BIBLE STORIES FOR CHILDREN

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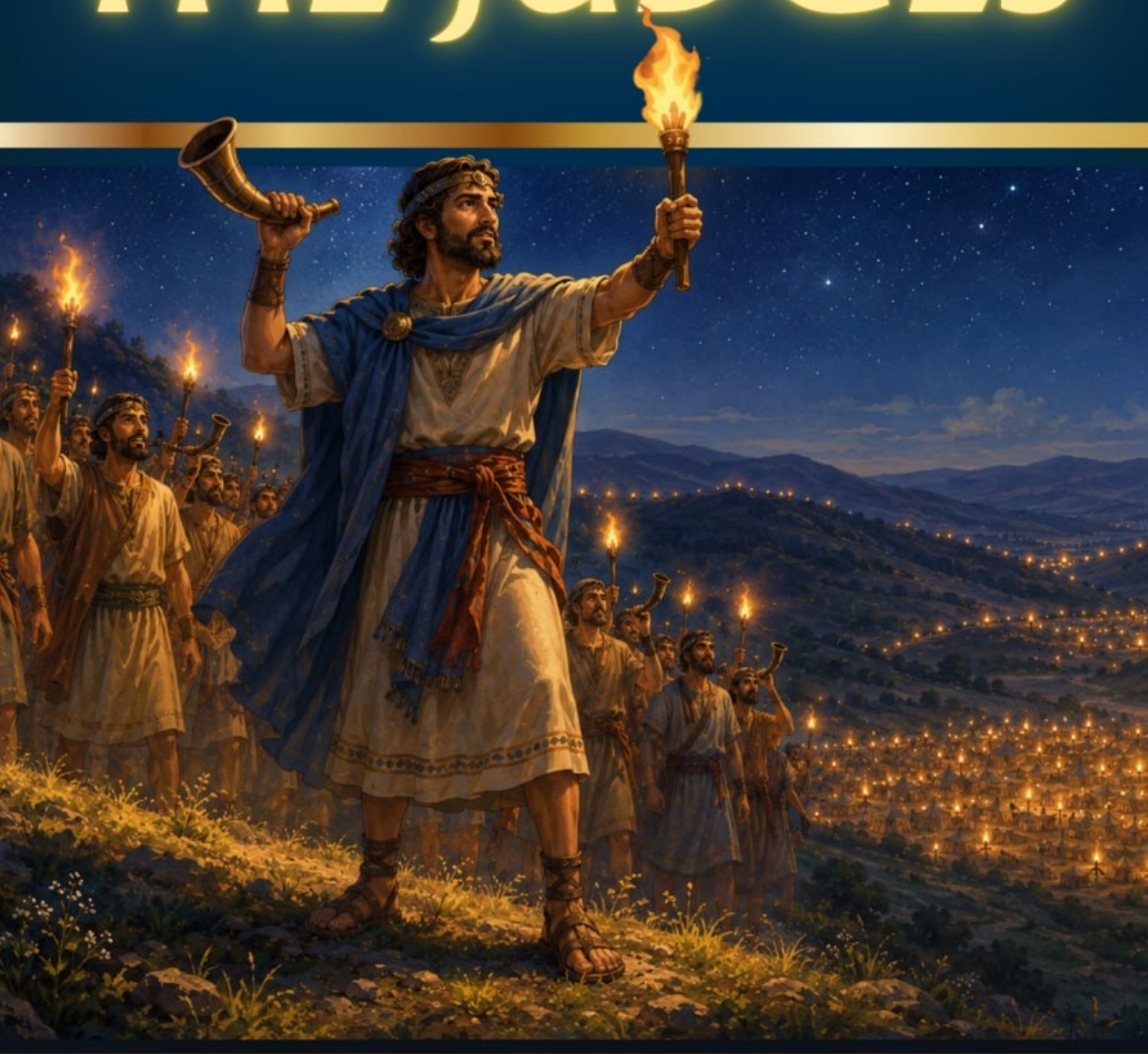
The Conquest and THE JUDGES



FATHER OF LOVE STORIES

MARLISE SCHNEIDER

The Conquest and the Judges

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MARLISE SCHNEIDER

MARANATHA MEDIA

Many thanks to Daniel Bernhardt, Carlos Hernández and Kevin Mullins for their suggestions as this book was being written.

This book is dedicated to my precious children, Lukas and Sarah

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	5
Introduction	8
1. Rahab Helps the Israelites	11
2. Crossing the Jordan	14
3. Marching around Jericho	17
4. Achan's Hidden Sin	21
5. God's Law is Read out Loud	25
6. The Gibeonites and the Israelites	28
7. The Longest Day	31
8. Dividing the Land of Canaan	34
9. A Misunderstanding is Solved	38
10. Joshua's Last Message to Israel	41
11. The Place of Weeping	44
12. A Woman's Faith	48
13. The First Judges	51
14. Deborah	54
15. Gideon's Doubts	58
16. Gideon's Small Army	62
17. Gideon's Problems	66
18. Abimelech, the Self-Appointed King	69
19. Jepthah and His Daughter	73
20. Preparing for Baby Samson	77
21. Samson's Strength	80

22. Samson and Delilah 85
23. Micah's Idols 89
24. The Tiniest Tribe 94
25. A Heathen Woman Chooses God 98
26. Ruth is Redeemed 103
27. Hannah's Faith 106
28. Samuel's Service 110
29. The Philistines Take the Ark 114
30. The Philistines Return the Ark 117
31. Israel Asks for a King 121
32. The Chosen King 124
33. The Israelites Accept Saul 127
34. Saul Chooses His Own Way 131
35. Jonathan's Faith 134
36. Saul is Rejected 138
37. David is Anointed 142
38. David and Goliath 145
39. Saul's Jealousy 149
40. Best Friends 152
41. David's Lack of Faith 157
42. David Spares Saul's Life 161
43. Abigail's Wisdom 164
44. David Spares Saul's Life Again 167
45. Saul's Worst Choice 170
46. David in Ziklag 173
47. David the New King 177
48. King David's Battles 180

49. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem 184
50. God's Promise to David 188
51. David's Loyalty 191
52. David Sins and Repents 194
53. Amnon and Absalom 198
54. Absalom Rebels against David 202
55. Absalom Dies 207
56. David Returns to his Kingdom 211
57. Men of Honor during the Time of David 215
58. A Plague in Israel 219
59. Solomon Becomes King 223
Thematic Index 227

Introduction

When Jesus was on this earth, children would flock around Him, eager to hear more about our Heavenly Father and to receive His blessing. The children around us today, whether our own or not, are the most valuable gift that God has given us, and the joy of sharing the received love of God with them is a calling of the highest order. One way of doing this is by teaching them about our Heavenly Father and how His Son came to live among us and teach us the way to eternal life.

Marlise, in her quest to bless our children Lukas and Sarah, began taking notes on the stories she told our kids. Soon, as those notes multiplied, it became clear that they could also be of great value to all those parents who faced similar challenges. Thus, these notes were transformed into a project, and this third volume of the *Father of Love* children's series forms part of it. The story of the people of Israel, from the moment they were ushered into Cannan, and their struggles while possessing the land, are filled with valuable lessons for every person, even our children.

This volume covers the journey of God's people from the time they entered the land with Joshua, right until King David's death. Did God really want the people of Israel to conquer the land by the sword? Or did He have other plans? In this book, you will find God's original plan, and how He, in order to not eternally lose His children, condescends to them and tries to teach them and guide them, while He pleads with them, to the point of accepting for them to have a

king, when this was a clear sign of their rejection of God. And in all this sequel, we find the many struggles that our little children will eventually have to face. Will they follow God in all, or be tempted and fall by the way, only to be saved at the very last, like Samson? Will they hear the voice of God early on as Samuel did, or reject the direct appointment and calling of God as did Saul? May God give you wisdom and His Spirit to guide you as you lead them to the eternal city of God through this mortally dangerous world of sin and rejection of God.

In preparing these stories, special attention has been given to ensure that they are based on the understanding of the covenants according to the message of Justification by faith. Man is unaware of the depth of his sinfulness, his self-sufficiency, and the degree of distrust he has of God. These realities are manifested throughout many biblical stories, as well as the constant longing of God that all mankind, from Adam and Eve until our days, would move out of the Old Covenant and accept the New Covenant. This covenant of God consists of receiving and treasuring His word, receiving God's forgiveness and receiving Christ. The new covenant experience is expressed most clearly in the life of Christ.

Each lesson contains a Bible memory verse, which in the author's view, presents the essence of the story. Additionally, the Bible reference is provided for each story, as well as a reference to Ellen G. White writings for those who would like to read further. At the end of the book a thematic index has been provided to make it easier to find specific stories.

It is Marlise's desire that this material will be as much of a blessing to you and your family as the preparation of this material has

been to our family. May God bless you in being parents and teachers of those to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Daniel E. Bernhardt

1. Rahab Helps the Israelites

Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Colossians 3:12 (ESV)

Joshua 1-2 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 44

The Israelites missed Moses. They were sad that he had died, and for thirty days they held services in memory of him. They remembered how patiently he had guided them, and they were comforted to see that God was still with them: the pillar of cloud was still on the Sanctuary, guiding them. They also knew that God had appointed Joshua to be their leader in Moses' place.

God spoke to Joshua and assured him, "I will be with you, just like I was with Moses." He knew that Joshua felt unsure of what to do and how to do it. God also reminded Joshua how important it was to remember His laws, and keep them with God's help. God could not bless Joshua if he did things his own way.

Soon it would be time for the Israelites to cross the Jordan. "In three days, we will cross the Jordan River, so we can begin to possess the land of Canaan," Joshua announced to the people. The people listened carefully as Joshua spoke of their plans. "We will obey you in all things, like we obeyed Moses," they said, "But the Lord must be with you, like He was with Moses."

To prepare for the crossing of the river, Joshua asked two young men to cross over and spy on a nearby Canaanite city called Jericho. The two young spies arrived at Jericho, went in easily through the gate, and asked to stay the night in the home of a woman called Rahab.

The two men had entered Jericho peacefully and easily, but soon the king of Jericho found out about them. He quickly sent soldiers to fetch them. Rahab did not want the soldiers to catch these men. She had heard all the stories of what God had done for Israel, and she believed that these men worshiped the true God and belonged to Him. She quickly took them upstairs to her flat roof. “Here, hide under this stalk of flax”, she instructed, and carefully covered them with flax so no one would see them. Then she went downstairs and spoke to the soldiers. She lied to them, saying, “I think the men left through the city gate; I haven’t seen them since.” Lying is not God’s way of doing things, but Rahab didn’t know this. She did the best she could with what she knew. The soldiers believed her and quickly left the city, hoping to catch the two spies.

When the soldiers were gone, Rahab went upstairs to where the spies were. “I know God is with you,” she told them, “We have heard all the things that God has done for your people. Please remember me and my family when you conquer this city, and protect us.” The spies promised to protect Rahab. They told her, “Hang a red chord from your window. When we conquer the city, whoever is in your home at that time will be safe.” So Rahab did just that.

Now Rahab helped the men to leave the city secretly and safely. Her house was right on the wall of Jericho, so during the night, she helped them climb down a rope from her window, out of the city

wall. Before letting them down, she advised them which way to go, so they would not be seen by the soldiers that were looking for them.

When the two spies arrived at the Israelite camp, they shared the whole story with Joshua and the people. Their story was so different from what the ten spies had said forty years earlier! “We will be able to take the land. God will help us. The people are already afraid of us,” they said. They also told them about Rahab’s kindness, her belief in God, and their promise to save her and her family.

God honored Rahab for her faith in Him and her kindness to the Israelite spies. After the city of Jericho was conquered, she and her family lived with the Israelites. She married an Israelite, and later she became one of Jesus’ great-great-great grandmothers!

Rahab knew very little about God, but she did as much as she understood. She believed that God would save her, and she acted kindly towards God’s people. Will you believe God today? Will you ask Him to help you be kind and helpful to others?

2. Crossing the Jordan

**And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves,
for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you. Joshua 3:5 (KJV)**

Joshua 3-5 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 44

It would soon be time to cross the Jordan River to get to Canaan. The Israelites arrived at the river and camped nearby for three days. At this time of the year, the Jordan River was overflowing with water. The people wondered, how would God help them cross such a deep and raging river? They waited for instructions from their leaders so they would know what to do.

On the third day, the officers of Israel went around the camp and explained to the people what they should do. “When you see the priests carrying the ark, follow them. Keep a space of about one kilometer (half a mile) between you and the ark.” Joshua also gave instructions. He announced, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”

When it was time, Joshua instructed the priests, “Take up the ark and pass over before the people.” The priests gladly began to do this. What was God going to do? How would He help them all cross this overflowing river?

God spoke to Joshua to encourage him: “Today I will begin to magnify you before the people, so that they can know that I will be with you like I was with Moses. Tell the priests that when they come to the edge of the water, when the soles of their feet are touching the water, they should stand still.”

Joshua told the people what God had instructed them to do, and everyone obeyed. They watched as the priests walked towards the river with the ark. They saw the priests stand still as soon as their feet touched the water. Then they watched with amazement as the water that was coming down the river began to rise up in a heap, while the rest of the water flowed down and away until there was dry ground to cross the Jordan River.

This was similar to how their parents had crossed the Red Sea forty years earlier. Now God was providing dry ground for them through the Jordan River! Once the water piled up, the priests carried the ark right up to the middle of the river – on dry ground, of course – and they stood there patiently and waited for the whole congregation to cross the river. All the men, women, children and animals, along with all their possessions, crossed the river on dry ground.

There was only one group that stayed behind and did not cross to the other side: the wives and children of the tribe of Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh, along with all their animals and possessions. Why didn't they cross the river? Because God had given these tribes land on that side of the Jordan. When the Israelites won against the Amorites, it was agreed that their land would go to the tribe of Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh. So when it was time to cross the Jordan, only the men from those tribes crossed to the other side, so that they could help the other tribes to conquer the land of Canaan.

Once everyone had crossed the river, God instructed Joshua, "Choose twelve strong men – one from each tribe of Israel – to go to the middle of the river and pick a stone each, and bring them with you." They were going to use these stones to make a monument in

their first camp in the land of Canaan. Joshua also made another monument in the middle of the river. He gathered another twelve stones and made a pile with them right where the priests were standing with the ark.

Now God said to Joshua, “Tell the priests to come out of the Jordan.” The priests obeyed, and as soon as their feet had reached the other side of the river, the waters of the river began to flow once more as before.

The Israelites were finally standing on the land of Canaan! That night they camped in their new land. Here Joshua gathered the twelve stones that the men had picked, and he piled them up to make the first monument in their new land. He explained to the people, “When your children see this pile of stones, tell them how God made it possible for us to cross the river on dry ground, just like God opened the Red Sea. Let everyone know how powerful God is!”

How happy the Israelites were! Four days after crossing the Jordan River, the people kept the Passover, their first Passover in Canaan. What a wonderful celebration it was! They enjoyed grain and unleavened cakes from the land of Canaan, the land that would soon be theirs. They marveled at what God was doing for them, and they gratefully gave themselves to Him once more. The day after the Passover, something important happened: God stopped sending manna. The people wouldn’t need it anymore, because now they were in Canaan and could eat straight from the land. Their journey through the desert was over!

God loves to bless His children and do wonderful things for them. He is able to do even what is impossible to us. All we need to do is hear Him, believe Him and obey His instructions. Will you let God guide you today? Will you listen to what He wants to tell you?

3. Marching around Jericho

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. Hebrews 11:30-31 (KJV)

Joshua 5:13-6:27 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 45

Joshua was deep in thought. How would the Israelites conquer the land of Canaan? How would they get the Canaanites to leave? These people were strong, much stronger than the Israelite army. But Joshua also knew that these people were terrified of the Israelites because they could see that God was with them and helping them. Joshua thought, “These people will do anything to defend their land and their homes; they will even join armies with people from other cities, to make their armies bigger and stronger.” The more Joshua thought, the more he realized that Israel could not win against the Canaanite armies; only God could. To conquer the land, the Israelites would have to trust in God fully and completely.

The first city that they needed to conquer was Jericho. Joshua prayed and asked God for guidance. Suddenly, he looked up and saw a tall, commanding warrior who was holding a sword. Joshua asked him, “Are you on our side, or against us?”

The warrior reassured Joshua and said kindly, “I come as Captain of the host of the Lord.” He was God’s Son Himself! Joshua knelt down and worshiped Him, and asked, “What do you have to say to your servant?”

Now God’s Son, the Captain, kindly said, “Remove your shoes; you are standing on holy ground.” After Joshua had taken off his shoes, the heavenly Captain assured him, “I have given into your hand Jericho, its king and its strong men.” Then He gave Joshua instructions on how to capture the city.

Joshua prepared the people and shared the commands that God’s Son had given: No one would attack the city. Instead, all the Israelites would march around the city – first the Israelite warriors, then seven priests with trumpets, then the priests holding the ark of the covenant. After that would come the army of Israel. The people followed these instructions and marched quietly, without saying a word; only their footsteps and the peal of the trumpets could be heard. After marching once around the city, the people returned to their camp.

For days, the people of Jericho had kept their city gate shut for protection; no one came in or out of the city. Now they watched, terrified. They didn’t understand why the Israelites were doing such a strange thing, why they were marching around quietly instead of attacking. The people of Jericho could have come out of the city at any time to ask for God to save them just like Rahab did, but they didn’t. They could have gone into Rahab’s house to keep safe, but they didn’t.

The Israelites marched like this for six days. On the seventh day, God instructed them to march not just one time, but seven times around the city. At the end of the last march, the trumpets sounded

and Joshua commanded, “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!” And the people shouted, the walls and towers of Jericho trembled and fell. The people of Jericho were so frightened that it was easy for the Israelites to go in and possess the city.

When God’s Son had spoken to Joshua, He had never said to kill the people of Jericho. He knew that the Israelites would do it, because they were not ready yet to understand God’s way of doing things. But even if God did command the Israelites not to kill them, He still could not protect the people of Jericho, because they had completely rejected God and lost His protection. The Israelites went in and killed them all, sadly. If the Israelites hadn’t done this, then the Destroyer, Satan, would surely have found other ways to kill them, and to make it seem like God had done it.

But Joshua commanded the two spies who had been in Rahab’s house, “Go and bring out Rahab and all who are with her, and her possessions.” Rahab’s parents and brothers and sisters had been staying in her home because they believed the Israelites’ promise, and the men helped them leave the city safely with all of their possessions, and they lived with the Israelites at the edge of the camp.

Jericho was a rich city, full of gold and wonderful possessions. But God instructed the people not to touch any of those things. The conquest of Jericho was not theirs; it was God’s. It was only possible to conquer this city through faith in God; they would always remember that it was not their strength that did it. They were told to burn the city and all the things in it. Whatever could not be burnt, such as gold, silver, vessels of brass and iron, were to be taken for the service of the Sanctuary. They were also instructed to never rebuild

Jericho. Every time they saw its ruins, they would remember what God had done for them.

What amazing things God can do for us if we will only trust in His Word! The Israelites could have said, “Oh, no, marching around the city is not a good way to win a battle; we won’t do it!” But instead, they didn’t question God; they did exactly as He instructed, and God did wonderful things for them. God wants to do great things for you, too. Will you ask Him to help you understand His will for you? Will you hear Him today?

4. Achan's Hidden Sin

He who covers his sins will not prosper,
but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.
Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

Joshua 7, 8:1-29 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 45, 46

The Israelites were overjoyed by their first victory, their conquest of Jericho. Now they were eager to conquer the next city, Ai. Joshua sent men to the city of Ai, to observe it and then come and tell them about it. The men returned from Ai, excited. "It's not a big city; don't send all the men," they suggested, "Send only two thousand or three thousand men."

In all this, no one had asked God what to do. The Israelites had begun to trust in themselves, and had forgotten that this conquest could only be possible with God's help and strength. Also, they didn't know it, but someone in the camp had taken treasures from Jericho and hidden them in his tent – and God had told them specifically to not do this. Because of this, God's protection and help was not with them when the soldiers went to attack the city of Ai.

The Israelite soldiers expected to win easily, but instead, they lost miserably. The city of Ai had already prepared a large army, much larger than the Israelite army of three thousand men. The Israelites were suddenly terrified, and ran down the hill away from the army of Ai. This army chased them and killed thirty-six Israelite men. The Israelites were disappointed and heartbroken. Joshua was so grieved that he ripped his clothes and knelt down with his face to the ground,

next to the ark, until the evening, and put dust on his head. The elders of Israel did the same.

Joshua asked God, “Lord, why did this happen? And what are the other Canaanite nations going to think now?” God answered, “Joshua, you can get up now. What happened is that Israel sinned. Someone broke my covenant by taking from Jericho; he stole and kept things in his tent. These things were cursed, and by keeping them, Israel is cursed, too.”

Now God instructed Joshua on how to solve the problem, “Tell the people to sanctify themselves. They need to get rid of this curse before they can confront their enemies again.” Then God explained how Joshua should find out who had been guilty of stealing the cursed possessions of Jericho.

