

David had been anointed as king, but it was a long road before he would have that role. He served Saul and distinguished himself as a military commander, even when Saul began to see him as a rival.

After Saul’s death (1 Sam. 31:1–6), Israel was ripped in two. The northern tribes followed Abner—the commander of Saul’s army—and Ish-Bosheth—one of Saul’s sons who functioned as a puppet king (2 Sam. 2:8–10). Meanwhile, Judah in the south rallied behind David and anointed him as king at Hebron (2 Sam. 2:4). A civil war between north and south led to bloodshed over seven years. During his own retreat, Abner killed one of David’s relatives (2 Sam. 2:18–23). But David was the superior commander, and he continued to succeed.

As the conflict cooled, Abner came to David to reunite the kingdom under him (2 Sam. 3:7–11). When one of David’s men heard

that Abner had come to Hebron, he killed the man out of revenge (2 Sam. 3:26–27). After Abner's death, Ish-Bosheth was also murdered (2 Sam. 4:5–7), leaving the people of Israel without the leaders they had looked to for the past seven years.

David publicly separated himself from acts of revenge and from the killing of Saul's kin (2 Sam. 3:28–39; 4:9–12). Instead, he would be a merciful king who honored Saul as God's anointed. Later David would even honor Mephibosheth for Saul's and Jonathan's sakes (2 Sam. 9:1–7). God preserved David's reputation, and the people still considered him an upright man after God's own heart.

The people say, "We are your own flesh and blood" (2 Sam. 5:1), showing their kinship toward David and the tribe of Judah. Further, they recognize God as working through David, even long before he became king. It was David who "led Israel on their military campaigns" (2 Sam. 5:2), recalling the song that compared him to Saul: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7).

They also acknowledge God's direct promise: "The LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel'" (2 Sam. 5:2). According to Deuteronomy, a king was not to be selfish or focused on himself—accumulating horses, wives, or wealth—but a ruler who loved and cared for his people (Deut. 17:14–20). As a former shepherd, David has shown these qualities. Moses had even compared Israel's future leader to a shepherd (Num. 27:16–17). The people now stand together in one accord, acknowledging that David is their shepherd-king who will act not on his own accord but according to God's command. They make him king of all Israel, and he rules in this position for forty years, or the length of a full generation (2 Sam. 5:4).

1 Why did the tribes say that they were David's "flesh and blood" after years of civil war?

2 How does David prove to be a good leader, even during the civil war?

3 In what ways did David show patience for God's timing?

⁶ And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. ⁷ Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.

⁸ And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

⁹ So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

¹⁰ And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

¹¹ And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house. ¹² And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

⁶ The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off." They thought, "David cannot get in here." ⁷ Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.

⁸ On that day David had said, "Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those 'lame and blind' who are David's enemies." That is why they say, "The 'blind and lame' will not enter the palace."

⁹ David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward. ¹⁰ And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

¹¹ Now Hiram king of Tyre sent envoys to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. ¹² Then David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

The King Leads

David's first military campaign as king of Israel helps to move his capital to a more central location. Jerusalem had been allocated to Benjamin and partially conquered during Joshua's campaigns (see Josh. 15:63; Judg. 1:21). But when Israel failed to drive out the inhabitants, Jerusalem remained occupied by a tribe named Jebusites.

The Jebusites mock David with supreme confidence, saying, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off” (2 Sam. 5:6). The idea is that Jerusalem’s natural defenses are so strong that disabled people could repel attack. They thought, *David cannot get in here*. It’s not unlike the taunting from Goliath years earlier (see 1 Sam. 17:42–44).

David was not intimidated, for he knew that God was on his side and would deliver the city into their hands. He had the promise and provision of God Almighty. The text does not dwell on the details but says simply, “David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David” (2 Sam. 5:7).

David’s military strategy appears to have been to use a water shaft. Jerusalem was a natural stronghold on the mountaintop, which is why it had not been taken for centuries. The water shaft was a tunnel system accessing the Gihon Spring. David notes, “Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft” (2 Sam. 5:8). Entering through the water system was something the Jebusites never expected. After David defeats the Jebusites, he shows that they were “blind” to God’s power and “lame” in their inability to stand against God. Their taunt became their undoing.

The text concludes by describing David’s new capital city (v. 9). It says, “He became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him” (v. 10). Even surrounding nations recognize his rule by sending gifts of fine materials that David can use to build a palace (v. 11). Just as God had established rulers in the past, God established David as the rightful king.