Joshua did exactly as God instructed him. Early the next morning, he gathered Israel by tribes, and the tribe of Judah was chosen as the guilty one. But no one yet knew who in Judah had sinned. Now each family of Judah was brought forward, and the family of the Zarhites was chosen. Now each leader from this family came forth, and Zabdi was taken. From his family, each male in the household came forward, and a man called Achan was shown to be the guilty one.

“My son,” Joshua said to Achan, “Give glory to God by confessing to Him. Tell me what you’ve done.” Achan answered with the truth, “I saw a Babylonian garment, some silver and gold among the ruins in the city, and I decided to keep them. I have buried them under my tent.”

Joshua asked some men to look inside Achan’s tent to see if this was true, and it was. The men found Achan’s stolen treasures and brought them to Joshua. The people all watched silently.

Then Joshua and the rest of Israel brought Achan, his family and all his animals and possessions, to a valley. And there, the Israelites stoned them. After that, everything was burnt with a fire.

Achan and his family would not have needed to die. He was given plenty of chances to repent: first when he took the possessions, then when the Israelites lost against Ai, then when Joshua told them to sanctify themselves, and finally when the tribes and families were being called in and chosen. Achan confessed what he had done, but only because he was not able to hide it any longer. He never showed repentance, and he did not ask for forgiveness. If he had, God would have gladly forgiven him. Also, the people of Israel did not think of praying for him and asking God to help him; they simply went ahead and stoned him and his family when they saw that he was guilty. God did not protect Achan against the stoning because, through his choices, he had rejected God. The Israelites would not have needed to be the ones to kill him; the Destroyer would have done it some way or another, because Achan had lost God's protection.

With Jericho, the Israelites had begun to receive God's blessings because they had started to trust in Him. But Achan's actions had brought trouble to the whole congregation. Once this problem was gone, there was nothing else holding them back from receiving God's blessings and protection again.

The Israelites didn't want to go out and fight now unless they were sure that God was with them. God told Joshua he could take his army to the city of Ai once more, and this time they were successful, because God gave them the city. The Canaanites had lost God's protection, so the Israelites could easily do whatever they wanted with them. And what did they choose to do? Sadly, they chose to kill. God had not asked them to do this; He had promised that the

Canaanites would be driven away by hornets, by fear, or some other way. The Israelites could have gotten the city without killing a single person.

All of Israel had been affected by Achan's sin. He never imagined that his hidden sin would end up hurting him, his whole family, and all his people. God encourages us to not hide our sins. He already knows if we've done something wrong; He's just waiting for us to come to Him and repent, and He'll gladly forgive us. In God's heart, He has already forgiven us; He's just waiting for us to accept it by simply asking for it. We don't need to be like Achan, who was not sorry and did not believe that God would forgive him and help him. Next time you do something wrong, will you remember that God is waiting for you to come to Him, and that He wants to help you and forgive you?

5. God's Law is Read out Loud

**Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
and that seek him with the whole heart. Psalm 119:2 (KJV)**

Joshua 8:30-35 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 46

The Israelites had just experienced what it was like to have God's help and strength. After what happened in the city of Ai, first when they failed and later when they conquered the city, they realized that before doing anything else, they needed to renew their covenant with God. They knew they could only be safe and successful if they were faithful to God.

The whole congregation went to Shechem to hold a special worship service. Shechem is the place where Abraham had built his first altar to God in Canaan. Both Abraham and Jacob had pitched tents in this place, and there was even a well that Jacob had dug, and an oak tree where he had buried the idols that his wives and servants had been worshiping.

Moses had instructed Joshua to build a large monument of stones in this place once the people reached Canaan, and Joshua followed his instructions. He built a large monument of stones on Mount Ebal. On these stones were written the Ten Commandments and the statutes and judgments. Next to this monument, Joshua built another altar. This altar was built from stones that no one had carved or

shaped; no human tool had been used on any of these stones. Then he offered sacrifices on this altar.

The people were organized and knew where to be so that everything was done in perfect order. There were two mountains with a valley in between them. Six of the tribes stood on one of the mountains, Mount Gerizim, while the other six tribes stood on Mount Ebal, the other mountain. The priests and the ark stood in the valley between these mountains.

The ceremony began: a trumpet sounded, calling for silence. Then Joshua stood next to the ark and read out the blessings that come from obeying God's law. When he finished reading the blessings, the tribes on Mount Gerizim said out loud, "Amen!" Now Joshua read out the curses that come from disobeying God's law. When he had finished reading, the tribes on Mount Ebal said out loud, "Amen!"

Now the Ten Commandments and the statutes and judgments were read out loud. These same laws were written out on the monument that Joshua made, so that anyone could come and read them for themselves. Joshua read every single word of God's law, all of it, while the men, women, and little children all listened closely. There were also some non-Israelites who had joined the camp, and they listened carefully, too.

The people understood that God wanted to give them Canaan, but there were conditions for this to be able to happen; this was explained in God's law. Moses had told the people that every seven years they should read God's law aloud to the whole congregation, during the feast of Tabernacles. This is what Joshua was doing now.

"Don't forget God's law," was the message to the Israelites, "Speak of the law when you sit at your house, when you're walking,

when you lie down and when you rise up. Teach it to your children." As long as they remembered God's law and valued it, they would stay close to God and receive His blessings. As long as they remembered God's law, they would be guided by Him, because His law is His word – it is His instructions to us.

Do you know God's law? Does your family talk about it? It is God's words to us. It is God's advice on how to live and how to stay within His hedge of protection. If we value His law and live it, it will lead us today, just as the pillar of cloud led the Israelites in the desert. Will you ask God to teach you of His law today?

6. The Gibeonites and the Israelites

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. Psalm 25:9 (KJV)

Joshua 9 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 47

The Israelites had already conquered two important cities: Jericho and Ai. The people around them could see that God was with the Israelites, and this made them afraid. One group of people, the Gibeonites, decided that they would lie to the Israelites. They wanted to trick the Israelites into promising them that they would not harm them.

After preparing their plan, a group of Gibeonite men got ready to visit Joshua. They did not live far from where the Israelites were camping, but they pretended that they did. They put on old, broken clothes and worn-out shoes, and packed dried, moldy bread. They also brought old, worn-out wineskins. They wanted Joshua to think that they had been travelling for so long that their food had gotten old and their clothes had worn out.

The Gibeonites came to Joshua and told them their untrue story. “We want to enter into an agreement with you,” they said. At first, Joshua didn’t know whether to believe them. But when he and the other leaders saw their clothes, shoes, and the dry, moldy bread, he believed them. The other princes of Israel believed the Gibeonites, too. Joshua should have asked God what to do, but he didn’t. To him,

it was clear that the Gibeonites were telling the truth. He believed them when they said they lived really far away, and if they did live far away, it didn't matter if they made peace with them, did it? Instead of consulting God first, he made an agreement with the Gibeonites. "We promise that we will let you live," Joshua said.

Three days later, the Israelites found out that the Gibeonites had lied to them. How could this have happened? Why hadn't they asked God what to do? They were upset at the Gibeonites, and upset at themselves. But they kept their promise. The Gibeonites had already promised them that they would stop worshiping idols and would worship God instead.

Joshua said to them, "Why did you lie to us? Because you lied to us, you will all become servants. You will have to chop wood and fetch water for us." The Gibeonites were relieved. They were grateful that Joshua was letting them live, even if it meant that they now had to become servants. They answered Joshua, "We were afraid, because we know that the Lord your God commanded you to cast out all the people from this land, because the land will be for you. You may do to us whatever you think is best."

From then on, the Gibeonites became servants for the Israelites. They gathered wood and water for the Tabernacle, or Sanctuary. It's a pity that it had to happen this way. They would not have needed to lie to the Israelites; they could simply have come to God honestly, and they would have been accepted, just like Rahab and her family were. The Gibeonites owned four cities and had lived like royals until then. Now they would be servants for the rest of their lives. It could have been so different!

And as for Joshua, he learnt how important it is to ask for God's directions before every decision he had to make. When he saw the

old bread and the worn-out clothes of the Gibeonites, he didn't think that there might be a problem. It would have been so much better if he had consulted God first! It's the same with us. Each day, we have decisions to make – big or small. We should never think that we know enough and don't need God's guidance. He is waiting to guide us in each decision that we have to make. Will you trust God today by asking Him to guide you before you make a decision?

7. The Longest Day

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Matthew 17:20 (KJV)

Joshua 10:1-39 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 47

The Gibeonites had tricked the Israelites. They had made the Israelites promise to let them live. Soon the other Canaanite tribes found out, and they were upset. “This is not good,” said king Adonizedek, one of the Amorite kings. “How could the Gibeonites do this? Now the Israelites will be even stronger with the help of the Gibeonites.”

King Adonizedek came up with a plan. He sent a message to four other Amorite kings, telling them, “Come to me and help me. Let’s attack Gibeon for making peace with the Israelites.” The four kings quickly arrived with their armies. They, too, were upset at the Gibeonites for making peace with Israel.

As soon as the Gibeonites heard that the armies of five kings were coming to attack them, they sent a message to Joshua. “Please help us against these kings!” they begged. This time, Joshua consulted God before deciding what to do. Should they help the Gibeonites against these five kings?

God answered, “Do not be afraid; I have delivered them to you.” Once more, God knew that the Israelites were not ready to understand that they could conquer these armies without killing. And

since these kings had long since rejected God, they had completely lost God's protection, and the Israelites would be able to do whatever they wanted with them. Yet if we see what happened during this battle, it is clear that if the Israelites had put away their swords and believed that God would conquer the invading armies in His own way, they would not have needed to kill anyone.

The five kings and their armies had surrounded the city of Gibeon. Joshua's army arrived during the night and attacked them. The kings had not expected that! They were so surprised, and scared, that their whole army escaped and ran up a mountain, and when they reached the top, they continued running down the other side. The Israelites ran after them. But as the Amorites ran down the mountain, hail fell on them. More Amorites were killed by the hailstones than by the swords of the Israelites.

It was now evening. The Israelites and Amorites had been in battle during the night, and then when the sun rose, they continued in battle all day long. Now the sun was about to set. Joshua had gone up the mountain and watched the Amorites running down the hill. He knew that once the sun set, the enemies would be able to hide in the darkness, and Joshua didn't want that. If the Amorites escaped, he was sure they would attack again. It was really important to win this battle. If the Israelites won, it would mean that five more cities would be conquered! Joshua, full of faith, prayed out loud, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon! And Moon, stay still in the valley of Ajalon!"

God answered this prayer exactly as Joshua asked: He stopped the sun and the moon from moving, and daytime continued for another whole day! This amazing miracle would be noticed and known by all the other nations. They would have no doubt that God

was with Israel, and that He was powerful. Would they now decide to come to God, to worship Him and join His people? Sadly, they didn't.

Joshua's army had enough time to deal with the Amorite soldiers. Then they found the five Amorite kings hiding in a cave, and these kings were put to death. Finally, Joshua's army destroyed everyone who lived in the cities of these five kings. If only these people had come into God's hedge of protection! But they chose to reject God and His care, and were completely unprotected by whatever attack came to them.

Joshua trusted God completely. His prayer showed faith, and he believed that God would do for them what was best. Because of his prayer, the earth had its longest day ever – a day that no one would forget, because it showed that the God of Israel was powerful enough to even stop the sun from moving in the sky! What do you need God to do for you today? Will this help others to get to know Him better? Ask God to do through you what needs to be done so that someone can get to know Him better today.

8. Dividing the Land of Canaan

The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.
Psalm 37:29 (KJV)

Joshua 10:40-43; 11 - 21 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 48

King Jabin, one of the kings of Northern Canaan, was terrified. He heard how Joshua's army had conquered so many of the Canaanite cities, in such miraculous ways. He could see that the Israelite God was powerful. He could have come to God and asked to join His people, but he didn't. Instead, he joined armies with some of the other tribes in Northern Palestine, and together they planned to attack Israel. He hoped that maybe, with such a large army, they would be able to win against Israel and their God.

Joshua heard of what King Jabin was planning to do. God encouraged Joshua and said to him, "Don't be afraid of them; tomorrow at this time they will be delivered before you."

Encouraged by God's words, Joshua and his army moved towards the enemy camp. They attacked the enemy by surprise, and won quite easily. After the battle, the Israelites burned all the enemy chariots and lamed the horses, because God said they would[1]. These

[1] We can understand burning the chariots, but laming the horses is very cruel. This is probably what the Israelites wanted to do in their hearts, and God mentioned it – not as a command, but as a way of telling them what they would do out of the desires of their hearts. See Book 4, *The Prophets and the Kings*, Story 26, "The Day the Valley Turned Red", for another example of this.

things would never be used in battle; they would not be used for making the Israelites stronger. The Israelites needed to always remember that their trust should be on God's power, and not on the horses, chariots or swords that they owned.

The conquest of Canaan continued for several years. Cities were conquered one by one. By the end of it all, Joshua was the master of Canaan. But Joshua's army did not get rid of every single Canaanite group; the rest of the conquest would have to be done by each tribe, in their own territories, with God's help.

Joshua gathered the people and divided the land of Canaan among them. Moses had already told them how the land should be divided, so Joshua followed what Moses had instructed them. All the tribes received plots of land except for the Levites. The Levites received only cities, because they were in charge of the sanctuary service. They would be busy enough in the sanctuary and would not have as much time to work the land, so God arranged for them to live in cities and to receive tithes from the people.

Caleb, who had been one of the faithful spies with Joshua forty years before, came to Joshua with a special request. "I would like to claim the land of Hebron as my own," he asked. This land had been promised to him for his faithfulness. Hebron was special because it's where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived and were buried. Yet this land still had Canaanites living in it, the Anakims, who were giants. These were the giants that had terrified the ten spies forty years before. But Caleb was not afraid. He was 85 years old, but he knew that God would give him strength to drive out the Anakims. Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him the land.

The tribe of Ephraim also came with a request. They told Joshua, "We are the largest tribe, so we need more land. Please give us more

land." They were hoping that Joshua would give them more of the land that had already been conquered. But Joshua said to them, "If the land isn't enough, then go to the forests where the Canaanites are still living." This land was given to the Ephraimites, but it was still full of Canaanites who lived there. The people of Ephraim didn't like Joshua's answer. They didn't want to make the effort of driving out people from their land! They said, "No, it's not enough for us, and the Canaanites there are really strong. They're giants, and they have chariots of iron." They were just making excuses, and Joshua knew this. He reminded them, "You are many, didn't you say so? Then you will have great power to drive out these people. You won't only have one lot; the mountain with the forest is yours, too. You can cut down the trees, and you will drive out the Canaanites even though they have chariots of iron." What a difference between Caleb and the people of Ephraim! All they needed was faith in the power of God to help them, and they would be able to send the people away from the land.

After the tribes had been assigned their land, it was time to find a spot for the Tabernacle. Joshua moved the Tabernacle to Shiloh. Shiloh was in the center of Canaan, so all the tribes would be able to travel there to celebrate the feasts. Everyone was invited to attend the feasts, but it was especially important for the men to attend, because they were the spiritual leaders of their families. God promised them that even when all the strong men were away from their lands during the feasts, their homes would be protected if the people were faithful to Him. God would place a hedge of protection around their homes, lands and families.

After everyone had received their land, Joshua made his claim. He had received a special promise of inheritance just like Caleb, but

he asked for a city that wasn't even built yet, the city of Timnath-serah. He built it himself, and lived in it. He could have asked for the most convenient spot in Canaan, but he didn't. After he built Timnath-serah, he enjoyed a quiet and peaceful life there.

The Israelites had finally received the land that God had promised. The Bible says that God gave them "rest", and that none of their enemies could stand against them. "Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all of it came true." (Joshua 21:45).

It was now up to them to drive out the Canaanite people who still remained in the land – and this could only be done through faith in God. God wanted to give them the land, but most of all, He wanted to give them eternal life. Every experience they had with the land of Canaan was there to teach them how to trust in Him completely so that He could save them and give them eternal life.

These stories are here for us, too, so that we can learn to trust in God completely. He wants to give us our inheritance of the New Earth, and eternal life. Will you ask Him to teach you how to trust Him today?

9. A Misunderstanding is Solved

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous. 1 Peter 3:8 (NKJV)

Joshua 22 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 48

The conquest was over, and it was time for each tribe to move into their own territories and settle there. Joshua called the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These tribes had been given land on the other side of the Jordan. Their wives, children and possessions were already there, waiting for them. Only the men from these tribes had crossed the Jordan to help the rest of the Israelites to conquer the land.

Joshua said to them, “You have done everything that the Lord commanded you, and you helped the other tribes to conquer the land. Now God has given rest to the other tribes, so it is time for you to return to your families. But once you do, don’t forget God and His law. Stay close to God and serve Him always.” Then Joshua blessed them and sent them home.

Not long after these tribes had settled on the other side of the Jordan, news came to the Israelites: “The tribes on the other side of the Jordan have built a large altar, near to where the crossing of the Jordan happened! The altar is similar to the altar of burnt offering at Shiloh, but we know that God has told us to *only* offer sacrifices at Shiloh!” The Israelites were upset. They said to each other, “These

tribes will offer sacrifices on the other side of the Jordan, but that's not allowed! Now God will be displeased with us because of them. Let's make war against them!"

Thankfully, after discussing what to do, they decided not to attack. First, they wanted to send a group of men to talk to these tribes and find out what the altar was about. Phinehas the High Priest (the grandson of Aaron) and ten princes, one from each tribe, set off to visit the tribes on the other side of the Jordan.

Phinehas asked them, "Why have you rebelled against God by building an altar here? If you don't want to live without an altar on your side of the river, you could have asked to move to the other side. Because of you, God will withdraw from the rest of Israel."

The leaders of the accused tribes were surprised at these accusations. They had not rebelled against God at all! They could have been angry that the other tribes thought they had done such a terrible thing, but they chose not to be angry. Instead, they politely explained, "The Lord knows that this altar was not built for sacrifices – we know that sacrifices can only be offered at Shiloh. The reason we built this altar is that we were afraid that in a few years, your children might think that we don't belong with the rest of Israel because the Jordan separates us. We're afraid that you might not let us worship at Shiloh. So this altar looks like the one at Shiloh, but it is a monument, a reminder that we are part of God's people; we will not use it for sacrifices."

Phinehas and the ten princes with him were relieved and filled with joy. The tribes on the other side of the Jordan had *not* rebelled against God! They couldn't wait to share the good news with the rest of the tribes. How glad they were that they hadn't just made war

without talking together first! It had just been one big misunderstanding, but now it was cleared up. Phinehas said gratefully, “Today we know that the Lord is among us, because you did not sin against God, and now you have been polite to us and helped us avoid doing wrong, too.”

The children of Gad and Reuben wrote on the altar: “It shall be a witness between us that Jehovah is God.” Now it would be clear that this altar was a monument, and not an altar for sacrifices and offerings.

How important it is to be courteous and treat people respectfully! It was good that the Israelites spoke together kindly before jumping to conclusions. This helped avoid an unnecessary war between the Israelites. This is how God treats us, and how He wants us to treat others. Will you ask God to help you be courteous and respectful to others today?

10. Joshua's Last Message to Israel

But cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day.
Joshua 23:8 (KJV)

Joshua 23-24 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 49

Joshua's work of conquest was finished; from now on, each tribe would have to complete the conquest of their plots of land through faith in God. Joshua settled down in his land and began to enjoy the inheritance that God had given him. But after a few years, he noticed that the Israelites were not as faithful to God as they should have been. "I'm getting old. I must speak to them before I die, and encourage them to follow God faithfully," thought Joshua.

He called all the people together, and spoke to them earnestly. "You've seen what God has done for you," reminded Joshua, "God fought for you. But the Canaanites still possess a lot of the land; you have not sent them away like God had instructed you. These people are idol worshipers, and God Himself will send them away from before you if you trust Him." After Joshua had stopped conquering Canaan, the rest of the tribes had not wanted to continue with this work. Joshua knew that it would be dangerous for them to live among the Canaanites, because the Canaanites would teach them to worship idols and to leave God. Joshua continued speaking: "Be courageous,

and do all that is written in the books that Moses wrote. As long as we have obeyed God, He has fulfilled His promises."

After this, Joshua and the people each returned to their homes. Joshua enjoyed a few more years of peaceful living in his land. But he was getting older, and he knew that he would soon die. He asked all the people of Israel to meet with him one more time at Shechem. This city was in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the spot where a few years earlier the Israelites had gathered together to read God's law. It was the perfect place for the Israelites to gather for Joshua's last message to them as their leader.

Joshua spoke to them like a loving father. He was more than one hundred years old – one of the oldest men in Israel – and the people loved and respected him. He said, "Remember all that the Lord has done for you. He took you out of Egypt and cared for you all these years. God helped you win against many of the Canaanite cities. And He even sent hornets which drove out some of the people. Now you have this rich land."

Joshua had asked for the ark to be brought from Shiloh. He wanted the people to renew their covenant with God once more. "Cleave unto the Lord your God, stay close to Him," urged Joshua. He also gave them an invitation. He said, "Choose today who you will follow. If you don't want to follow God, then who will you follow? But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people's hearts were touched. How could they not follow God, how could they not love God, after everything He had done for them? They all said, "We will follow the Lord; we will not leave Him for other gods."

Joshua was glad to hear of the people's decision. But he wanted them to understand that they would not be able to follow God on their own; they would only be able to do it with His help. If they

trusted in their own strength, they would not be able to receive God's forgiveness and righteousness. But the people thought they could. They said to Joshua, "We will serve and obey the Lord!"

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day. He wrote what they had promised, and placed it in the side of the ark, where the book of the law was kept. He also set up a pillar as a memorial, so that every time the people saw this pillar, they would remember their covenant with God. It wasn't necessary to do all this, but since the people had made a promise, Joshua wanted to help them remember it.

Why is it so hard for us human beings to understand that we cannot promise anything to God? God must have been happy that the people wanted to follow Him, but He would have to patiently help them see that they could not do this unless they stayed close to Him and depended on Him completely.

After this special meeting, everyone went home. Joshua died some time later. He was a hundred and ten years old. He had been a faithful and godly leader, and the people would miss him. And as for their promise to God, the people kept this promise as long as Joshua was alive, and after he died, they kept it as long as the elders that had worked with Joshua were still alive.

God wanted to renew His covenant with His people. He longed for them to simply cling to Him and hear His words and believe them. He wants the same for us, too. We don't need to promise Him anything; we just need to "cleave" to Him (like Joshua told the people) and believe His words, and He will do everything He promises to do in us. Will you ask Him to help you cleave to Him today?

11. The Place of Weeping

I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. Judges 2:1 (KJV)

Judges 1; 2:1-5

Joshua had conquered a great part of Canaan. But there were still territories that needed to be conquered with God's help. Joshua had told the people that each tribe would have to complete this task through faith in God.

After Joshua's death, the Israelites wondered, "Who will fight against the Canaanites for us?" God knew who had enough faith to trust God to help them: the men of Judah. He said, "Judah will go up; I have delivered the land to them." What did God mean when He said, "I have delivered the land"? This meant that God would be protecting the men of Judah because of their faith, but He would not be protecting the Canaanites, because they did not want Him in their lives. The men of Judah invited the men from the tribe of Simeon, and together both tribes conquered the land.

In this battle, they captured one of the Canaanite kings called Adonibezek, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. He admitted, "I've done this same thing to seventy other kings. Now God is doing this back to me." Was God doing this to him? No. God would not have chosen such cruelty. What had happened is that he had lost God's protection, so his enemies were able to do whatever they wanted with him.

How would God have driven out this king and his nation? Certainly not with cruelty and killing, but the Israelites didn't understand this, and they weren't ready to change their way of thinking yet. The Israelites were able to do this to the Canaanite king simply because he and his people had rejected God and no longer received His protection. At the same time, this was a chance for the Israelites to see how cruel their own hearts were – they were just as mean as this heathen king had been! Wouldn't this want to make them repent and change? Sadly, they didn't seem to notice their own cruelty, and they missed this chance to repent and to learn to be kinder and more loving, like God is.

The tribes of Judah and Simeon kept on driving out the Canaanites, but suddenly they stopped: they came to a valley that made them really scared. In this valley, the people had chariots of iron. These chariots were the strongest of that time, and they had sharp metal blades in the front. Chariots of iron were terrifying! The men of Judah and Simeon stopped trusting in God, and only saw the scary chariots of iron. They decided to not conquer any more land. Was God stronger than chariots of iron? Would He have helped them? Of course! But without faith, God could do nothing for them.

Another tribe, the tribe of Ephraim, also went to conquer. They arrived at the city of Bethel, and they met a Canaanite man who lived there. They said to him, "If you help us get into the city, we will not harm you or your family." The man listened, and he was kind and helpful to them, just like Rahab had helped the spies a few years before.

The men of Ephraim conquered the city of Bethel, and they kept their promise to this man. They made sure he and his whole family were safe, and they were invited to live with the Israelites, just like

Rahab and her family had done. But this man chose not to live in Israel. He and his family chose to move to another country, far from Israel, where they continued to live as idol worshipers.

What would have happened if most of the Canaanite people had decided to move away from the Israelites, like this man did? What if they had decided not to fight? Maybe they would not have died; maybe they would have been able to live, but in faraway lands, where they could not bother God's people. This was God's plan from the beginning. The Israelites did not need to kill others to drive out the people from the land. But since they often chose to not do it God's way, God permitted the Israelites to drive out the people in their own way.

Very few of the tribes had the faith to truly conquer their land. Some of the tribes did not even bother to drive out the Canaanites from their land. Instead, they said, "We're stronger than these Canaanite people. We'll let them live in this land, but they will have to pay taxes to us." This seemed to be ok as long as the Israelites were stronger, but as time went by, the Canaanites grew stronger, and soon enough, it was the *Israelites* who were having to pay taxes to the Canaanites. One of the tribes was treated so badly by the Amorites that they had to move to the mountain, away from their lands and homes.

God saw all this, and He was grieved. How He longed to help His people! But they had such little faith, that there was not much He could do. He sent an angel to them with a message: "I took you out of Egypt, I saved you from slavery, and I will never break my covenant with you. Yet you disobeyed my instructions, and you made agreements with the people of Canaan when I told you not to. You

did not get rid of their altars for idol worship. Why did you behave like this?" Now God told them that He would respect the choices that they had made. He said, "Now, I will not drive the Canaanite people out for you. They will be like thorns on your side, and their idols will bring you problems."

The people heard, and they realized their big mistake. Right there, they all cried loudly. In fact, they cried so much that this place was called Bochim from then on. "Bochim" means "the place of weeping".

As the people cried, they offered sacrifices to God. They hoped this would make things right between them and God. But God was not expecting sacrifices from them; all He wanted was for them to repent and to believe His words. If they truly believed, they would gladly obey Him, and He would be able to do great things for them. But sadly, this did not happen. The people were more worried about the bad consequences of their actions than about how their actions ruined their relationship with God. How could God work through them if they weren't willing to follow Him?

God had said to them, "I will never break my covenant with you." The covenant could only be broken by them, not by God. We have a steadfast, trustworthy God who always does what He promises. We just need faith to believe what He promises to us. Do you need more of this faith? Will you ask Him for faith today?

12. A Woman's Faith

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Luke 11:9-10 (KJV)

Judges 1:12-15; Numbers 27:1-11

Caleb had complete faith in God. Even though he was one of the oldest men in Israel, he still used his strength and faith to conquer land. He expelled the Canaanites from Hebron, his land.

Caleb also wanted to conquer a city near Hebron called Kirjath-Sepher. He decided to invite the younger men to conquer it. He promised, "Whoever conquers this city will be able to marry my daughter, Achsah." Caleb knew that any young man who would have the faith and courage to do this task would make a wonderful husband for his daughter.

A brave young man called Othniel accepted the challenge. He conquered Kirjath-sepher and gladly married Caleb's daughter Achsah.

After the wedding, Achsah decided to visit her father. She had something important to ask him. She got on her donkey and rode to meet her father. When Caleb saw her, he kindly asked her, "My daughter, what can I do for you?"

Achsah replied, "Please give me a blessing; you've given me the south land, which is large but is dry and has no water. Could you also

give me some land that has springs of water?" Caleb understood. It was reasonable for her to ask for land that had water in it. But the land with springs that she was asking for was still full of Canaanite people. Before she could use this land, they would have to drive the Canaanites away from there. Most people in Israel would not have asked for this land, because they were afraid to try to conquer it. But Achsah was different: she had faith that God would help them conquer the land, and that she would be able to use it soon. She was so sure of this that she asked her father for the land, and Caleb gladly gave it to her.

What wonderful faith Achsah had! This reminded Caleb of five other women who had also shown a similar faith many years before, when Moses was still alive. The Israelites hadn't even crossed the Jordan yet, when five sisters went to Moses with a special request. They arrived at the door of the Tabernacle and politely said, "Sir, we are sisters. Our father has already died, and we have no brothers. This means that our family might not inherit any land at all, because there are no more men in our family. Could we please receive land along with our relatives, for our father's family?"

Moses heard them and asked God what to do. Usually, the men inherited the land, and the women received whatever belonged to their husband once they were married. But what about when there was no son to receive his father's land? God told Moses, "What these women are asking for is correct. If there is no son to receive the inheritance, then the daughters should receive it." The five sisters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, were also told, "Get married to cousins, so that the land will remain in your family." Depending on where you live, marrying a cousin might sound

strange, but in many countries, this is not strange at all, and it sometimes happens.

These five sisters showed that they had faith. They asked for land that had not been conquered yet, but they spoke as though they were sure that this land would be conquered. They were certain that God would keep His promise to give them the land. It would have been so easy for them to think that it wasn't worth it to ask for something that hadn't yet been conquered and might never be theirs, but they chose to believe and to ask as though God had already fulfilled His promise. This is the same faith that Achsah, Caleb's daughter, had. These women asked knowing that God would be with His people and would give them the strength to conquer. They knew God would keep His promise to His people.

God didn't only give promises to the Israelite people; He has given wonderful promises to us, too. He has promised to give us a character like Jesus, so that we can live in the heavenly Promised Land very soon. Do we believe His promises? Will you ask Him today to fulfill them in your life?

13. The First Judges

**For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;
and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. Psalm 86:5 (KJV)**

Judges 2:6-23; 3

The people had been faithful to God until Joshua and the elders with him died. After that, they let the Canaanites influence them. They made friends with them and even married them, and the Canaanites taught them how to worship idols. This was exactly why God had asked them to send the Canaanite people away, and had promised to help them do it if they trusted in Him. God had said “drive them away” or “send them away”, not kill them. It was the Israelites who had chosen to kill them when they took their land.

Since the people now chose to leave God, He respected their choice and withdrew from them. Now they no longer had God’s protection, and the Canaanite people were able to rule over them. The Canaanites had acted friendly when they thought the Israelites were stronger, but once they felt powerful, they treated the Israelites with cruelty and made them suffer a lot.

When the suffering became too much, the people would remember God and would cry out to Him for help. During those times, God was merciful. He raised up judges who delivered them from their enemies. As long as the judge was alive, the people would listen to him and follow God, but as soon as the judge was dead, they

would return to their idols, and would lose God's protection once more. They constantly broke their covenant with God.

The first judge that God raised up was Othniel, Caleb's nephew, the man who married Caleb's daughter Achsah. The Israelites had been servants to the king of Mesopotamia for eight years, and they finally cried out to God for help. Othniel fought against this king and won, and Israel had rest again. This peace continued for forty years, until Othniel died. Then the Israelites forgot about God and returned to their idols.

Now the Moabites began to rule over the Israelites. Once more, the Israelites remembered God and cried out to Him for help. This time, God raised up a judge called Ehud. He was a left-handed man, which surprised people, because only a few people were left-handed there. Ehud had to take the taxes from his people to King Eglon, the Moabite king. One day, he thought of a plan to save Israel from this king and his taxes. He asked if he could speak alone with the king of Moab. When he came in to see the king, he brought a dagger hidden in his clothing. None of the guards noticed that he had it, probably because he was left-handed and kept the dagger in a different spot in his clothing than where right-handed men would have kept it.

Once he was alone with the king, he took out his dagger and killed the king with it. Then he quickly locked the door and left the king's parlor. The king's servants waited outside for several hours, and wondered why the king never called them. When they finally went inside to see him, they found him dead.

Right after that, Ehud blew a trumpet and called all the Israelites together to fight against the Moabites. Since the king of Moab was now dead, he knew it would be easy to win. Ten thousand Israelite

men fought against the Moabite army and won. After this, Israel had peace for eighty years.

Another man who helped Israel during the time of Ehud was called Shamgar. The Israelites always remembered him, because he killed six hundred Philistine men with a really strange weapon: an ox goad – a long wooden stick with a metal point on it, which was used for guiding oxen. He probably used this because he didn't have any swords; the enemies must have taken them away. These men, Ehud and Shamgar, did the best they could to help Israel come back to God. But sadly, when Ehud died, the people left God again, and returned to idol worship.

How painful it must have been for God to watch His children constantly leaving Him and suffering! He never broke His covenant with them; when they cried out to Him, He heard them and helped them. But they constantly broke their covenant with Him. How easily they left the God who gave them everything they needed, and who loved and protected them. How easily they turned to idols who could do nothing for them. He heard them and gave them Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar, men who did not always do things the way God would have preferred, but who at least let God use them in some way, according to what they understood. Yet God longed to give them even more. He longed for them to know Him well and love Him, to reflect His character and to live truly blessed lives, but this was not possible with the choices they made.

God still answers our cries if we call to Him. Do you need God's help and forgiveness? He is waiting and ready to give it to you. Will you ask Him today for it? And will you ask Him to give you the Spirit of Christ, who stays close to His Father, and reflects Him in every way?

14. Deborah

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses:
but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Psalm 20:7 (KJV)

Judges 4, 5

The Israelites kept on leaving God and turning to idols. While Ehud the judge lived, they still worshiped God and enjoyed peace in their land. But as soon as Ehud died, they began to worship idols again. Each time they rejected God this way, they left His hedge of protection. And when they lost God's protection, the king of Canaan, King Jabin, was able to rule over them. They were miserable living under this cruel king, and they could not imagine how to escape from him. King Jabin was strong, and he had a huge army and 900 strong chariots of iron. A man called Sisera was the captain of this terrifying army. For twenty years, the Israelites suffered under King Jabin's rule.

After twenty years, the Israelites couldn't take it any longer. They began to cry out to God for help. God looked around for a man He could use as a judge to lead Israel back to freedom, but sadly, He found none. None of the men in Israel had enough faith in God, nor enough courage, for God to be able to use them. Instead, God found a woman. Her name was Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth. She was a prophetess. She trusted God completely and had the courage to follow His instructions, and it wasn't long before the people realized that they could come to her with their problems. She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah, where people would come to her for judgment.

Deborah called a man named Barak and told him, "God has commanded you to gather ten thousand men. He will bring Captain Sisera and his army to you, by the river, and will deliver this army to you." What an amazing promise! When God "delivered an army" to them, this meant that this army had no protection whatsoever from God, and that His blessing would be on the Israelite army, if they believed in Him.

But Barak was afraid. Remember, God had not been able to find a brave man with enough faith in Israel – not even the captain of Israel's army! Barak believed that God was calling him, but instead of looking to God completely, he thought of all the weaknesses of the Israelite army, and how strong Sisera's army was. This filled him with doubts, so he said to Deborah, "I will go, but only if you go with me. If you don't go with me, I won't go." Since when did men ask women to join them in battle for protection? This didn't make any sense! But at least Barak was willing to go, so Deborah answered, "I will go with you. But because of your unbelief, you will not get the honor of this victory. Instead, a woman will bring the victory."

Barak then gathered his army together. When Sisera, the enemy, heard of this, he gathered his large army, along with all his iron chariots, and brought them to the river, just like God had promised he would. Deborah instructed Barak, "Go. This is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera's army into your hand. God has already gone out before you." The Israelites looked at the huge enemy army and were afraid. Those iron chariots were powerful and dangerous, and the enemy was so strong! How would God help them win?

Even before Barak's army arrived, God began working in the Canaanite camp. God's presence came to the enemy army, and it made the soldiers feel very disturbed and uncomfortable. Why did

they feel so disturbed? Because they were clinging to sins that they refused to give up. With God being so near them, they could see their sins clearly, and they could not stand it. This was an opportunity for Sisera and his men to repent and come to God, but they chose not to. Instead, they panicked and ran away. Even Captain Sisera, the Canaanite captain, left his iron chariot and escaped on foot. The Israelite army easily caught up with these enemy soldiers and began to kill them.

Captain Sisera escaped and came to the tent of a man called Heber the Kenite. The Kenites were children of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. They loved the Israelites, but they were not enemies with Sisera's people, so Sisera was sure he had found a safe place. He greeted Jael, Heber's wife, and she invited him in. At first, she didn't know who he was, so she offered him food and rest, just like she always offered it to any traveler who passed by her tent. "Come in, my lord, do not fear," she said. She gave him milk to drink, then he lay down to sleep, and she covered him with a blanket. Sisera told Jael, "Stand by the door. If anyone asks you if a man is in here, say no." Then he quickly fell asleep. By now, Jael knew who this man was – he was an enemy of God's people! What should she do? While Sisera was still sleeping, she quietly found a tent peg and hammered it into his temples, and he died. She must have felt horrible doing this, but it was what she understood that she had to do. She did not think that God might have solved the problem in a different way.

Later that day, Barak, the captain of Israel's army, passed by Jael's tent, and she called him and said, "Here's the man you're looking for." Barak was amazed. Jael, a woman, had conquered Sisera and had brought victory to Israel, just like Deborah had said. After Sisera's army lost their captain, it was easy for the Israelites to win

the battle. They even captured King Jabin, and after that, Israel was free from their enemy. The Israelites celebrated this huge victory, and Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise to God to thank Him for giving them back their freedom.

God longed to give His people freedom and a peaceful life. As long as He found someone of faith who believed Him and was willing to be used by Him, He delivered the people. God used Deborah and Jael, two women, to do what the men of Israel should have had the faith and courage to do. The men looked to human power, to chariots and weapons, rather than looking to God's strength. God is able to help us with any problem we have. When you have a problem, do you look at the problem and all your limitations, like Barak did, or do you look to God and all that He can do for you, like Deborah did? Ask God today to help you focus on Him and His strength to help you, and to stop looking at your problems or limitations, so that He can do what He has promised to do in you.

15. Gideon's Doubts

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7 (KJV)

Judges 6 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53

God loved the Israelites and had done all He could to help them and to guide their lives. While Deborah was alive, they enjoyed peace. But after that, they went back to their idols. How could they leave the God who loved them and protected them? By leaving God, they were leaving His hedge of protection. With sadness, God respected their decision, and He no longer protected them. All too soon, other nations began to disturb them.

This time, the enemies were the Midianites. For seven years, they oppressed the Israelites and made them miserable. It got so bad that some of the Israelites had to leave their land and hide in caves and dens in the mountains. Now that no one was defending the land, the Midianites and the Amalekites took the Israelites' grains, fruits and animals, so that there was hardly anything left for the Israelites to eat.

Now that they were suffering, the Israelites remembered God. They cried out to Him for help. God sent them a prophet. The Bible doesn't tell us his name, but this prophet reminded them, "God brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery, and He drove out the people before you and gave you their land. He is your God and you do not need to fear the gods of the Amorites. But you have not obeyed Him."

Now that the people were talking to God again, He could help them. God needed a man who had enough faith to let God use him.

Would He find a man like this? Yes, he did. The man's name was Gideon. He was busy threshing wheat in a very strange place: the winepress. Why would he thresh wheat in a winepress? Because he was hiding his wheat from the Midianites. It wasn't wine season yet, so he hoped that none of the Midianites would come to the winepress that day.

God's Angel, or God's Son, came to visit Gideon as he was threshing the wheat. The Angel sat under an oak tree near Gideon, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor!"

Gideon was frightened. Would this visitor steal his wheat? But then he saw that his visitor was friendly. He said to the visitor, "If the Lord is with us, then why is all of this happening to us?" The Angel encouraged him, and said, "Go, you will save Israel from the hands of the Midianites, because I have sent you."

Gideon suddenly thought of all the reasons why he was not the right person for this task: "But my family is poor, from the unimportant tribe of Manasseh. And I'm the youngest brother, the least important." The Angel, God's Son, patiently answered, "I will be with you."

Gideon felt honored, but he still had doubts about what he was being asked to do. He begged the visitor, "If I have found grace in your sight, show me a sign that you've talked with me. Please don't leave until I bring you a present." The patient visitor answered, "I will wait until you return."

Gideon hurried off to prepare a meal for his visitor: a goat and unleavened bread. It was a generous gift, because his family had very little food. He brought it to the visitor. "Place it on a rock, and pour out the broth," the Angel, God's Son, instructed. When Gideon did this, the Angel touched the food with his staff, and fire burnt up the

offering. Now Gideon knew, without any doubt, that his visitor really was from God. He was afraid that he might die, because he knew he was a sinner. But God's Son comforted him, saying, "Peace be unto you; do not be afraid; you will not die."

That same night, Gideon followed God's first command. He and ten servants broke down the altar of Baal that was in his town. They also cut down all the trees around this altar. Gideon's own father had built this altar, but Gideon was sure that destroying it was the right thing. Then Gideon and his servants built an altar for the Lord on the rock where the Angel had been. They used the wood from the trees they had cut down, and they offered a young bull there. Gideon wanted to help the people to abandon their idols and return to God and His protection.

The next morning, several men came to worship Baal, and they were very angry when they saw what Gideon had done. They came to Gideon's father and demanded, "Bring your son here, so that he can die!" But Gideon's father answered them, "Why are you trying to defend Baal? If he really is a god, let him defend himself!"

He was right: who was supposed to defend who? Wasn't Baal supposed to defend the people? Yet he couldn't even defend himself! If Baal really was that powerful, why didn't he kill Gideon? If Gideon was alive, then this meant that Baal had no power to kill him, and that Baal had no power at all!

After all that happened, Gideon should have been completely sure that God was with him and had called him to deliver the Israelites. But he still had doubts. Was he really the man who should lead the Israelites against the Midianites and Amalekites? Gideon prayed, "I will put a fleece of wool on the ground during the night. If the fleece is wet with dew, but the ground is dry, I will understand

this as a sign that you have sent me." The next day, it happened just as he had prayed.