1 What made Jerusalem the ideal capital for a united Israel?

2 What does the taunt of verse 6 show?

3 How does the conclusion reveal David’s understanding of godly leadership?

Waiting on God

Scripture describes David as a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). The text records the years David reigned: seven and a half years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem over all Israel (2 Sam. 5:4–5). These numbers remind us of God's provision, but they also highlight David's patience to wait on God's timing. From the time Samuel anointed him, David endured fifteen long years before ascending to the throne. Even then, his rule began as partial, since he reigned over Judah before God gave him the entire kingdom. David trusted that the Lord's promises would come to pass in His perfect time.

This lesson speaks to our lives today. How often do we become impatient when God does not act according to our schedule? We demand immediate relief in trials, instant gratification in desires, or quick solutions to our struggles. Yet the story of David reminds us that waiting on God is never in vain. The Lord uses seasons of delay to strengthen faith, shape character, and deepen reliance on Him (see James 1:1–4).

Hebrews exhorts us in this same direction: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). The promise is not of earthly kingdoms or worldly success but of God's eternal provision. David became king of a nation, but we who trust in Christ are made sons and daughters of the living God (2 Cor. 6:18). This means that we share in the same promise that God is with us, providing for us spiritually through the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as we study this text, we are called to trust in the promises of God. Just as David clung to the Lord through years of waiting, so we must learn to rest in His timing, content with His presence, and confident in Him.

1 What do you think that David experienced during fifteen years of waiting to be king?

2 What do you think David did when he lacked faith in the promised provision of God?

3 What does God want you to trust Him for today?

A Shepherd's Heart

God loves leaders like David—people who lead with a shepherd's heart, caring for the needs of their followers, rather than advancing their fame and influence. Who has God entrusted you to lead? Some people lead entire companies or organizations, others lead classrooms or teams, and still others lead children, small groups, or groups of friends. The size of your role doesn't matter—your shepherding heart is what counts. Offer this prayer to God this week:

Lord, You have entrusted me to lead _____.

Help me to lead with a protective heart of a shepherd, looking out for their best interest above my own.

Key Text

And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake. —2 Samuel 5:12 KJV

Then David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. —2 Samuel 5:12 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of November 30 through December 5

Mon. Philippians 4:1–9—A Healthy Mindset.

Tue. Isaiah 61:10–62:5—God Rejoices Over You.

Wed. Romans 14:11–18—Righteousness, Peace, and Joy.

Thu. Romans 15:7–13—Filled with All Joy.

Fri. Nehemiah 8:6, 9–12—The Joy of the Lord.

Sat. Psalm 91:7–16—God Our Deliverer.

Next Week: 1 Peter 1:1–12

As we enter a season of waiting for Jesus' birth, what are you hoping to receive?

TERENCE LESTER, PHD.

From Dropout to Doctorate: Breaking the Chains of Educational Injustice.

Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2025. 224 pages.
ISBN: 978-1-5140-1148-5. \$19.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Victoria Saunders McAfee



In his new book, Terence Lester has crafted a unique piece of prose. Though categorized as a memoir, this book reveals itself to be more than a look into Dr. Lester's life—it is a revelation of the ways unjust policies create barriers to education.

Lester recounts his early struggles and challenges, which are faced by many Black Americans, connecting his experiences to the injustices and flaws around the current educational system. When facing overwhelming odds—poverty, abuse, familial dysfunction—what can a child do?

Lester offers a detailed explanation of the school-to-prison pipeline and explores how impoverished children often find themselves caught in a closed system that doesn't serve their best interests, perpetuating cycles of injustice. He draws on research and his own experiences to craft a compelling call to action. He encourages parents, educators, leaders, and advocates to get more involved and work toward positive change for underprivileged and marginalized communities.

Find the text continued at this link:



International Sunday School Lessons

Bible Study Plan

For 2026–2029

	Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer
2026– 2027	Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel	Power to the People 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude	Written that You Might Believe John	Just a Closer Walk Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon
2027– 2028	Telling About Our Beginnings Genesis	Christ Comes to Reconcile All Luke	God’s Redeeming Power Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Luke, John	The Meaning and Significance of Grace Romans
2028– 2029	Wisdom’s Story: Listen and Live Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Song of Solomon	Jesus the Messiah Matthew	The Church: Revealing God’s Love and Power 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians	God’s Patient, Reformative Justice 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Amos, Hosea, Micah