Yet Gideon needed some more assurance. Maybe it was normal for the fleece to be wet and the ground to dry up first in the morning. "Please don't be angry with me," he prayed, "But this time, if you have sent me, let the fleece be dry and the ground wet with dew." The next morning, the fleece was dry, but the ground was wet. Now Gideon was encouraged, and sure that God really had sent him to do this work.

God was patient with Gideon. It would have been far better if Gideon had simply believed God's words from the start, without the need to see signs in order to believe. But as long as Gideon was willing to listen, God would be able to work with him.

God wants us to "walk by faith, not by sight". Do you believe God's words for your life? Do you need to see signs to be sure? Ask God to help you to believe, and to strengthen your faith. He did it for Gideon; He will lovingly and patiently do it for you.

16. Gideon's Small Army

One man of you shall chase a thousand; for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Joshua 23:10 (KJV)

Judges 7 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53

Gideon was now sure that God had called him to free the Israelites from the Midianites. Already, the Midianite and Amalekite armies had gathered and were camped in a nearby valley. It was a huge army, and Gideon wanted to make sure he had enough soldiers to fight against them.

Gideon invited the Israelites to join his army, and he was relieved when 32.000 men answered his call. With this number of soldiers, they might be able to conquer the Midianites! But God said to Gideon, "You have too many men. They might end up believing that they won because of their own strength, and they won't believe that I delivered them. Tell your army that anyone who is afraid should return home." God wanted to work through men who had faith in him, and if they were afraid and didn't trust Him, it was better for them to return home.

Then God said, "Now send home anyone who has just built a new house and hasn't dedicated it, and anyone who has just planted a new vineyard but hasn't eaten from it yet. Also, send home anyone who is engaged to be married but hasn't gotten married yet." The Israelites had always done this with their men just before battle, and Gideon knew he should do it, but he had hoped he wouldn't have to.

He wished he didn't have to invite any of his soldiers to leave! But he obeyed God's orders, and to his dismay, 22.000 men turned around and went back home. Now Gideon was left with only 10.000 men! Would they be able to win with only this number of soldiers?

But God wasn't done yet. "There's still too many men," He told Gideon, "Take the men down to the river to drink water, on the way to the battle camp. Those men who kneel to drink, or who lap up the water like a dog, should be sent home. But keep those men who scoop up water with their hand and drink while still standing." Why? God could only work with the men who were ready to work and concentrated on their task; men who didn't want to waste time, not even to kneel down to drink. Gideon watched the men as they drank, and to his dismay, he had to send thousands of them back home. Now there were only 300 men left. It was only a small army, but God had chosen them. They were brave, had faith in God, and were not idol worshipers.

God wanted to encourage Gideon some more. He commanded, "Go down to the enemy army with Purah, your servant, and watch what they do and say." So Gideon and Purah went down to the enemy camp, hid in the shadows and listened to the conversations of the soldiers. They heard one enemy soldier say, "I dreamed that a cake of barley bread tumbled into our camp, came into a tent and turned it over." The other soldier answered, "Oh, this dream means that the Lord has given the Midianites to Gideon!"

Gideon had heard enough. Excited and encouraged, he and his servant returned to their small army and told them what they had heard. "God has delivered them to us!" he said excitedly. Now each soldier got ready: God had told them to each carry a trumpet and a torch. The torch had to be covered with a clay pitcher to hide its

light. If they had only carried this, it would have been enough to win the battle, but of course the soldiers couldn't help carrying a sword, too. God had not told them to bring swords, but they just were not ready to understand that God did not expect them to kill anyone that night.

It was night time. The 300 Israelite men surrounded the enemy camp, where the soldiers were sleeping. Suddenly Gideon blew his trumpet, and all 300 men blew their trumpets. Then they broke the clay pitchers to uncover their torches, and shouted, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!"

The sleeping enemy army woke up, terrified. They heard the trumpets and the shouts. They saw the torches, and to them it seemed like they were surrounded by thousands and thousands of Israelite soldiers! They had no idea that Gideon's army was so small. They began to run away, and in their fear and confusion, they began to kill other soldiers in their own army.

Gideon and his men could have just returned home, and the Midianite army would have destroyed itself. Since the Midianites had abandoned God and lost His protection, this was going to happen anyway. But the Israelites didn't completely understand God's ways, so they chased after the Midianite and Amalekite soldiers and killed them, thinking that they had to do it. The Israelite men who were not part of Gideon's army heard what was happening and joined in to help, too.

Israel was finally free from the Midianites! And it was clear that this had happened, not because the Israelite army was great, but only because God was great and powerful.

Many years before, Joshua had told the Israelites that God would fight for them, and one man with God's help would be able to do

what one thousand men could do. That day with Gideon and his 300 men, this promise was fulfilled. With God's help, we can do anything. And whatever we do, it is God's power that makes it possible, not our own. Will you ask God to give you faith in Him, so that He can do what He has planned to do through you?

17. Gideon's Problems

But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you. Jeremiah 7:23 (ESV)

Judges 8 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53

Gideon was overjoyed. The Israelites were finally free from the Midianites! Now they wouldn't need to hide in caves anymore. They wouldn't have to pay taxes to the Midianites, and they would be able to grow food in their fields and vineyards again.

The Israelites were grateful, too. They couldn't wait to live in their homes in peace again. They were tired of hiding in caves. But one tribe was unhappy: the tribe of Ephraim. They had refused to join Gideon when he called for soldiers, but now they were upset that they hadn't been there to help him. It's just as well that they hadn't been in Gideon's army, because they would never have given God the glory for the victory. They only wished that they could be among the group of heroes that had saved the Israelites. They felt jealous that Gideon was a hero and they were not. They quickly tried to blame Gideon for their bad feelings. "Why didn't you call us to come and fight with you?" they asked angrily.

Gideon had invited them to join his army, but they had refused. Gideon chose to be polite and humble to the men of Ephraim. At least they had come near the end of the battle, and they had killed the Midianite leaders. Gideon said to them, "Isn't what you did much

greater than what I've done?" These kind words made the men of Ephraim feel better, and they stopped arguing with Gideon.

Once everyone was home again, the people came to Gideon with a request. "Please be our king," they said. But Gideon knew this would be wrong; God had not instructed them to have a king. "No," he refused, "I will not rule over you, and neither will any of my children. God will rule over you." Why was it so hard for the people to remember God? It was God who had delivered them, not Gideon.

Gideon had done well in treating the tribe of Ephraim with respect. He had also done well in refusing to become Israel's king. In all this, he remembered that it was God alone who had saved Israel. But sadly, right after this, he made a choice that brought him and the Israelites many problems.

Gideon knew he could not be a king, but he had an idea: maybe he could be a priest! He should have known this was wrong, because God had told the Israelites where to worship, and which tribe and family the priests should come from. Gideon was not from the tribe or the family of priests. Yet he thought, "The Angel asked me to offer a sacrifice on the rock, so I should be able to keep on doing it."

Gideon asked the people for the golden earrings they'd taken from the dead enemy soldiers. He made a priestly garment for himself with this gold. Then he led the people to worship. But this was not the worship that God wanted. The people only saw Gideon, not God, and they forgot about the Sanctuary services in Shiloh. Gideon had a long life, and even though he talked to the people about God, his false worship services ruined much of the good he could have done.

After Gideon died, the people forgot whatever they knew about God, and they went after idols once more. They had not gotten to truly know God for themselves. So much evil could have been

avoided if Gideon had always followed God's will! The moment that he decided to listen to his own ideas rather than to what God had instructed, he made decisions that hurt the whole nation of Israel.

God asks us to hear His voice. As long as we listen and follow His leading, we will be safe. Will you ask God to help you listen to what He has to say to you? Will you let Him lead your choices, and your life today?

18. Abimelech, the Self-Appointed King

Therefore do not be unwise,
but understand what the will of the Lord is.
Ephesians 5:17 (NKJV)

Judges 9 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53

After Gideon died, the people of Israel seemed to forget about God, and they were not interested in what God had done through Gideon to care for them. Gideon had seventy sons. Like many men of that time, he had several wives, even though that is not God's plan for families. One of these sons, Abimelech, decided that he wanted to become king. He thought, hadn't the people asked his father Gideon to be their king? His father might have refused to be king, but why couldn't he, Gideon's son, become king?

Abimelech talked to the men of the city of Shechem and got their support. These men did not have good characters; none of them loved God, and they were selfish and greedy. They only accepted Abimelech as king because they thought they would benefit from it. The men of Shechem gave Abimelech seventy pieces of silver from the temple of their idol. It was their way of telling Abimelech, "We accept you as our king." And by accepting the silver from an idol, Abimelech was telling them, "I accept your idol as my god."

Once this was done, Abimelech and the men of Shechem went to where Gideon's family lived, and they killed all of Abimelech's brothers, except for the youngest one, Jotham. This brother managed to get away and hide. By killing his brothers, Abimelech was making sure that none of them would try to take his throne away from him.

Jotham, the youngest brother, was grieved that such a terrible thing had happened. He went up on Mount Gerizim, one of the mountains where the people had renewed their covenant with God during the time of Joshua2. From this mountain, he spoke a parable out loud so that his brother and the people of the city of Shechem, who were in the valley, could hear. He said:

"One day, the trees decided to pick a king. They asked the olive tree to become their king, but the olive tree refused, because he already had an important job producing olives. The fig tree and the vine also refused to become king, because they each had their own important tasks to do: they had figs and grapes to produce. So finally, the trees asked the bramble, the most useless bush, to become their king. Since the bramble didn't have any valuable job to do, he accepted. But he also said, 'If I become your king, all the trees must come into my shadow.'" (This would be impossible, because the bramble hardly gave any shade! It was just a short little bush!) "Then the bramble threatened the other trees, 'If you don't come into my shadow, fire will come out of me and burn all the trees.'"

Jotham continued speaking, "If you, the people of Shechem, have been true and sincere when you made Abimelech king, and killed all of Gideon's sons even though Gideon did so much for you, then enjoy your new king. But if you have not been true and sincere when you

[2] See Story 5 in this volume.

did this, then let fire come out from Abimelech and burn you, and let fire come from you and burn Abimelech."

Then Jotham ran away and hid to protect himself. But his words actually came true. Three years later, Abimelech and the men of Shechem stopped trusting each other and wanted to destroy each other.

Then the grape harvest came, and the people had a feast. A man called Gaal said, "I would make a better king than Abimelech." When Abimelech found out, he killed Gaal. Then he began attacking cities and killing all their people because he thought they were against him. One of the cities he attacked was, precisely, the city of Shechem. Abimelech killed one thousand people in Shechem.

Then he attacked the city of Thebez. The people of this city climbed into a tall tower to protect themselves. "I will burn up the tower, with all the people in it," decided Abimelech. But just as he was trying to do this, something happened: a woman threw a heavy millstone from the top of the tower. The millstone cracked Abimelech's head, and he knew he would soon be dead. "Quick!", he told his armor-bearer, "Kill me with your sword, so that no one will be able to say that a woman killed me!" Soon enough, the cruel, selfish Abimelech was dead. His brother's parable had actually come true: both Abimelech and the men of Shechem had ended up being destroyed.

How different would this story have been if Abimelech had simply waited patiently for God to show him what special work he could do! Wouldn't he have been happier living a simple life of service, surrounded by his many brothers and family members? Maybe God would have given him a leadership position if he had been humble and open to learning God's will. God could have helped

him be a wonderful leader who could have brought the Israelites back to God. He could have improved things where his father had failed. But we will never know what could have been, because Abimelech chose to do his own will instead, and lived a selfish, Godless life.

Each of us has a special work to do, just like the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine did in Jotham's parable. We don't all need to be leaders; what's important is to do what God is asking us to do. There is no better work than that. God's plan for us will always be for our good and for the good of everyone around us. Have you ever wondered what special work God will give you to do when you're older? Is there anything special you need to do today? Ask God to show you His will and to guide you, so that you can make choices in your activities today that will be according to His plan.

19. Jepthah and His Daughter

For I [the Lord] desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.
Hosea 6:6 (NKJV)

Judges 10 - 12 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 53

After Abimelech died, there was a time of peace. God raised up different judges who did their best to bring the people back to God. These men did not try to become important, and they did not fight wars. The first of these men was Tola. He judged Israel for thirty years. He brought law, order and justice back to Israel. Tola chose to live near the Tabernacle so that he could attend the services and focus on the worship of God. This was good, because the worship of God had been ignored since the time of Gideon.

After Tola, a man called Jair judged Israel for twenty-two years. He had thirty sons who rode on donkeys and helped him to rule Israel. He tried to teach the people to worship God, but still, most of the people chose their idols. By the time Jair died, the Israelites were so deeply into idol worship that they were worshiping not one idol, but seven!

God had no choice but to accept that the Israelites did not want Him in their lives, so with great sadness, He withdrew His presence from them. This left them without His protection, and all too soon,

the Philistines and Ammonites began to rule over them and treat them cruelly. For eighteen years, the Israelites suffered under the Philistines and Ammonites. Finally, they remembered God and cried out to Him.

God answered them through a prophet. We don't know the name of this prophet, but God used him to give the Israelites this message: "Didn't I deliver you from Egypt? Didn't I deliver you from all these other nations that were ruling over you? Yet you left me and chose other gods instead. Go and ask those gods to deliver you."

The Israelites knew he was right. They got rid of all their idols, and they said, "We have sinned. Lord, do whatever you think is best with us, but please deliver us!" Now that they wanted God in their lives again, He gladly began to help them. He had never wanted them to suffer like this.

The Ammonite army had already camped in Gilgal and was ready to attack Israel. The Israelites didn't have a leader yet. "Who will fight against the enemy?" they wondered. A man called Jephthah was willing to do this job.

Jephthah gathered up his army, and then he did something foolish: he made a promise to God, "If the Lord gives us victory, then whatever comes out of my house to meet me will be the Lord's, and I will offer it!" Somehow, he felt that if he made a big promise to God, then God would be more willing to help him. But God had never asked for this kind of promise; He was more than willing to save Israel without receiving any offerings from them. All He wanted was for the Israelites to hear Him and believe His words. If they heard and believed, they would always have God's peace and protection.

Jephthah and his men went to battle and defeated the Ammonites. Since the Ammonites had lost God's presence and

protection, the Israelites had no difficulties in winning, even though God would not have wanted a battle like this, with people killing each other.

When Jephthah returned home from battle, his daughter, the only child he had, was the first person to meet him. She was overjoyed that they had won the battle, and she was celebrating by dancing and playing a timbrel.

Now Jephthah was horrified and realized his mistake. His daughter was surprised when, instead of celebrating with her, he ripped his clothes in sorrow. “My daughter, I made a promise to God, and I can’t break it,” he said. The daughter listened and understood. She assured her father, “Keep your promise, father, because the Lord has helped us today.”

Jephthah was not going to burn his daughter in sacrifice, because people were not offered like that to God. If a sheep or cow had met Jephthah, then he would have offered it on the altar. But if a dog or a donkey had received Jephthah, then of course he wouldn’t have offered those animals on the altar, because those animals were never offered on an altar to God. Instead, they would have been used for God’s service. It was the same with Jephthah’s daughter; her life would be dedicated to God’s service only. This was her father’s decision, not God’s. Her father’s promise meant that she would never be able to get married or have children, and that made her sad, because she had really wanted that.

She asked her father: “Father, let me go to the mountain for two months with my friends, and mourn that I will never get married.” Jephthah let her do that. After this, every year the young girls would remember the life of Jephthah’s daughter for four days. She would

never have children who would remember her, but at least her friends would remember her story.

Jephthah had defeated the Ammonites, and he was a hero in Israel. Everyone was happy with him, except for one tribe: the Ephraimites. Just like with Gideon, the men of Ephraim angrily claimed, “Why didn’t you call us to fight with you?” Jephthah, sadly, did not respond kindly like Gideon had. “You didn’t come when I needed you,” he replied. Then he and his army fought against the Ephraimites and killed 42,000 men.

Jephthah led Israel as a judge for six years, then he died. After him, Israel had three other judges, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. Each of these men kept order in Israel, but the people did not have the peace and rest that God would have wanted to give them, because they did not follow God whole-heartedly during this time.

Jephthah had thought he had to make a promise to God in order for God to help him, but this was not necessary. All that God wanted was for Jephthah, and all of Israel, to hear Him and follow His lead. There was so much joy and peace that He wanted to give them, but they were too busy listening to their own thoughts instead of to God’s thoughts. Because of this, God could not do as much as He longed to do for them.

God wants to lead your life, too, to give you peace and happiness. Will you ask Him today to help you listen to what He has to say to you?

20. Preparing for Baby Samson

Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.
Luke 11:28 (KJV)

Judges 13 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 54

The Israelites had once more left God and turned to their idols. And of course, God had to finally give in to what the Israelites wanted. With sadness, He withdrew so that they could be with the idols they had chosen. Since God wasn't protecting them anymore, it didn't take long before the Philistines took over the land. This time, the Philistines had power over the Israelites for forty years, and all this time they ruled over them with cruelty.

God longed to free the Israelites, but He could only do it through people who had faith in Him. There was one man who had faith in God, and who was not an idol worshiper. His name was Manoah. He and his wife were not able to have children, but they still believed God's words and loved Him. God knew he could use this couple to save Israel. Would they believe Him?

One day, the Angel of the Lord, God's Son, came to Manoah's wife with wonderful news: "You will have a son, and God will begin to deliver Israel through him." Then He told her how to prepare for this baby, and how he should be raised, "Don't drink wine, and don't eat anything unclean. And after he's born, the child shouldn't eat or

drink these things, either. He will be a Nazirite, dedicated to God. Don't cut his hair."

Manoah's wife quickly went and told her husband everything. Her husband knew that this message was really important, and he began to worry, "Oh, what if we make a mistake and do something wrong?" He prayed, "Lord, please send the man of God again to teach us what to do." God kindly answered this prayer. He sent the Angel back to Manoah's wife. She was sitting in the field, and when she saw Him, she ran to call her husband. Together they eagerly listened as the Angel gave them instructions.

"Please wait here," Manoah begged, "We will cook something for you to eat." He thought the Angel was a man that God had sent; he didn't really know He was a messenger straight from heaven. The Angel replied, "Even if I stay, I will not eat. And if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it unto the Lord."

Manoah asked, "What is your name? We want to honor you when our baby is born." The Angel answered, "Why do you ask my name? It is a secret." Manoah would soon find out who this Angel really was.

Manoah quickly prepared a goat and some bread, then he came back to where the Angel was. He offered the food on a rock to the Lord. Then he and his wife watched with amazement. They saw that a flame came up from the offering towards heaven, and they saw the Angel going up to heaven in the flame. "Now we know who this visitor is!" thought Manoah and his wife. They bowed with their faces on the ground, amazed. Then Manoah felt afraid. He said to his wife, "We have seen God. Now we will surely die!"

Manoah could feel his sinfulness like never before, because he had just been with God's most special messenger. But his wife trusted in God's love, and with confidence, she replied, "If God wanted to kill

us, He wouldn't have accepted our offering. And if He wanted us dead, He wouldn't have told us all these things, either." She was right! God had sent His Angel to them because He had a special plan for them, and they eagerly waited for His promises to be fulfilled.

And God kept His promise. Manoah's wife became pregnant, and they carefully followed all the instructions that the Angel had given them. When baby Samson was born, Manoah and his wife raised him according to everything that the Angel had instructed them. They were eager to see how God would use their precious son to give freedom to Israel!

Manoah and his wife believed God's words, and He gave them a miracle baby. They could have rejected God's instructions; they could have chosen to do things their own way, or to not do them at all, but instead, they chose to accept God's words and follow everything He told them, and He was able to fulfill His promise of giving them a baby. This is the kind of heart that God is looking for: He longs for us to simply hear what He has to say, and believe it. This is how He can keep His promises in us. Will you ask God today to give you a listening heart? Will you hear what He has to say to you today? Ask Him to give you the willingness to listen, and the faith to believe His words.

21. Samson's Strength

Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Isaiah 28:23 (KJV)

Judges 14, 15 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 54

Samson's parents had done their very best to follow all of God's instructions on how to raise their son. God blessed Samson as he grew, and soon it was clear that this boy had been given incredible physical strength. And just like God had commanded, Manoah and his wife raised Samson as a Nazirite, as someone dedicated to God. They never cut his hair, and they did their best to teach him how to become a man of God.

Samson received all these blessings, but when the time came for him to make his own choices, he sadly chose to not follow God as carefully as his parents had. Samson's parents had been told, "Your son will *begin* to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines." Samson should have spent time asking God how to deliver the Israelites from their enemies, the Philistines. But instead, what did Samson do? He enjoyed spending time in the nearest Philistine town, visiting the people there, and eventually, he fell in love with a young Philistine woman.

"I want to marry this Philistine girl," Samson told his parents, "Go and get her for me." Manoah and his wife were devastated that Samson would want to marry a heathen woman. They begged Samson not to do this: "Isn't there any girl from our own people that you like? Why would you marry an idol worshiper?" The parents knew that this

woman would *not* make a good wife for their son. How could he deliver the Israelites from the Philistines if he was married to a Philistine? But Samson insisted on having his own way, and he married her. This was not God's plan, but God would use this mistake of Samson's to begin to give freedom to the Israelites.

Some time before the wedding, Samson was walking down the road to visit his future wife when, suddenly, a roaring lion rushed at him. If anyone else had been there instead of Samson, they would have been killed by the lion. But Samson was much, much stronger than lions, and he easily grabbed the animal with his two hands and killed it. Some time later, Samson saw that a swarm of bees had built a hive inside the lion's carcass. He took honey from the hive and began eating it. A Nazirite was not supposed to take anything from inside a dead body because it was unclean, but Samson didn't care; he enjoyed the honey anyway.

Then Samson had his wedding. During the wedding feast, Samson decided to have some fun. Thirty men, all Philistines, had come to the wedding. Samson said to them, "I have a riddle for you. If you can solve it, I'll give you thirty changes of clothing. If you can't solve it, you'll have to give me thirty changes of clothing." The friends agreed, so Samson told them the riddle:

"Out of the eater came forth something to eat
Out of the strong came something sweet"

What could this mean? The friends tried hard to solve the riddle, but they couldn't. Finally, they went to Samson's wife and threatened

her, “Find out the answer to the riddle! If you don’t, we will burn your family’s home!”

Samson’s wife could have told her husband what these men had said to her, and he would have protected her and her family, but because she was raised worshiping cruel idols, she never thought that Samson loved her and would help her. So instead of telling him what was really happening, she began to whine and nag to get Samson to tell her his secret. Samson quickly got tired of hearing her nagging, so he told her the answer to the riddle, and she quickly went and told the Philistine men. They smugly told Samson, “Here’s the answer to your riddle:

What is sweeter than honey?
And what is stronger than a lion?”

They were right! The riddle that Samson told them referred to the honey that he ate out of the lion’s carcass. But how did they find out? Samson knew exactly what had happened, and he felt angry and hurt that his wife had betrayed him. He had promised the men that if they solved the riddle, he would give them clothing, so he did – but because he was so filled with anger, he got these clothes by killing thirty men from another Philistine city. Then he went back to live in his parents’ home, and for a while, he refused to be with his wife, because of what she had done.

Some time later, he decided to go back to his wife, but by then, she had already married someone else. This made Samson so angry that he burnt up all of the fields, olive trees and vineyards of the Philistines. And do you know how he did it? He caught 300 foxes and

tied them tail to tail. Then, between the tails, he lit torches and let the foxes loose, and they burnt up everything.

This led to even more killing: the Philistines were so angry with what Samson had done, that they killed Samson's wife and her father. This made Samson so upset that he went and killed even more Philistines. Then Samson, sad and angry, walked to the land of Judah. The Philistine army followed him and camped nearby, hoping to catch him.

The men of Judah were disturbed when they saw the Philistines. They could have prayed and asked God to help them, but instead, they said to Samson, "Don't you know that the Philistines rule over us? Why are you angering them? Now they will attack us!" Samson wasn't worried about how the people of Judah felt. He carelessly replied, "Well, the Philistines started it." He, too, did not think of asking God what to do. He just wanted to get back at the Philistines for what they had done to him.

The men of Judah wanted to do anything that would stop the Philistines from attacking them. "Samson, let us tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines; we promise we won't kill you," said the men of Judah. Samson let them do this; he knew he was much, much stronger than all the Philistine soldiers together. As soon as he was taken to the Philistines, he broke the ropes that he was tied with. Then he looked around for a weapon and found the jawbone of a donkey. He grabbed that and quickly killed one thousand Philistine men with it, and the rest of the Philistine army ran away.

The Israelite men simply watched. They didn't even pray. They could have joined in and helped Samson, but they didn't seem to believe that God wanted to give them freedom. Maybe that's why the

Angel had said, “Samson will *begin* to free the Israelites from the Philistines.” God could only do as much as the faith of the Israelites allowed, but they had very little faith right then.

After the battle, Samson was thirsty. He had seen how God had protected him from the entire Philistine army; it would have been so easy for him to simply pray and ask God for water. But instead, he complained, “Lord, will I die from thirst now? Will the Philistines finally get me?” God was patient with him. He kindly made water come out for him from a new spring, and he drank.

After this, Samson became Judge in Israel, and this lasted for twenty years. All this time, God was giving Samson and the rest of Israel the chance to come to Him for wisdom and strength, yet Samson and the people rarely asked God for these things. How long would these blessings last? Would Samson learn to appreciate the strength that God had given him, or would he waste it? We will see in the next story.

God has given each of us special blessings, like he gave to Samson. Ask God to help you appreciate them. Thank Him for all that He does for you, and ask Him to keep on blessing and guiding you today.

22. Samson and Delilah

There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV)

Judges 16 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 54

Samson was judge in Israel for twenty years. During that time, he still enjoyed visiting Philistine cities for fun once in a while. One time he went to Gaza and planned to spend the night there. The Philistines said, "This is our chance to kill Samson! Let's surround the city and catch him when he tries to leave the city gate in the morning!"

But Samson wouldn't be caught; at midnight he suddenly woke up. He sensed that there might be a problem, so he decided to leave the city. As he left, he grabbed the enormous, heavy city gate, along with its two posts, and carried it all on his shoulders. This gate was so heavy that it could only be opened or closed if several men worked together to move it. But Samson picked it up as if it weighed nothing, and carried it up to the top of a nearby hill. Once more, the Philistines saw that they could do absolutely nothing to Samson because he was so strong.

Soon after that, Samson fell in love with another Philistine woman called Delilah, and he began to spend time with her. He should have asked God to help him find a good wife, rather than marry yet another idol worshiper, but he didn't do this.

The Philistine leaders saw their chance to defeat Samson. They came to Delilah and offered her a huge amount of money. "We will

each pay you eleven thousand pieces of silver if you find out where Samson gets his strength from," they promised. Delilah liked the idea of becoming so incredibly rich – she liked that more than she loved Samson, so she began to ask him, "Samson, where does your strength come from? Will you tell me?"

At first Samson kept the secret to himself. "If they tie me up with seven bowstrings which have not been dried, then I will be as weak as any other man," he lied. Delilah tied him up with bowstrings, and the Philistine men came to attack him, but Samson easily broke the strings and defended himself.

Delilah began to whine, "You've lied to me! Won't you tell me where your strength comes from?" Samson lied once more, "If they tie me up with new ropes that have never been used, I will lose my strength." Of course, Delilah tied him up with new ropes, and the Philistines came to attack him, but he easily defended himself.

Delilah cried and begged, "Tell me where your strength comes from! Why are you lying to me?" Samson should have asked her why she had betrayed him twice already, but he didn't. Instead, he told her yet another lie, "I have seven braids. If you weave them into fabric with a pin, I will lose my strength." As soon as she could, Delilah weaved Samson's hair into a fabric. But of course, when the Philistines came to attack him, he easily defended himself.

Now Delilah was really upset. She should have been embarrassed for betraying her husband, but all she cared about was that he wouldn't tell her his secret. "How can you say you love me, if you don't tell me what's in your heart?" she cried. Samson finally gave in to her crying, because he couldn't stand it anymore. He didn't seem to see the danger he was in, and he finally told her the truth: "I am a Nazirite, and I've never cut my hair. If I shave my head, I will be as

weak as any other man." Didn't he realize that she would betray him again?

Delilah knew that she had finally found out the truth. When Samson was sleeping, she quietly brought in someone to shave his head, then she called the Philistines. This time, Samson had no strength to defend himself. By giving away his secret, Samson lost God's protection, and the Philistines took him away to prison. They took out his eyes and made him grind grain all day long in the prison.

With time, Samson's hair began to grow again. As he worked grinding grain all day, he thought and thought about his life. God had given him so many blessings, yet he had been blind to it all; he hadn't really noticed how much God had done for him. Now his eyes were blind, but his heart could finally see something important: he could see, or understand, the truth. He was sorry that he had wasted his life and done things so differently to God's plan.

The Philistines planned a huge banquet in the temple of their idol, Dagon. "Our idol Dagon has given us Samson!" they said happily. Three thousand people gathered in the temple for the feast. They danced and sang to loud music, and as they ate and drank wine, they said, "Let's bring Samson in here so we can see him and make fun of him!"

Blind Samson felt terrible as he heard everyone mocking him. Yet he remembered that now his hair had grown back. Would God be with him again, and give him strength? Samson had fully repented of his sinful life, and now that he was in the temple, he thought that God might be able to use him one last time.

"Let me rest on one of the pillars," Samson said to the guard that had brought him in. The guard placed him next to the two middle

pillars of the temple. Then Samson prayed, “Lord, remember me and strengthen me only this once. Help me get back at the Philistines!”

This vengeance is not how God does things, but by now the Philistines had completely lost His protection, so He would not stop it from happening. Samson, at least, had faith that God could still fulfil His promise to “begin to free” the Israelites from the Philistines. Samson’s faith had grown, just like his hair had grown back. That long hair showed people that God had chosen Samson for a special work – and now Samson was willing to be used by God, even if he didn’t completely understand God’s ways.

Now Samson pushed both pillars with his arms – arms that were now strong because God had given him strength again. As he pushed the pillars, the whole building collapsed on top of that huge gathering. All the people in that building, including Samson, died that day.

How different Samson’s life could have been, if he had given his heart to God from the beginning! How much more Samson could have done if he had asked God for guidance in every decision of his life! Samson’s story is sad; it’s a story of what could have been. We’re so glad to know that in the end, he gave his heart to God and repented of his mistakes. Just like with Samson, God has a plan for your life, too. Will you ask God to guide you today, to show you His plans? He will gladly lead you and use you!

23. Micah's Idols

He that is of God heareth God's words:
ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.
John 8:47 (KJV)

Judges 17, 18

God had dreamed of making Israel the best country in the whole world. If they had followed His laws, they would have had the richest, most abundant country, in which everyone would have had what they needed. The people of Israel would have enjoyed a freedom that no other country could give, and the rest of the nations of the world would have wanted to learn how to make a country like that. Israel would have been rich and free because God was their King.

But the Israelites had a hard time simply following God's lead. They kept on going back to their idols. They constantly forgot the words that God had told them through Moses and Joshua. God does not force anyone to obey Him, so He gave them what they wanted. If they chose to leave Him, He let them, even though it hurt Him to do so. And it hurt Him when they suffered the consequences of leaving His hedge of protection.

Because the Israelites lived this way, the time of the Judges was a time in which everyone "did what they saw fit". They were free to do what they thought was best, and instead of using this freedom to ask God what was best, they just made their own terrible decisions.

One of the stories of bad decisions during this time is the story of a man called Micah. He saw that his mother had 1.100 shekels of silver (which is a lot of silver!), and he stole them. When his mother noticed that her silver had disappeared, she said, "May the thief of my silver be cursed!" Micah was afraid when he heard this, so he went to his mother, confessed what he had done, and gave her back her things.

Micah's mother was overjoyed to get her silver back. "My son, may you be blessed!" she said, as she happily forgave him. Then she told Micah her plan: "I dedicated this silver to the Lord, to make an idol." Then she took out only 200 shekels from her pile and used these to make an idol. The rest of the silver she kept for herself. How confused this woman was, and how far away from God! She had promised 1100 shekels to God, but only ended up giving 200 – and she used those 200 shekels to make a horrible idol!

"Let me keep my silver idol in your home," Micah's mother said to him. Micah already had a special room where he kept several idols, and he was happy to add this new one to his collection. "I need a priest for my house and all these idols," thought Micah. He asked his son to be his priest. But after a while, he had a better idea: he invited a Levite, who was travelling, to be his priest. "You can live here and I will pay you," Micah promised him. This was not how God had told them to worship! None of these men should have become priests! Only the men from Aaron's family could be priests. It's true that the Levites worked in the Tabernacle, but not as priests; they did other special tasks. Yet Micah thought, "I have a Levite in my home! Now God will bless me!" Sadly, God could not bless a home that completely ignored His instructions.

After this, Micah received some dangerous visitors: five men from the tribe of Dan. They pretended to be friendly, but they were actually looking around to see if they could steal Micah's land and possessions. The tribe of Dan wanted more land, because most of their land had been taken by the Canaanites. Instead of asking God to help them get their land back from the Canaanites, they decided it would be easier to steal land from other Israelite tribes. How could they do such a terrible thing to their own people? This shows how far away they were from God!

These five men from Dan spoke with the Levite that Micah had hired as priest. "Will we be successful in what we came to do? Please ask God for us," they requested – but they didn't tell him what they had come to do. The Levite, of course, didn't ask God about it at all; he just answered them with whatever they wanted to hear, even though it was a lie: "Go in peace; God is watching over your journey."

The five men returned to their home in Dan and told their people, "God will give us this land, let's conquer it!" This was not true – God had never told them they could take land from another Israelite tribe. They were just saying what they wished was true!

The men of Dan formed an army of six hundred men, and went to camp in the land where Micah lived. Soon enough, the five men brought the whole army to Micah's home. "There are idols here. Do what you have to do!" they said. If this army had been under God's orders, they would have gone in and destroyed the idols and anything that could stop them from worshiping God. Instead, the men went in and began to take the idols for themselves!

The Levite tried to stop them, but they looked at him and said, "Why don't you come be a priest for the whole tribe of Dan? You don't need to stay in Micah's family." The Levite liked this idea. He

suddenly lost interest in living with Micah, and he helped the soldiers to pack the idols, and went with them. He was not a loyal friend to Micah, and always chose whatever seemed best for himself.

When Micah realized he had lost his idols and his Levite, he was upset. He caught up with the men from Dan. Filled with sadness, he begged, "Give me back my idols and my priest! I have nothing left now!" But the men refused to give him back his things. Micah had no choice but to return home with nothing.

Now that Micah's home was free of idols, he may have had the chance to think more about his Father in Heaven and to go to Him. We don't know, because the Bible doesn't tell us what he did after that, but we hope he went back to God.

Meanwhile, the men of Dan set up Micah's idols in their land and worshiped them for years afterwards. They completely ignored God's instructions to worship in Shiloh, with priests who were from Aaron's family. God could not bless them if they ignored Him like that!

The people in this story kept mentioning the Lord and acting as though they had prayed and asked Him what to do. They behaved as though they knew what God wanted and as if they understood Him, but they were so very far from any real understanding of God and His will.

This is happening today, too. So many people say and do things that are the opposite of what the Bible says, yet they mention God and even say that they're doing what God wants them to do. They are so confused!

How can we know if what we're doing is within God's will? The only way is to follow God's Word, the Bible. In Micah's time, the people had God's Word in the books of Moses and the words of Joshua. If the people had remembered and followed these words,

they would have stayed within God's will. In our days, we have the whole Bible, including the testimony of Jesus. We should let His testimony guide our understanding of the Bible. If we make decisions according to the Bible, we can trust that God is leading us. We don't need to live messy, confusing lives away from God, like the people did in this story. Ask God today to lead you, to help you stay close to Him, so you can live according to His beautiful plan.

24. The Tiniest Tribe

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. James 3:17 (ESV)

Judges 20:8 – 21:25

During the time of the Judges, the Israelites could have had the most peaceful country in the world, and they could have enjoyed a freedom that no one else had. God wanted to be their King and guide their lives. But sadly, the Israelites mostly rejected God's words. They only remembered Him when they had big troubles, but other than that, they made their own decisions and tried to solve their problems in their own way. And most of the time, they made terrible decisions. One of these sad times was when the whole of Israel caused the tribe of Benjamin to become the tiniest tribe in Israel.

It all started when a Levite was travelling home with one of his concubines. It was a long trip, so they needed to spend the night in the city of Gibeah, which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Sadly, the men of Gibeah were evil. They took the Levite's concubine and killed her. The Levite had not protected this woman properly, but he decided to put all the blame on the men of Gibeah. He sent a message asking all of Israel to attack this wicked city for what they had done to his concubine.

The Israelites were shocked. "The men of Gibeah acted just like the men of Sodom!" they thought. They quickly sent a message to the

tribe of Benjamin, saying, “Why has this wicked thing happened? Hand over the men who did this terrible thing.” But the men of Benjamin decided that they wouldn’t hand over the men. “We will protect our own people!” they decided. And the people of Benjamin gathered an army of 26.000 men, ready to defend their tribe from the rest of Israel.

Now Israel gathered their own army: 400.000 men. They thought God was leading them, but they weren’t really ready to hear how God would solve this issue. They asked God what to do, but they would not have followed His words unless it was what they wanted to hear. So God gave them what they wanted, and what they wanted was to attack the tribe of Benjamin, just like they had attacked the Canaanites. Actually, none of the tribes were under God’s protection at this time, because none of them were following His words and instructions. Each of them had stopped listening to God and had chosen to do things their own way.

Now a terrible battle started. The Benjamites won the first battle, but the Israelites won the next battle, and they ended up destroying the cities of the land of Benjamin. They killed all the people of Benjamin that they could find, even women and children. God had never asked them to do this terrible thing; they did it out of their own wickedness. The only Benjamites who survived were 600 men: they were strong and quick enough to escape, and they hid in caves for four months.

After all the destruction and killing was done, the Israelites felt terrible. They realized that they had almost destroyed a whole tribe out of their own people, and they wished they hadn’t done it. They gathered at Bethel and cried, “Oh Lord, why should there be one tribe missing in Israel today?” They offered sacrifices, and wondered

how to help the tribe of Benjamin to grow again. First, they sent messengers to invite the men of Benjamin to return to the rest of Israel. They announced, “You can come out of your hiding places now; the tribes want to be at peace with you!”

When the men came out, the Israelites realized that they had a big problem: these men from Benjamin didn’t have their wives and children anymore, because they had all been killed in the war. How could they help these men to find new wives and start new families?

“We can’t give them our own daughters to marry,” the Israelites cried, “because before the war, we promised that we wouldn’t. Now we can’t break that promise. But where will they get wives from?” Then they had an idea: the city of Jabesh-Gilead had not helped the rest of Israel to fight against the tribe of Benjamin. “Let’s punish them for not helping us!” they decided.

Soon 12.000 soldiers were sent to that city. The soldiers killed everyone there except for the unmarried women, then they brought these women so the men of Benjamin could marry them. But there still weren’t enough women for all six hundred Benjamite men.

“What shall we do now?” they wondered. Then they had another idea: “There will soon be a feast in Shiloh. During this feast, the unmarried girls always come out to dance. The men of Benjamin should hide in the vineyards and catch these girls for themselves. Then we can’t say that we gave them our daughters; they took them. That way, they can have wives, and we won’t be breaking our promise.”

Does this sound like something God would tell people to do? Of course not! But the people went ahead and did this. It is because of this type of thinking that God had to teach the Israelites, slowly,

carefully guiding them one step at a time to a fuller understanding of His ways.

Soon the surviving men of Benjamin each had wives again. They rebuilt their cities and had families with these women that they had taken. After that, the tribe of Benjamin remained the smallest tribe, the group with the least amount of people, the tribe that was almost killed off by the rest of the Israelites.

How would God have solved each of these problems? It would certainly not have involved any killing or stealing. But sadly, the people chose their own wishes and their own wisdom to find solutions to these very difficult problems. Our Father has a solution for each and every problem we might have. If we ask Him and truly believe His words, He will show us how to solve problems according to His will. Will you ask him today to help you remember that He has solutions for everything? Will you ask Him to help you trust Him, and not your own wisdom, when you have a problem?

25. A Heathen Woman Chooses God

But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God." Ruth 1:16 (NKJV)

Ruth 1-2

God had a plan for Israel: if they followed His laws, they would enjoy freedom and prosperity. He longed for the nations around Israel to say, "Look, Israel is such an amazing country because of their God! We want to join them, too!" But sadly, the Israelites never lived up to this plan. Yet there were still a few times when an idol-worshiper decided that they wanted to leave their idols, worship God and join God's people. One of these people was a young woman called Ruth.

Ruth was a Moabite woman. When she was still young, a man called Elimelech moved to Moab with his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They came to Moab because there was a famine in Israel, and they were looking for a better place to live in until the famine ended. Sadly, Elimelech died a few years later. Naomi and her sons stayed in Moab after that, and both sons ended up marrying Moabite women. Mahlon married a girl called Orpah, and Chilion married Ruth.

They were very happy together, but sadly, it wasn't long before both Mahlon and Chilion died, too. Naomi, Orpah and Ruth were heartbroken. What would they do now? Naomi knew she couldn't stay in Moab any longer; it would be better to return to Israel where she had relatives who would be able to help her. Orpah and Ruth joined her, but soon Naomi told them, "It will be better for you to return to your parents' homes. It will be easier for you to find husbands there, and soon you will have your own homes again. Don't stay with me."

Orpah and Ruth cried. They insisted that they wanted to stay with Naomi, but she kept saying, "Go back. I can't have any more sons for you to marry. You'll be better off in your parents' homes." Orpah was finally convinced. She cried some more, then said good-bye to Naomi, and left. But Ruth refused to leave. She knew it would be hard to be a foreigner in Israel, but she had come to learn about God through Naomi and Chilion, and she did not want to go back to the idol-worshipping in Moab. She also knew that Naomi was old, sad and lonely. She loved her and wanted to care for her.

"Look," said Naomi, "Your sister-in-law has already gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same." But Ruth refused. She insisted to Naomi, "Don't tell me to leave you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." Now Naomi knew that Ruth had made up her mind, so she stopped insisting that Ruth go back to her family. Together, they returned to Naomi's hometown, the city of Bethlehem.