COMING NEXT QUARTER

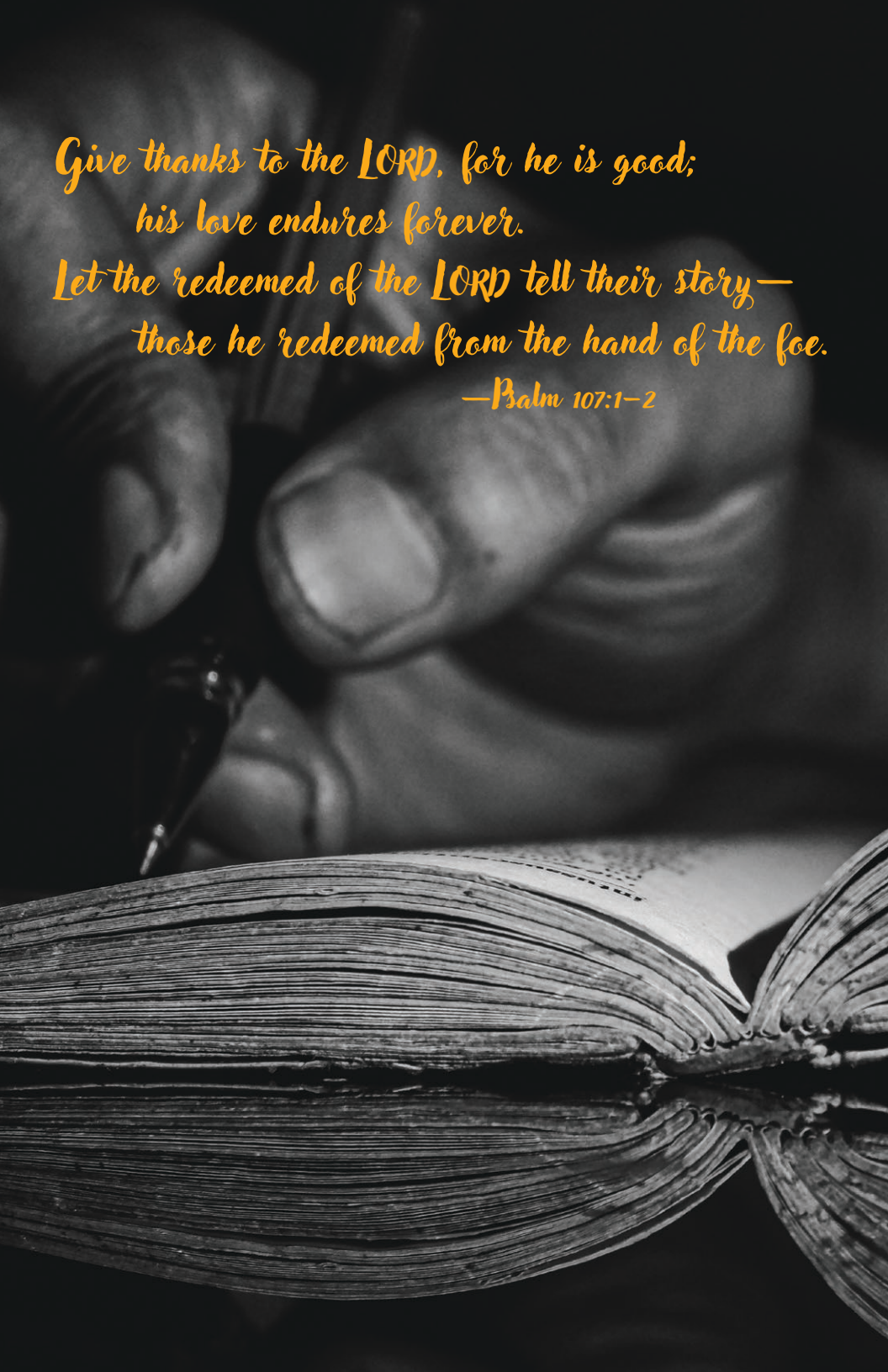
December 2026 – February 2027

Power to the People

Next quarter focuses on powerful living for a powerless people through a study of some of the New Testament’s “general epistles.” With an in-depth study of 1 Peter, followed by a cursory look at the other epistles, we will explore living holy lives as a demonstration of the way of Christ for the world. The first unit looks at believers’ status as “exiles” (1 Peter 1:1), highlighting our spiritual role as outsiders, living in a foreign land. Because of our unique, set-apart, and hope-filled identity, God calls His people to live with purpose and holiness. The second unit focuses on the behavior of God’s holy people. Peter addresses godly living among various groups (high and low status). He encourages enslaved Christians to follow the example of Christ, who suffered unjustly. The final unit contains brief studies on four other texts: the letter of 2 Peter, along with 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude

Texts for study include: 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude

Lessons of this Student Guide are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible, following the International Sunday School Lessons series (ISSL). In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible’s key themes through studies of books in both Old and New Testaments.

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a pen over an open book. The hand is positioned as if about to write. The book is open, showing its pages. The background is dark and out of focus.

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.*

*Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe.*

—Psalm 107:1–2

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