Naomi's friends and relatives were excited to see her again after so many years. They were sad to hear that Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion had died. "Don't call me Naomi; call me Mara," Naomi said

to them. “Naomi” means pleasant, and “Mara” means bitter. She explained, “God has made my life bitter, not pleasant.” Naomi felt bitter because of all the sad things that had happened to her. For a long time, she found it hard to feel God’s care and love, even though God had never stopped watching over her. She didn’t know that soon, she would be able to see God’s tender care over her through her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

Meanwhile, Ruth did all she could to find food for herself and Naomi. It was the beginning of the barley harvest, so Ruth looked for a field to pick whatever barley stalks were left over. According to God’s laws, whenever someone harvested their field, they had to leave some stalks left over for poor people to pick, so that everyone could have something to eat. Without knowing it, she ended up working in the field of a man called Boaz.

Boaz was rich, kind-hearted and a true follower of God. He was also a close relative of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband. Boaz arrived at his field and, as usual, spoke kindly to his servants, asking them about their work and their day. Then he noticed Ruth. He had never seen her before, but oh, how hard and tirelessly she worked! “Who is she?” he asked.

“That’s Naomi’s daughter-in-law from Moab. She’s gleaning the field. She’s been working all day, and only rested for a short while,” they answered. Boaz was touched by what Ruth was doing. He told her kindly, “Stay in this field; don’t go to any other field. No one will bother you here. And when you’re thirsty, you may drink from the water that my servants have brought.” Then he told his servants, “Let her glean all she wants, and don’t disturb her. Also, leave behind plenty of stalks for her to pick, so that she can have all she needs.”

Ruth was filled with gratitude. She bowed to Boaz and thanked him for his kindness. Boaz said, "I know all that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. You were willing to come to a land and a people that were different from what you knew. May God fully reward you, because you've come to trust Him; you chose to come under His wings." What comforting words these were to Ruth!

Before Ruth returned home, Boaz invited her to have dinner with his workers. He made sure she ate until she was full. Then she returned home and happily showed Naomi all the barley she had gleaned: almost 25 kilograms (about 55 pounds)! This was enough grain for them to eat for several weeks. Naomi was astonished. "Where did you glean today? May God bless the owner of this field for noticing you," she said. She knew Ruth could not have gathered so much without the kindness of the owner of the field. "The field belongs to a man called Boaz," answered Ruth.

For the first time, Naomi began to feel God's love and care again, after all that she had suffered. She said to Ruth, "God has not left His kindness. This man Boaz is a relative. Keep on working in his field." Naomi was now sure that they would have the food they needed, and that Ruth would be safe, because she would be working in the field of Boaz, Elimelech's cousin.

Ruth chose to follow God even though that meant having to live in a new land as a poor widow and a foreigner. Through her brave decision, God was able to show Naomi how much He cared for her, even when bad things happened. When we choose to follow God, it blesses not only us, but all those around us. Even Naomi's friends and relatives could see how God was working through Ruth, because she

chose to follow Him. Do you choose to follow God, too? Ask Him to give you faith and trust in Him today, in everything you do.

26. Ruth is Redeemed

**The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you
by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.
Ruth 2:12 (NKJV)**

Ruth 3-4

Ruth worked in the field of Boaz for several months, until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. Meanwhile, Naomi thought about her past decisions. Why hadn't she and her husband decided to stay in Israel during the famine? Why hadn't they trusted God to take care of them then, in their own land? Would things have been different if they had not gone to Moab? Then Naomi thought of Ruth. What could she do to help Ruth find a husband and build a family again? She didn't want her kind and loving daughter-in-law to end up alone.

Then she thought of Boaz. He was a close relative, so according to the law, he had the right to buy back Elimelech's land and marry Ruth. This was called "redeeming". If he did this, Naomi and Ruth would be safe and taken care of. Ruth would also be able to have children. But would Boaz want to marry her?

Naomi told Ruth about this, and she gave her instructions on what to do. "Wash yourself, put on perfume, and wear your best clothes." Naomi knew that Boaz would be guarding his grain in the threshing floor all night. She told Ruth, "When he's sleeping, go, uncover his feet and lie down. Then wait; he will tell you what to do."

Just as Naomi instructed, Ruth went down to Boaz's threshing floor. She found him sleeping at the end of a heap of grain. She quietly uncovered his feet, lay down, and waited. In the middle of the night, Boaz woke up. He was startled to find a woman laying at his feet! "Who are you?" he asked, afraid.

Ruth spoke honestly to him, "I am here to see if you will be my kinsman-redeemer. If you will, then you may spread your cloak over me." Boaz was touched. "May the Lord bless you; you could have searched after younger men, but you didn't. Everyone in this city knows that you're a good and kind woman. I will do what you are asking," he said. But before he could do anything, there was someone he needed to talk to. He explained, "There is another relative that is even closer to Elimelech than I am. I will talk to him tomorrow. If he agrees to marry you, then he will. But if he refuses, I will do it." Boaz let Ruth rest there safely until just before dawn. Then, before she left for home, he said, "Hold your veil." She held out her veil, and he filled it with grains of barley to take home.

That morning, Boaz went to the city gate and waited for his relative to pass by. When the relative arrived, Boaz spoke to him in front the elders of the city. The relative said, "I would be willing to redeem Elimelech's land." But then Boaz said, "If you redeem the land, you have to marry Ruth as well." The relative answered, "Then I can't do it. You may do it." To show that this was their agreement, the relative took off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. The city elders listened to the whole conversation, and they were glad when it was agreed that Boaz would marry Ruth. They said to Boaz, "May God bless this woman and make her like Rachel and Leah, and may God bless your home."

So Boaz married Ruth, and they had a precious baby boy named Obed. Naomi now felt full of God's goodness. Her friends came to visit her and told her, "God has restored your life. He gave you Ruth, who is better to you than seven sons." Naomi nodded and smiled as she picked up little Obed and tenderly helped to care for him.

Obed grew up and had a son called Jesse, and Jesse became the father of King David. And do you know who came from King David's family many years later? Jesus, the Son of God. God was able to use faithful Ruth, a woman from Moab, so she could become the great-great-grandmother of Jesus, the Messiah. What an honor! Ruth had decided to trust God even though everything was new and scary to her, and God blessed her with more than she could ever have asked for. Will you come under God's wings and trust Him like Ruth did? Ask Him to give you faith in Him today.

27. Hannah's Faith

For this child I prayed, and the Lord
has given me my petition which I asked of him.
1 Samuel 1:27 (KJV)

1 Samuel 1:1- 2:21 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 55

Hannah was sad. How she longed for a baby! She had been married to her husband, Elkanah, for many years, but they'd never been able to have a child. Her husband had even married a second wife, Peninnah, just so that he could have children. Peninnah, the second wife, had several children, but she was jealous of Hannah because Elkanah loved Hannah more than he loved her.

Every year, when they traveled to Shiloh to celebrate the feasts, Elkanah would give Hannah twice the amount of food that he gave Peninnah and her children. By doing this, he wanted Hannah to know that he loved her just as much as if she had given him children. Peninnah saw this and felt jealous. She would provoke Hannah and say mean things to her. "God isn't pleased with you, that's why you don't have children," she would say to Hannah. Peninnah's words hurt Hannah deeply. She would cry, and she would refuse to eat. Elkanah would try to comfort her, and he would say, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Why are you so sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

After several years of this, Hannah couldn't bear it any longer. Once more they had traveled to Shiloh for the feast. Hannah's ears

were tired of Peninnah's mocking words, and her heart was hurt and sad. She went alone to the Tabernacle and decided to tell God how she was feeling. "If you give me a son, I will dedicate him to you," she promised God. As she said this prayer, her lips moved, but she did not speak the words out loud.

The high priest, Eli, noticed Hannah. He saw that her lips were moving, but no sound came out of her mouth. Her face looked sad and anguished. His first thought was, "This woman is drunk! Why is she in the Tabernacle?" He quickly went over to where Hannah was, and he scolded her harshly, "How long will you be drunk? Stop drinking wine!"

Poor Hannah! She was already feeling upset, and now the high priest himself was accusing her of being drunk! But Hannah was polite, and she answered Eli respectfully, "No, my lord, I was praying because I'm sad. I'm not drunk; I was telling God about my pain."

Eli's heart was touched. He felt bad for having treated this woman harshly. He liked how patiently and politely she had answered him when he didn't deserve it, and he wanted to bless her. "Go in peace," he said kindly to Hannah, "May God give you what you have asked Him for."

Hannah left, comforted by the kind words of the high priest, and a few months later, God gave her what she had asked for: a precious baby boy called Samuel. Hannah raised him carefully, but she only kept him with her for a few short years. While Samuel was little, she did not go to Shiloh during the feasts; she stayed to care for her baby. But Hannah always remembered the promise that she had made to God, so as soon as little Samuel was weaned, she kept this promise and took Samuel to the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

She brought offerings of three bullocks, flour and wine and came to Eli. “Sir, I am the woman who was here, praying to the Lord,” she told him, “I asked God for this child, and He gave him to me. Now I have brought him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he will be given to the Lord.” Eli remembered Hannah, and he was touched by her story. What faith Hannah had! He worshiped God in thanks, and Hannah praised God, too.

It must have been really hard for Hannah to leave her little boy in the Tabernacle, away from home, and she must have missed him very much. But she was convinced that this was what she had to do, even though God had never asked her to do it. She knew that she had this precious son only because God had made it possible, so she trusted that God would care for him once she left him under the care of Eli.

Hannah always prayed for Samuel. She asked God to help him remember that he belonged to God, and that he might never forget the truths she had taught him. She wanted, more than anything, for her son to honor God and to be a blessing to others. Each year, she traveled to Shiloh to visit little Samuel, and she would bring him a new robe, which she made herself, for him to wear that year.

God blessed Hannah for her faith. She had been willing to give back to Him what was most precious to her: her little boy, the child that she thought she might never be able to have. She always remembered that she had Samuel because God had made it possible. After Hannah left Samuel in Shiloh, God blessed her even more, and she had three more sons and two daughters.

Hannah’s faith in God brought blessings to her, to her children, to Priest Eli, to the whole of Israel, and even to us, as we learn her story and the story of Samuel. Do you have this kind of faith? Jesus

wants to give it to you. He longs for you to have such faith that you can trust God with anything in your life. Will you ask Him for this faith?

28. Samuel's Service

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.
Luke 16:10 (KJV)

1 Samuel 2:12 – 3:21 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 56-57

Eli loved Samuel tenderly like a son. Samuel was different from Eli's own sons; They were rude, irreverent and spoiled, but Samuel was sweet and obedient. With the help of God, Samuel did not end up following the bad example of Eli's sons. Instead, Samuel became Eli's special helper. He was so responsible that he was allowed to wear an ephod. An ephod was a special piece of clothing that Levites wore only after they turned twenty-five years old. Samuel was only a little boy, but he worked willingly, even when he didn't feel like it. He understood that if he was faithful with small tasks, God would one day be able to trust him with bigger, more important tasks.

Samuel was a precious child, a boy that was born because his mother had faith in God. With God's help, his mother taught Samuel to be polite, helpful and obedient, and this helped him build a beautiful character that prepared him to later on become an amazing spiritual leader in Israel.

The Israelites noticed that Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were rude, irreverent, selfish and violent. This was especially terrible because Eli's sons were priests and were supposed to help bring people closer to God. Sadly, Eli had never corrected them when they

were younger, and now that they were grown men, they refused to listen to their father when he asked them to change. With priests like Hophni and Phinehas, how could Israel be brought closer to God? And how could the Israelites learn how to raise their own children, if the high priest had never taught his own sons properly? One day, a prophet came to Eli with a message. He said, "Why do you honor your sons more than God? He wanted your family to minister, but now He will have to raise a priest who is faithful to Him."

Eli and his sons ignored what the prophet said, so God had to find another way to speak to Eli: He chose little Samuel. Why did God choose a child to speak to His people? Because the grown-up leaders were not listening! This is how badly Israel was doing; the leaders were not receiving visions from God, because they were not open to His words.

One night, after everyone had gone to bed, little Samuel heard a voice calling him, "Samuel!" He quickly got out of bed and ran to where priest Eli was. "Here I am, priest Eli! You called me," said Samuel. Eli said, "No, Samuel, I didn't call you. You can go back to bed."

Samuel went back to bed and lay down, but soon he heard that same voice again: "Samuel!" Once more, little Samuel ran to where priest Eli was sleeping. "Here I am! You called me," he said. Eli responded, "I didn't call you. Lie down again." And Samuel did. But then, for the third time, Samuel heard a voice calling him. Again, he ran to Eli. "Here I am, priest Eli! You called me," he said. Now Eli understood what was happening: God Himself was calling Samuel! Eli instructed Samuel: "Go, lie down, and if He calls you again, you shall answer: Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Samuel lay down and waited. Soon enough, the Lord came and stood next to him, and called, “Samuel, Samuel!” And Samuel replied, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Samuel was amazed. The Lord was speaking to him! And right then, the Lord gave him a message for Eli. It was a terrible message, and Samuel dreaded having to give Eli the news.

Eli understood that God had chosen to speak to Samuel instead of to him, because he, the high priest, had not been faithful to God when it came to teaching his sons. The next morning, he saw that Samuel was having a hard time speaking to him. Eli encouraged him and said, “Samuel, tell me exactly what the Lord said to you.” With sadness, Samuel told him that bad things were about to happen to Eli and to his sons. Even now, Eli could have repented and asked God to help him, but instead, he just bowed down and accepted his guilt without trying to correct his mistakes.

Now Eli told the whole nation what God had said to Samuel, and the people accepted that Samuel was a prophet. Eli hoped that at least some of his evil influence over Israel could be stopped, but the damage had already been done, and the Israelites were living lives that did not honor God.

Samuel was faithful to God in little things, and when he was still a child, God was able to give him even bigger, more important tasks to do. When none of the leaders in Israel were worthy of receiving God’s messages, God was able to use little Samuel for this very special task. Eli, on the other hand, already had one of the most important tasks in Israel: the job of being the high priest. Yet he was not careful with his tasks, especially when it came to raising his children. Instead of asking God to help him, he ignored any advice

that God tried to give him. And because of that, God could not use him as high priest for much longer.

Are you open to the special tasks that God gives you each day to do? Even the small, repetitive tasks are important, and they prepare us for bigger things. Will you ask God to open your heart so that you value each task you have for today? Ask Him to help you understand and value what He has for you today, and to prepare you for even bigger things in the future.

29. The Philistines Take the Ark

My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me. Psalm 63:8 (ESV)

1 Samuel 4-5 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 57

High Priest Eli had not listened to God's warnings to teach his sons properly. And now, his sons Hophni and Phinehas had become wicked men. It's very sad that they were priests, because they taught the Israelite people to be wicked, too. They caused the Israelites to leave God and worship idols. Their idol worship pushed God away, and Israel became weaker and weaker.

The Israelites didn't realize how unprotected they were now that they had left God. "Let's fight against the Philistines!" they decided. They didn't ask God what to do, and they didn't ask Priest Eli or a prophet whether this was a good idea. Could God protect them like this? Of course not! The Israelites went into battle and lost; the Philistines killed four thousand Israelite men.

"Why did the Lord do this to us?" they wondered. "Let's fetch the ark and bring it to our army camp. It will save us from our enemies!" they decided. Could the ark, by itself, protect them in any way? No, it couldn't; only God could! They were treating the ark like an idol, and ignoring God. Eli's sons, the wicked priests, should have stopped

the Israelites from doing this, but instead, they were the ones who carried the ark into the camp.

When the ark arrived at the camp, the Israelite soldiers shouted with joy. They didn't realize that the ark couldn't protect them at all; only God's presence could. The Philistine army heard the shouts of the Israelites, and they heard that the ark was in the Israelite camp. The Philistines were afraid. "They brought their God to their camp!" they said, "We need to fight our hardest!" When the battle started, the Philistines fought so hard that they ended up killing thirty thousand Israelite men. Eli's two sons also died in this battle. The Philistines won the battle, and they ended up stealing the ark and taking it with them.

All throughout the battle, Priest Eli sat on a chair by the road, waiting for news. He was anxious, because he was sure that the news would be bad. When the battle was over, a messenger came to Priest Eli. "Israel lost, and your two sons are dead!" he said sadly. This was very sad news for Priest Eli, but he wasn't surprised to hear it. Then he heard the worst news: "The Philistines took the ark of the Lord!" This news was too much for Eli to bear. He was so shocked and sad that he fell backwards in his chair, broke his neck, and died.

Now the rest of Eli's family heard the terrible news. The wife of Phinehas (one of Eli's wicked sons) was pregnant. She heard the news, "Your husband is dead. Priest Eli is dead. And the ark has been taken!" She was filled with such sorrow that she began to give birth to the baby, and just after the baby was born, she died. What a sad day it was for Israel!

The Philistines were happy. Now they had a new idol – the ark! They put it in the temple of their god Dagon. But soon enough, they noticed that having the ark only brought them trouble. Two nights in

a row, their idol Dagon broke. Dagon was half fish, half human. The human part of the idol was the one that kept breaking off and falling to the ground.

"Let's move this ark somewhere else," decided the Philistines. They moved it to three different cities, but plagues came to each of these cities. Then they moved it to a field, and soon that field was filled with mice. The mice ate and destroyed all the crops in that field.

The Philistines had the ark for seven months, and all this time, the Israelites did not try to get it back. But now the Philistines were tired of all the problems that they had since they'd stolen the ark. They could see that there was a special power that came with the ark. They didn't understand that all the problems had come to them because God could not protect them as long as they had the stolen ark. All these problems gave the Philistines a chance to come to God and ask Him for forgiveness and help. But they didn't want to come to God; they just wanted to get rid of the ark. "Let's return the ark to the Israelites," they decided.

The ark had always reminded the Israelites of God's throne and God's presence. If they had stayed close to God and allowed Him in their lives, none of the Israelites would have died in battle, and they would never have lost the ark. As for the Philistines, they thought that, because they had the ark, that their own idol, Dagon, was powerful. They quickly learnt that Dagon could do nothing for them. If only both nations had come to God! He was longing to bless them and help them, but He couldn't, because they didn't want Him in their lives.

God wants to be in your life and fill you with peace and blessings. Will you let Him come into your life? Will you ask Him to help you stay close to Him?

30. The Philistines Return the Ark

O Israel, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. Psalm 115:9-11 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 6-7 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 57

The Philistines had stolen the ark from the Israelites. They had it for seven months, and all that time, they had many problems. God could not protect them if they had stolen the ark, so they got plagues. Also, their god Dagon broke. It was clear that Dagon had no power at all; he couldn't even help himself! The Philistines could have come to God when they saw that their idol couldn't help them, but they refused. Instead, they decided to return the ark to Israel. "Let's return this ark; it brings too much trouble," they said.

They put the ark into a wooden cart. "We have to send an offering together with the ark, to say that we are sorry that we stole it," the Philistines decided. They added some golden offerings to the cart: five golden tumors and five golden mice. Then they let two young cows pull the cart.

"We will let the cows go wherever they wish," decided the Philistines, "If the cows go to the town of Beth-Shemesh in Israel, we will know that all of this happened because of Jehovah, the God of

the Israelites. If not, then we will know that all these troubles happened to us by chance." The Philistine leaders followed behind the cart and watched. The cows walked and walked until they reached a field in Beth-Shemesh, then they stopped. The Israelites working in the field saw the ark, and they were overjoyed. Soon they called some Levites, and the Levites found a large, flat rock and placed the ark and the golden offerings there. Then they cut up the cart and made a fire, and they offered the two cows to God. The Philistine leaders said to each other, "Let's go home now. The Israelites have received their ark."

What would the Israelites do now that they had their precious ark back? Did they treat it with reverence? No, they didn't. They left it on that flat rock, uncovered. Anyone could come and look at it. Some people even came, touched it, and opened it. By their actions, they were saying, "We don't care what God said we should do with the ark. God's words are not important." By doing this, they pushed God and His protection away, and several people died when they touched and opened the ark.

The people of Beth-Shemesh were afraid. "The ark should be taken somewhere else," they said. There was a town nearby called Kirjath-Jearim. The people from this town wanted to treat the ark properly, and they reverently took it to the home of a Levite called Abinadab. Abinadab's son Eleazar took care of the ark reverently for twenty years. Their home was at peace during all that time.

Now the people started to think about all that had happened: the Philistines were ruling over them, their priests Eli and his sons had died, and they could have lost the ark forever. They began to listen to Samuel when he told them, "Leave your idols! Come back to God!"

Samuel traveled from town to town to teach the people and to invite them to return to God.

"Samuel is God's prophet," the people decided, "And we want to come back to God." All the Israelite leaders gathered together. They fasted and prayed, and they asked Samuel to be their judge, their leader. Then the Israelites heard that the Philistine army was coming to attack them. "The Philistines think that we are gathered to prepare for battle!" they said. "We only gathered so we could worship God. Samuel, please pray to God for us, so He can protect us!" they begged. And Samuel did.

The Philistine army arrived. But before the Philistines could do anything, a terrible storm came. It killed many Philistines, because God's protection was not with them. The rest of the Philistines ran away. The Israelites were grateful and overjoyed. God had forgiven them! God was helping and protecting them! They could have stayed there and praised God, but first they did what they thought they had to do: they ran after the Philistine soldiers and killed them, even though God had never asked them to do this. It was easy for them to catch the Philistine soldiers simply because the Philistine army had completely lost God's protection.

Despite the fact that there was unnecessary bloodshed, what a wonderful day that was for Israel! "God has forgiven us and helped us!" the Israelites said joyfully. Samuel set up a great stone that day to remember that event. It was called the "Ebenezer" or stone of help. Every time the Israelites saw this stone, they would remember the day that they came back to God, and how lovingly He forgave them and helped them. God wanted to be their Helper and Protector, but He could only do it if they stayed close to Him.

Do you want God to be your Helper and Protector, too? Will you ask Him to do this for you? Will you stay close to Him?

31. Israel Asks for a King

And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. 1 Samuel 8:7

1 Samuel 8 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 59

Samuel worked his whole life for the good of the Israelites. He became their judge, and ruled them according to God's instructions. He was also their priest and teacher. The people knew they could trust him; he was always fair, faithful and truthful. But as Samuel became older, he realized he needed help in his work, so he placed his two sons as judges with him. Sadly, his sons were not like him at all; they were corrupt and evil. The Israelites noticed this and soon grew tired of them. They decided that things needed to change.

Deep down, though, it wasn't just Samuel's sons that made them want something different: they felt that Samuel looked too humble and simple next to the kings of the nations around them. "We want a handsome, powerful king – someone that other nations can see and admire! Let's ask Samuel to give us a king to rule us instead!" they decided.

The Israelites didn't stop to think that they already had a king – the most powerful, glorious and wonderful king that any nation could ever ask for. Their king was Jehovah, God Himself! Samuel was simply God's messenger; but all the decisions were made by God. With God as their king, the Israelites had the best government of all,

and more freedom than any other nation around them. God's laws, when obeyed, helped to keep everyone safe, healthy and happy. Their country would have been the richest and most abundant of all if only they had followed God's instructions wholeheartedly.

Sadly, the Israelites couldn't see this. They only saw that the nations around them had flashy-looking kings, while the nation of Israel only had a humble judge. The elders of Israel came to Samuel and said, "You are old now, and your sons are not like you. Now, please get us a king, like all the other nations."

Samuel felt sad when he heard this. He would have gladly removed his sons from their positions, but it was too late for that: the people were asking for an even bigger change. He felt that the people were rejecting him, but he didn't tell them this. Instead, he went to God and asked, "What should I do?"

God answered kindly, "Do what the people are asking for. They're not rejecting you; they're rejecting me. So do give them what they're asking for, but let them know what it will be like for them if they have a king. Let them know that having a king will not be good for them."

Samuel told the people what God had said. He explained what their lives would be like with a king. "If the king worships idols, the whole nation will abandon God. Also, the king will want servants. He will take your servants, and even your sons and daughters, to work for him. He will need soldiers, and captains for those soldiers. And he will need to pay all those people, so he will take your best lands, and he will charge you expensive taxes. He will take your best animals and possessions. Then, when you wish you could get rid of him, you won't be able to."

The people heard Samuel, but they didn't change their minds. "We want a king. We want to be like all the other nations," they

insisted. Samuel told this to God, and God answered, “Do what they ask, and give them a king.” This was not God’s plan for them at all, but He let them have a king, because this is what they wanted. God gives freedom to His children, and stays with them as much as they will let Him. He would try to work through this new king, even though it was not the best way for Israel.

God always knows what’s best, and He lets us know His ways. However, He gives us the freedom to decide against His counsel. Israel’s choice to have a king would bring them problems later on. It’s the same with us: if we choose to do things differently to what God advises us to do, we will end up with unnecessary problems, too. God wants to save us from making bad choices. Will you let God be your King, your Guide, today, so that He can help you follow His ways?

32. The Chosen King

Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple. Psalm 65:4 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 9:1 – 10:16 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 59

Now that the people had decided that they wanted a king, the best they could do was to let God choose him. God knew that a king would not be best for Israel, but if this king always followed Him, then it wouldn't be so bad. But if their king chose to leave God, it would be a disaster for the whole nation. Samuel waited patiently for God to show him who the new king would be. God promised Samuel, "I will send you a man from the tribe of Benjamin, and you will anoint him king. He will save my people from the Philistines."

The chosen king was a young man named Saul. He was tall and handsome, just like the people had hoped he would be. You see, although God chose Saul to be king, He was choosing a king with the characteristics that the people wanted. Through the prophet Samuel, God had warned them what would happen if they decided to have a king, but they sadly rejected the warning. God would, however, work through Saul as much as Saul would let Him.

Before he became king, Saul had good character qualities: he was humble and hardworking. Saul worked in his father's home, taking care of the animals. The day he met Samuel he was out with his servant looking for some of his father's donkeys that had gotten lost.

For three days, Saul and his servant looked for the donkeys, but they could not find them. Saul said to his servant, "I think we should just return home; I don't think we'll find them." But the servant said, "We're close to the city of Ramah, where the prophet Samuel lives. Why don't we see him and ask him about the lost donkeys?" Saul agreed. "That's a good idea. And look, we have some silver with us; we can give it to him as a thank-you gift."

As soon as Saul and his servant arrived at Samuel's city, they found the well. There were some young women fetching water there, and Saul asked them, "Where is the prophet?" The girls answered, "He's here. They're about to have a worship service and a sacrifice."

Meanwhile, Samuel was waiting. He knew that Saul would arrive. God had spoken to him in his ear, "A young man from the tribe of Benjamin will come tomorrow. Anoint him king." When Saul came into the city gate, Samuel saw him, and God told Samuel, "This is the man!"

From then on, Samuel treated Saul kindly. First, he said to Saul, "Don't worry about your father's donkeys; they have been found. Please stay with us for the feast." Then Samuel said something that surprised Saul, "The hopes of all Israel are on you and your father's house." Saul felt overwhelmed. How could he receive so much honor? He politely answered, "Why do you say this to me? I come from the smallest tribe in Israel, and the least of the families of Benjamin!"

Then Saul stayed for the worship service and the feast. When it was time to eat, Samuel made sure that Saul received the best food. That night Saul slept in Samuel's own house, and they talked about the government of Israel. Saul was overwhelmed with all that was happening. Why had God chosen him to be king?

When it was time for Saul to return home, Samuel walked with him part of the way. Then Samuel said to Saul's servant, "Keep on walking; I want to be alone with Saul." When they were alone, with no one around, Samuel anointed Saul's head with oil. He assured Saul, "The Spirit of God will be upon you." How could Saul be sure of this? Samuel told him what would happen to him on his way home. When Saul saw these things, he could be sure that God really had called him to be king, and that God was with him.

As Saul returned home, everything that Samuel had said came true. First, he met someone who told him, "Your father's donkeys have been found!" Then he met some men who were on their way to worship God. They carried three goats, some wine and three loaves of bread. When they saw Saul, they gave him two of the loaves. Then Saul arrived to his city and met a group of prophets who was singing praises to God. He joined them and began to sing and prophesy with them. The people knew Saul well, and they were amazed at the changes they saw in him. "Is Saul a prophet now?" they asked in wonder.

Now Saul was certain that God had chosen him to be king, and that He was sending His Spirit to guide him in this task. He decided to wait patiently for God to tell him when it would be time to begin his task as king of Israel. We might not be kings, but God has chosen each of us for a task. He wants to bless others through us, just like He hoped He could bless Israel through this king they had asked for. Will you let God use you today? Will you let Him show you how to help and bless others today?

33. The Israelites Accept Saul

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6 (KJV)

1 Samuel 10:17- 12:25 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 59

Saul had been chosen and anointed King of Israel, but only Saul and Samuel knew this. No one else knew it yet. How would the people find out? Samuel invited all the people to gather together. Once everyone was there, Samuel said, "The Lord God of Israel delivered you from Egypt, and from all the other kingdoms that were ruling over you. In spite of this, today you have rejected the God who saved you, and you asked for a king instead."

No one answered Samuel; they really wanted to have a king, and they were eager to see who had been chosen. Now everyone watched as they drew lots to see who had been chosen to be king. The lot fell first on the tribe of Benjamin, and then on Saul's family, and finally, on Saul himself. Now everyone knew Saul had been chosen – but Saul wasn't there! Where was Saul? The people asked God, "Has Saul arrived yet?"

The Lord answered, "He has hid himself among the baggage." Sure enough, Saul was hiding there, among the supplies that the people had brought for the meeting. He felt shy and overwhelmed by

such honor. They ran and fetched Saul, and he stopped hiding and stood before the people.

When the people saw their new king, they were excited. Saul was tall, much taller than anyone else there, and he was also very handsome. A tall, handsome king would make them look good to other nations, wouldn't he? But Samuel reminded them, "The king must be under God!" If the king stopped following God, the people would be miserable. Samuel wanted them to understand this.

While most of the people were glad that Saul had been chosen, there were men from the tribes of Ephraim and Judah who were unhappy. They complained, "Why was a man from Benjamin chosen? That's such a small tribe. Why can't we have a king from one of the larger tribes, like Ephraim or Judah?" These men were proud, and forgot that it was God Himself, and not Samuel, who had chosen Saul.

When Saul heard that there were complaints against him, he decided to return home. He wouldn't try to be king until this problem was solved. He let Samuel be in charge, and he humbly went back to his work taking care of his father's animals.

A short time later, the Ammonites surrounded the Israelite city of Jabesh-Gilead. This city was in deep trouble, so they sent messengers to Saul. "Please help us! They will take out our right eyes and make us their servants unless you help us!" they begged. Saul instantly sent a message asking all the Israelites to join his army to help the people of Jabesh-Gilead. 330.000 men joined Saul, and he bravely led them against the Ammonites. God was with them and protected them, and they won the battle.

Now everyone could see that Saul was brave, and they were glad that he had been chosen to be king. Someone suggested, "Saul, why don't you kill the men who didn't want you to be king?" Saul

answered kindly and humbly, “No. No one will die, because today God has brought salvation to Israel.”

Samuel then invited the people, “Come, let’s all meet and crown Saul king again.” The people gladly gathered, worshiped God and crowned Saul king. During this meeting, Samuel spoke to the people. He said good-bye to them as their ruler. “Have I ever taken anything from you? Have I ever been unfair?” Samuel asked them. The people assured him that he hadn’t; he’d been faithful to God and to them his whole life.

As Samuel spoke, he reminded them of all that God had done for them since they had left Egypt. He also wanted them to understand that asking for a king had been a sin. He said, “It is wheat harvest today, a time of year in which it never rains. I will ask God for thunder and rain, so that you can see that you were wicked in asking for a king.”

Samuel prayed, and God answered his prayer by sending thunder and rain. The people were afraid; they realized they had been wrong in asking for a king, when God Himself could be their king. “Pray for us, we’ve sinned!” they said to Samuel. Now they could not get rid of the king they had chosen, but they could still come to God and be close to Him.

Samuel comforted the people, and said, “Don’t be afraid. What’s done is done; now you have a king. Now keep following God, and serve Him with all your heart. He will not leave you.” Then Samuel assured the people, “I will keep on praying for you and teaching you.” Samuel would not be their ruler anymore, but he would still be their priest and teacher.

The people were happy to have a new king, but God was sad. He knew the problems that having a king would bring. Yet He still loved

His people, and would work through their chosen king for them. He longed for the Israelites to understand that their real king was not Saul, but God Himself, the only One who could keep them safe and protected. King Saul needed to have the Lord as his King and ruler so that he could lead Israel well. Would Saul do this? Each of us also needs Jesus to be our King, the King of our hearts and lives. Will you let Him be your King? Invite Him into your life today.

34. Saul Chooses His Own Way

Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. Psalm 119:173 (KJV)

1 Samuel 13 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 60

God had said, "Saul will save my people from the Philistines." For many years, the Philistines had been disturbing the Israelites. After Saul's army won the battle at Jabesh-Gilead, Saul could have continued defeating the rest of Israel's enemies. The people would gladly have helped. But he didn't. Instead, everyone just went home. Only 3,000 soldiers stayed with Saul and Jonathan.

Two years later, Jonathan decided that it was time to fight against the Philistines. He led the army and won. But the Philistines didn't want to accept that they had lost; they gathered a huge army – the largest they could gather - and prepared to fight again.

King Saul invited the Israelite men to join his army. But soon the Israelites noticed that their army was much smaller than the Philistine army. "We'll never win," they said, afraid and discouraged. The Israelite soldiers began to run away and hide, and Saul's army got smaller and smaller.

The Israelite soldiers needed to be reminded of all the times that God had helped them. They needed to remember that God was

stronger, and that He could use even a tiny army. But Saul didn't remind them of these things. The people's minds were not on God. Instead, they looked at their king, and their king was just as weak as they were. Everyone was discouraged.

Saul was waiting for Samuel to arrive. Surely with Samuel things would get better! He got a message from Samuel: "Wait for seven days, and I will arrive. We will offer burnt sacrifices, and we will pray for God's guidance and protection."

Saul waited. On the seventh day, the day when Samuel was supposed to arrive, Saul couldn't wait any longer. The day was not over yet, but Saul said, "Samuel hasn't come! I have to do something!" Why couldn't Saul have waited just a little longer? Surely Samuel would arrive! Also, why couldn't Saul pray while he waited?

Then Saul made a huge mistake: he offered burnt sacrifices himself, as if he were a priest.

Saul was not supposed to do this! Can you imagine a king, dressed in his army clothes, offering sacrifices? "The soldiers are leaving because Samuel isn't here. I must make the people feel better," argued Saul. But he was wrong. God had purposely allowed Samuel to be late because He wanted to test Saul. Would the king of Israel wait for the instructions of his King? Or would the King of Israel choose his own way?

Samuel arrived just as Saul had finished offering the sacrifices. He was deeply disappointed that Saul had chosen to do this. How could God bless Israel if His simple instructions were not followed? Saul didn't even seem to notice how wrong he had been. He went out quickly to greet Samuel. "What have you done?" asked Samuel, with a worried look in his face. Saul was full of excuses. He replied, "Well, the soldiers were leaving, you weren't coming, and the Philistines are

already gathered, so I decided to go ahead and offer the sacrifice myself."

Samuel replied, "You've done a foolish thing. You didn't keep God's commands. He would have established your kingdom forever, but now God has found another man to be king over His people; a man who is after God's heart." After saying this, Samuel left.

If Israel would be God's people, then their king would have to be under God, otherwise God could not bless them. How could God work through a king who didn't listen to Him? Now God could not work through Saul, because he had chosen to follow his own ideas.

Saul could have repented right then, but he didn't. He kept excusing his sins. As he looked at his army, he knew they had little hope of winning. Only 600 soldiers had stayed with him. How would they defeat the Philistines? "Maybe if I bring the ark here, the soldiers will be encouraged," thought Saul. He was rejecting God's instructions, but now he wanted to pretend that he cared about the things of God. He knew that many years before, Eli's sons had taken the ark to their army camp, and it had been a disaster. But he decided to do it anyway. And he didn't tell Samuel about it; he didn't want to see the prophet frowning at him anymore.

God had all the answers to Saul's problems, and He was longing to help. But God cannot force anyone to follow His instructions. Saul had chosen to follow his own way, so now God could not help him. Would there be anyone in Israel who would have enough faith to let God use him?

God has wonderful plans for you, and He wishes to guide you and help you. Will you let Him be your King and your guide? Will you let Him lead you today?

35. Jonathan's Faith

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
1 Corinthians 16:13 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 14 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 60

The Israelites were in deep trouble. The huge Philistine army had camped nearby, ready for battle, and the Israelite army only had 600 soldiers. On top of this, the prophet Samuel had just left because King Saul had disobeyed God's orders. How could they ever win this battle?

The Israelite king had not followed God's orders, but there was one man who did believe in God and who trusted in Him: King Saul's son, Jonathan. Jonathan knew that God could do anything, even with a small army of 600 men. With faith and hope, he said to his armor-bearer, "Let's secretly attack the enemy camp. God can still use the few men that we have."

The armor-bearer was also a man of prayer and faith, and he agreed with Jonathan. The two men prayed together, then they secretly left the Israelite camp and went towards the Philistine camp.

As they got closer to the Philistine camp, an enemy soldier saw them. "Oh, you've come out of your hiding place! Come, and we will get you!" he taunted. Jonathan and his armor-bearer felt assured. They had agreed that if a Philistine soldier said this to them, then it meant that God was with them.

They continued through a secret and difficult path, and finally climbed a steep, dangerous cliff. This was the only way they could

reach the camp without being seen. None of the Philistine soldiers were guarding this cliff because they assumed that none of the Israelite soldiers would dare to climb it. This way, Jonathan and his friend entered the Philistine camp easily, and they killed the guards before anyone could do anything.

The two friends began to attack the Philistine camp, and angels guarded them. The Philistine soldiers were so afraid that they all trembled, and the earth started trembling, too. Now the Philistines were sure that a huge army with horses and chariots was coming to fight them, because they could feel the earth trembling. They were so scared and confused that they began to kill each other, thinking that they were killing Israelite soldiers.

The Israelite soldiers, from their camp, heard the noise of battle. Saul didn't know who was fighting the Philistines, but he decided to join in with his army. Israelite men who had left the army and hidden away in the caves of the mountain also heard the noise of battle, and they decided to join in, too. Thanks to the faith and bravery of Jonathan and his armor-bearer, the Israelite army was able to defeat the Philistines.

Now, of course it would not have been necessary to do any killing; the Philistines were so afraid that they were already doing it themselves! But we've already seen that the Israelites never understood that God could win their battles without making them kill anyone. Much later, through Prophet Zechariah's writings, God tried once more to teach His people that He does not work through force. He told them, "You will succeed, not by military might or by your

own strength, but by my Spirit."[3] But for now, the Israelites were not ready to listen to this.

Saul was excited. He knew that this victory was not his, but he wanted to receive all the honor for it. He was no longer humble like he had been before he became king. Saul gave a very foolish command to his army: "No one will eat or drink the whole day, until evening! If anyone eats or drink, they will be put to death. We will do this so I can defeat my enemies!" This was selfish and cruel. How do you think the soldiers felt when they had to fight the whole day under the sun and were not allowed to drink or eat anything? And why was Saul trying to get all the attention for this victory, when he hadn't been the one to plan and lead this battle?

Jonathan didn't hear his father's command. He passed through a forest and saw a fallen bee-hive full of honey on the ground. Since he was hungry, he ate some of the honey from the hive. "Oh, Jonathan," said the other soldiers, "None of us ate that, because your father ordered us not to eat!" Jonathan was surprised. "Why would my father do that to his soldiers? I feel so much better after eating!" said Jonathan.

When Saul found out that Jonathan had eaten honey, he was angry. He loved his son Jonathan, but he loved his honor more. "I will surely put you to death, Jonathan, for disobeying my commands!" he said. He didn't want anyone to ever dream of disobeying him, even if his command had been pointless to start with. He was too proud to admit that he had made a mistake.

But the people didn't let Saul kill his son. "No, no! How can you kill him, when he brought salvation to Israel? He was led by God

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[3] Zechariah 4:6

today. Not even a hair from his head should fall to the ground today!" the people declared.

Saul listened to the people, and Jonathan was saved. Now Jonathan was a hero, and Saul knew that the people loved his son more than they loved their king. He returned home in a bad mood. He should have been pleased with his son, and thankful for what had happened that day, but he was disappointed that he had not received any of the honor for himself. Saul also realized that not even God was speaking to him anymore. He had asked God, "Should I keep fighting against the Philistines?" But the Lord didn't answer him. Why not? Because Saul had stopped listening to God and refused to repent, so it didn't make sense for God to give him instructions that he wouldn't follow. The people realized that day that the king they had asked for did not care so much about what was right; he cared about himself more. They didn't want a king like this, but now they could not get rid of him.

Jonathan and his friend had been brave and faithful. They had trusted God and followed Him in the best way they could, and they brought blessing and victory to Israel. Saul thought only about himself, and he ended up disappointed and lonely. God wants to use you like He used Jonathan. Will you ask Him to help you trust and follow Him? Will you ask Him to use you to bless others?

36. Saul is Rejected

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.
1 Samuel 15:22 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 15 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 61

King Saul had made some serious mistakes, but he still had the chance to repent and change. He could still learn to trust completely in God's Word and obey His instructions. Would he? No. Saul thought he had done nothing wrong; he could think of plenty of excuses for all his mistakes. "Samuel has been so unfair to me," he thought grumpily. Saul felt so bad that he began to attack enemy nations. He won, because God was no longer protecting these evil nations.

God knew that Saul was going to attack the Amalekites soon. Now God could give Saul one more chance to listen to him. He sent Samuel with a message: "Saul, the Lord says to go and defeat the Amalekites." Then Samuel gave clear instructions: they would have to kill *all* of the Amalekites and their animals, and burn their things. The Israelites would keep nothing. Why would God ask for such a terrible thing?

The Amalekites had been the first nation to attack Israel in the desert. Four hundred years had passed, and they had not changed. They were as evil as ever, and God's protection was no longer with them. If the Israelites had understood how God could free them from

other nations without any killing, God could have done wonderful things. But the Israelites had decided many generations ago that killing was the way. And since they were going to kill, and since God's protection had completely left the Amalekites, God wanted to make sure that nothing would be left from the Amalekites: no possessions, no animals, no people that would become slaves. The Israelites would not keep anything, and they would not become richer after this battle. The Israelites would have to understand that this battle did not happen because Israel was great; it happened because God had withdrawn from the Amalekite nation. If only the Israelites had asked, "Is there any other way to do this? Can we send them away without killing anyone?" But this didn't even cross their minds.

Saul gladly set off to attack this enemy nation – but sadly, he did it *his* way. The Israelite army killed all the Amalekite people, except for their king Agag. And they killed all the animals – except for the best and healthiest sheep and oxen. Saul only obeyed part of God's instructions. As he looked at the animals he'd kept, he felt proud of "his" victory.

That night, God told Samuel, "I repent that I made Saul king; he has not obeyed me." Samuel was heartbroken. When God repents, it means that His relationship with that person has changed, because that person has rejected God. This brings God much grief. Saul's relationship with God had changed, and he could no longer be Israel's king. This made Samuel very, very sad, and he cried and prayed for Saul all night.

The next day, Samuel went to see Saul. He hoped that Saul might realize his mistake and repent, and that his relationship with God could be restored. But Saul refused to accept that he had sinned. He

said to Samuel, “Look, I have done what the Lord has commanded!” Samuel looked at him with a worried look, and asked, “Then why do I hear sheep bleating and oxen lowing?” Saul quickly replied, “Oh, the people saved the best ones so we can use them for burnt offerings!” This was just an excuse. Deep down, Saul was relieved that he could offer these animals instead of his own ones! Also, he was blaming the people for what he did, when it had been his own idea to save these animals.

Samuel looked at Saul sternly. Then he said, “Saul, when you were humble, God made you king over Israel. Why did you disobey Him? It’s better to obey than to offer sacrifice. Now that you’ve rejected the word of God, He has also rejected you from being king.”

Saul was terrified when he heard this. He didn’t feel one bit sorry for what he had done, but he did not want to lose his throne. He cried out, “I have sinned! I was afraid of the people, and I did what they wanted me to do!”

Why was Saul blaming others for his own sin? He should have confessed his sin in front of the people, but he didn’t. Then he begged Samuel, “Forgive me, come with me and we will worship the Lord together!” But Samuel refused. He reminded Saul that God had rejected him as king of Israel. Then Samuel turned around to leave. Saul was so terrified that he grabbed Samuel’s mantle to stop him from leaving, and the mantle tore. Samuel said to Saul seriously, “Today God has torn the kingdom from you, and has given it to one of your neighbors, who is better than you.”

“Please, please come with me and worship the Lord with me. I don’t want to lose the people’s respect,” Saul pleaded. Samuel accepted. He didn’t want the people to rebel against Saul yet, so he went with Saul. But he only watched the worship service; he knew

that this worship ceremony was empty, because Saul's heart wasn't right with God.

After the sacrifice was over, Samuel asked the men to bring Agag, the Amalekite king, to him. And right there, he killed him. He completed what Saul should have done. Sadly, Saul was so far from God that he couldn't even obey God when He "commanded" him to do things that Saul himself originally wanted to do! Then Samuel returned home, and did not come to see Saul again.

Did God want Samuel to kill Agag? There was no command from God for Samuel to do this; he just did it. He was trying to do what he thought was best, but it would have been better for him to consult God first. The king that Israel had asked for had not done things right, and now Samuel wanted to help by killing Agag. Agag had lost His protection anyway, but the Bible does not say that God wanted Samuel to do this.

Saul had started off humble and willing to be taught. If he had let God show him his errors and help him, his character would have gotten stronger, and he would have been a wonderful king. But he became proud and refused to admit his mistakes, until God could no longer work through him. When Saul refused to accept that he had been wrong, he rejected God's guidance, and he separated himself from God. Now God would have to choose another man, one who would be willing to be guided and taught by His Spirit.

Are you willing to be taught by God's Spirit? He wants to do beautiful things through you. Will you let Him guide you and teach you?

37. David is Anointed

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 16:1-13 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 62

Samuel was sad. He thought of Saul and how he'd separated himself from God. What would God do now? What would happen to Saul, and to Israel? God spoke to Samuel tenderly, "Samuel, you've been crying for Saul for a long time. He won't be king anymore. Now, fill your horn with oil and take a young cow with you to the house of a man called Jesse. One of his sons will become the next king; I will show you which one. Invite Jesse to be with you when you offer a sacrifice, and I will tell you what to do next."

Samuel did what God told him. When he arrived at Jesse's town, he invited the leaders of that town, as well as Jesse and his family, to offer a sacrifice. They gladly joined him, and after the sacrifice, they were going to have a feast. Samuel looked at Jesse's sons and wondered which of these young men would become the next king. He looked at Jesse's oldest son, Eliab. What a tall, handsome man he was! He was the tallest of the brothers, almost as tall as Saul. "He will probably be the next king," Samuel thought. But God said to Samuel, "Don't focus on his good looks. Man looks at the outside, but I look at the heart. I don't look at what man sees. Eliab will not be king."

Samuel looked at the rest of Jesse's sons, and one by one, God told Samuel, "No, this is not the one." Samuel was confused. He had seen Jesse's seven sons, and none of them had been chosen. Who would be the next king? Samuel asked Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" "No," answered, Jesse, "I have one more, the youngest. His name is David, and he stayed to care for our sheep." Jesse didn't think that Samuel would mind if his youngest son didn't come to the feast, so he was surprised when Samuel said, "Call him. We won't sit down to eat until he is here."

David was surprised when messengers came to tell him that Prophet Samuel wanted him to be at the feast. He got ready and, as quickly as possible, arrived to meet Samuel. As soon as Samuel saw David, God let him know, "He is the one. Anoint him." Samuel liked David. He was polite and humble. He also looked strong and healthy from all the time he spent working outside with the sheep.

Samuel anointed David secretly. No one in David's family knew it, although they wondered why Samuel had wanted to meet David. It was better for no one to know that David had been anointed, because Saul might find out. Then Samuel returned home, happy and relieved. David went back to working as a shepherd, and he patiently waited for God to tell him when he could start being king. As the years passed, he remembered his anointing, and it gave him strength and courage. Meanwhile, he cared for his family's sheep, and as he watched the sheep, he created beautiful songs of praise to God, which he would sing while he played his harp. Being outside in nature helped him to spend time with God and get to know Him more. All of this helped him to develop the qualities that would later help him to be a king that was after God's heart.

What do you see when you look at someone? Do you see only what they look like, or do you pay attention to their character, their inside? How would you like others to see you? Isn't it wonderful that God looks at the inside, and not the outside of a person? He longs to help you develop the inside, to help you be a person after God's heart. Do you want this? Ask Him to make you like this; ask Him to give you a beautiful heart, and to help you look at people's inside rather than just their outside.

38. David and Goliath

And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands.
1 Samuel 17:47 (KJV)

1 Samuel 16:14-23; 17 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 63

King Saul was desperate. He refused to admit that he had done anything wrong; he kept God's Spirit away from him by refusing to repent or change. And now that God's Spirit had left him, an evil spirit took over and made Saul miserable. King Saul was sick with worry. He knew that sooner or later someone else would become king in his place. The more he thought about this, the worse he felt. He didn't feel bad that his relationship with God was broken; instead, he felt bad that he would stop being king.

Saul's servants wanted to help him. "Sir," they suggested, "Why don't we bring in a musician to play for you? The music will calm you and help you feel better." Saul liked this idea. Soon the servants told Saul, "We've found a good musician for you. He is also a strong, brave man. The Lord is with him." Who was this musician? David, the shepherd. David gladly came to play for Saul, and his peaceful music calmed him down. Saul loved David and often asked for his services.

As David played, he paid attention to what King Saul's life was like. He saw the king's worry and anxiety. "It's so important to do

God's will," thought David, "Once I become king, I want to keep having a close relationship with God. I want to stay connected to God."

After some time, Israel declared war against the Philistines. Saul and his army camped near the Philistines. Three of David's brothers, including Eliab the eldest brother, joined the Israelite army. David, as usual, stayed behind to care for his family's sheep. Then Jesse said to David, "Please go to the army camp and see how your brothers are doing. Take them some food, too." David gladly went. His father Jesse didn't know it, but an angel had told David that the Israelite army was in danger, and that God would use him to save them.

When David arrived at the camp, he saw that the Israelite soldiers were terrified. On the other side, he saw a huge Philistine man, a giant called Goliath. This giant kept saying terrible things. He would insult the Israelites, and he would insult the Israelite God. Then he said, "Which man will come, alone, and fight against me?" Of course, not one Israelite soldier was brave enough to face such a huge giant, so no one did anything. The shouting and taunting had been going on for forty days.

David instantly wanted to help. He said, "How can this idol worshiper say such things against our God, and against God's army?" Eliab heard David and felt jealous and annoyed. He knew that his little brother David was brave and strong, and ever since the visit of Prophet Samuel, he had wondered why the prophet had paid special attention to David and not to him. Eliab angrily blurted out, "Why did you come here, David? Who stayed with our sheep? I know how proud you are. You just came here to watch the battle, didn't you?" David answered politely, "What have I done? I was only asking a question. Can't I speak?"

Soon Saul heard what David had said, and he asked David to come to him. David said to the king confidently, “No one should be afraid or discouraged because of Goliath; I will go and fight against him.” David also told Saul, “While caring for sheep, the Lord saved me from lions and bears. He can save me from this Philistine man who has defied God’s army.”

King Saul couldn’t imagine how God could save David. Would David be able to kill Goliath? But he said to David kindly, “Go, and may the Lord be with you.” Then he gave David the king’s own armor and sword to wear for the battle. David tried it on, but he realized it was all too heavy and uncomfortable for him. “Please let me take this off. I’ve never used these before,” he said to Saul. Then he walked toward Goliath, taking only his sling and a shepherd’s scrip, or bag. He stopped first by the brook, picked up five smooth stones and put them into his bag. Then he approached Goliath.

The huge giant looked at David and felt angry. What kind of soldier was this? David looked strong and healthy, but he had no armor, no sword – only a sling! “Am I a dog, that you come to me like this?” asked Goliath angrily. Then he threatened to kill David.

David answered, “You come to me with a sword, a spear and a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord, the God of the armies of Israel. You have defied this God, and today He will deliver you into my hand. Then the whole earth will know that there is a God in Israel, and everyone will know that God doesn’t save with a sword or a spear, for the battle is the Lord’s.” David’s voice could be heard clearly. Goliath heard it, the Philistines heard it, and the Israelite army heard it, too.

David’s words made Goliath furious. He pushed up his helmet and rushed forward to attack David. David ran towards the giant,

took a stone from his bag and threw it with his sling. The stone hit the only part of Goliath that was not protected by armor: his forehead. Goliath fell on his face instantly. David could have stopped there, but like all of Israel, he believed that he had to get rid of his enemies by killing them himself. He rushed to Goliath, pulled out the giant's sword, and killed him right there.

The Philistine soldiers were terrified. Their giant leader was dead! They all began running away. The Israelite army now felt strong and brave, and they ran after the Philistines and killed them.

That day, all of Israel and the surrounding nations knew that Israel had a God, a God who doesn't need swords or spears to protect His people. He only needs His children to have faith in Him. That day, God used David's faith. God wants to use you, too. If we have faith in Him and trust Him, He can use us to bless others. He can do great things through His children who have faith in Him. Will you ask Him to give you this faith? Will you ask Him to help you trust Him completely?

39. Saul's Jealousy

A sound heart is life to the body,
But envy is rottenness to the bones.
Proverbs 14:30 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 18:5-30 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 64

David was now a big hero in Israel. He had killed the giant Goliath, something that no other Israelite had been brave enough to do. "You will now stay with me," King Saul commanded, "Don't return home. We need you here."

At first, David felt welcome and safe in King Saul's house. The king loved him, the servants loved him, and the people did, too. Jonathan, the king's son, also really liked David. David and Jonathan became close friends. In fact, their friendship was so strong that they made a covenant together, promising to always be good friends. When they made this covenant, Jonathan gave David his robe, clothes, a sword, a bow and a girdle. These were some of the best things that Jonathan had, things that only a prince wore, and he loved David so much that he wanted him to have them. In spite of his new fame, David continued being humble and modest. He did his work well and treated everyone with respect and politeness. This made everyone love him.

For some time, Saul was glad to have David working for him. He thought, "God is with David, so if David is working for me, then my throne is safe!" But Saul's happiness with David did not last long. One day, Saul and David were returning from a battle against the

Philistines, and a group of women met them on the way. The women began to play musical instruments and danced as they sang. One group of women sang, “Saul has killed his thousands!”, and another group of women answered in song, “And David has killed his ten thousands!”

Saul didn’t like this at all. “They said that I killed thousands, but that David killed ten thousands. Now there’s nothing else he can have, except the kingdom!” Saul was filled with anger and jealousy as he thought that now the people were singing that David was more powerful than Saul.

David had not stopped being King Saul’s musician. The next time that David played music for Saul, something horrible happened: King Saul threw a spear at David. Thankfully he missed, and David was able to get away.

Saul was filled with hate for David, and an evil spirit came into Saul. “How can I kill David?” he wondered. Then he had an idea: “I will send him to war. I will make him captain of one thousand soldiers. Then I won’t have to see him in my home, and he might die during battle.” Saul also hoped that David would do or say something wrong, so that he could put him to death.

Saul then said to David, “If you fight the Philistines for me and win, you can marry my oldest daughter Merab.” David answered Saul politely and humbly, “This is a big honor. I’m not important enough to become the king’s son-in-law!” David agreed to fight.

To Saul’s disappointment, David didn’t die in battle. In fact, David won the battle, and he returned, expecting to marry Saul’s daughter. But Saul broke his promise, and made his daughter marry another man. David accepted this peacefully.

Then Saul noticed that his younger daughter, Michal, was in love with David. “I can use my daughter to trap David,” thought Saul wickedly, “He might die in battle this time.” Saul said to David, “If you kill one hundred Philistines, you can marry my younger daughter. I want this instead of a bride price.” David agreed. He went into battle and killed not one hundred Philistines, but two hundred! Saul had no choice now but to let David marry his daughter.

Saul was upset. David was now the king’s son-in-law! “He will surely become the next king,” thought Saul, “He will take the throne away from me!” Saul felt unsafe and afraid because he had left God. He had no one to help him and protect him, so he felt he had to protect his throne and his honor. He was jealous of David. How sad and unnecessary it was for him to feel this way! It was different for David: he wasn’t planning to take anything away from Saul. He was willing to just wait patiently and see what God wanted him to do next. He was God’s child, and that was enough for him.

How sad that Israel’s first king had ended up this way, jealous and focused only on himself! How different from David, who was peacefully resting in his God. Would you like to feel like David, close to God and sure of your value as His child? Ask God to help you focus on Him, to have a close relationship with Him.

40. Best Friends

A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.
Proverbs 17:17 (KJV)

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19; 20 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 64

Jonathan was the king's son. He saw that David had become famous, and that God was with him, and he could have become envious just like Saul had. But he didn't. Jonathan was a follower of God, and he liked David and wanted to be a true friend to him.

One day Jonathan went to see David. "My father is telling me and his men to kill you," he warned, "Go, hide, and I will try to change his mind. Then I will let you know what he said." David hid, and Jonathan spoke with his father. "David is a good man. He hasn't done anything against you; please, father, don't sin against him. Don't kill him. He has always worked well for you." Saul listened to Jonathan, and he agreed with what his son said. "David will not be killed," promised Saul. Then Jonathan brought David back, and David continued working for Saul just like before.

Soon after, there was another battle against the Philistines. David led the army and won, and the people began to praise David once more. Saul didn't like this at all; he became jealous again. The next time David came to play music for him, Saul threw a spear at him again. He missed, and David escaped. David went to his house, where his wife Michal was.

Michal said to David, “If you don’t escape now, you will be killed.” She helped him escape from a window, then she got a statue and put it in David’s bed. She covered it with blankets and goat hair, and it looked as if someone was sleeping in that bed.

It wasn’t long before Saul’s soldiers arrived, looking for David. “Oh, he’s sick,” Michal lied. The soldiers left, but soon they were back. “King Saul said we should bring him anyway,” they said. They went in and found the statue in the bed, and that David was gone.

Saul was upset with his daughter. “Why did you lie to me?” he demanded. Michal lied again, “David said that if I didn’t let him go, he would kill me.” Why did Michal lie? We don’t know. Maybe she was afraid of her father. But we do know that eventually, Saul made her marry somebody else. He probably used this lie of hers as one of the reasons why she couldn’t be married to David anymore.

Meanwhile, David escaped to Prophet Samuel’s home. There David enjoyed peace, and he and a group of men sat with Samuel and studied about God’s will. They enjoyed learning these things from Samuel.

Soon Saul found out where David was, and he felt jealous. Saul hadn’t spoken to Samuel anymore, but now David was talking with Samuel! “Go and fetch David, so we can put him to death,” ordered Saul. Saul’s soldiers went off to fetch David, but something wonderful happened: unseen angels met them, and these soldiers began to prophesy. When God’s Spirit worked in their hearts, they listened, and they refused to do anything to David.

Saul sent a second group of soldiers to fetch David, and the same thing happened to this group. They, too, began to prophesy. A third time, Saul sent a group to fetch David, and again, the same thing

happened. Frustrated, Saul said, "I will get him myself." To everyone's surprise, Saul himself began to prophesy on the way!

Was God forcing Saul to prophesy? No; God never forces anyone. His Spirit only works in the hearts of people who let Him in. For a few hours, Saul was open to God's Spirit. He arrived at Samuel's house and removed his kingly robe. Then he lay down all day and listened to Samuel and his students as they spoke about the things of God. All that day, Saul's heart was open to the Spirit of God. This was a wonderful opportunity for Saul to learn about God and to repent of his sins. But sadly, when he thought about all that had happened, he decided he would not repent. He did not want to change. He rejected God's Spirit working in his heart, and he began to feel embarrassed by what had happened at Samuel's house. He wondered: why had he taken off his kingly robes at Samuel's house? Why had he let David go?

David was safe for now, but he didn't trust Saul anymore. He went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done wrong? Why does your father want to kill me?" Jonathan said, "David, after what happened to my father in Samuel's house, he won't want to kill you. You're safe now." But David insisted, "No, he will change his mind. I'm not safe." Then David and Jonathan made a plan so that they would get to know how Saul really felt about David. They also made a covenant together for the second time, promising to always be friends, and to be kind to each other's families.

The next day, it was time for the new moon feast. David and Jonathan agreed that David would not attend the feast, even though Saul expected him to. They would see how Saul would react. The first night of the feast, Saul didn't say anything. But the second night, Saul

asked Jonathan about David. “Oh, Father, he asked for permission to spend time with his father’s family.”

Saul became really angry. He could see that Jonathan was protecting David. “Jonathan, do you realize that as long as David is alive, you will never become king? Bring him here now, so we can put him to death!” Saul said angrily. Jonathan tried to change his father’s mind, but it only made Saul angrier. Saul was so angry, in fact, that he threw a javelin at Jonathan, his own son, because Jonathan was on David’s side. Jonathan was so upset that he didn’t eat anything that day.

The next morning, Jonathan went outside to shoot arrows. He and David had agreed that this is what he would do. He shot his arrows, then he told his servant, “Go and get my arrows. Look, the arrow is farther away. Can you see it?”

David was hiding nearby. He heard these words, farther away, and he knew that Jonathan was trying to tell him, my father is far from you in his heart. You need to go farther away to save your life. Both David and Jonathan were heartbroken. As soon as Jonathan’s servant left, David came out of his hiding place. He bowed himself three times to Jonathan, showing respect and gratefulness towards his friend. They both cried and said good-bye. Jonathan assured David, “Go in peace. We have both promised in the name of the Lord, that He will be between us and our children.” Then Jonathan returned to the city, and David left.

David and Jonathan were best friends. They were kind, loyal and faithful to each other. They were able to have this kind of friendship because they were both close to God first. Would you like to have good, trustworthy friends? Ask God to help you be this kind of friend.

Ask Him to help you know Him as a true friend, so that you can then be a good friend to others.

41. David's Lack of Faith

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.
Hebrews 12:2 (KJV)

1 Samuel 21, 22 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 64

David was sad and afraid. Where could he stay? Where would he be safe from King Saul? He decided to go to the city of Nob. This is where the Tabernacle was, and where High Priest Ahimelech lived with his family. Many years ago, the Israelites had moved the Tabernacle from Shiloh to this city called Nob.

High Priest Ahimelech greeted David kindly. "What brings you here, David? Why are you alone?" he asked. It seemed strange to see David alone, without any of his soldiers. Something must be wrong, he thought.

Yes, something was wrong, but David was too scared to tell Ahimelech the truth. Instead, he decided to lie, "The king sent me on a secret errand, that's why I'm passing through here." David's men were hiding away, and they were all really hungry. They'd been walking for hours. David hoped he would be able to get food for them. "Have you got five loaves of bread for me and my men?" David asked.

Ahimelech answered, "The only bread we have is the one that's inside the Tabernacle." This was holy bread, dedicated to God's service. But since David and his men needed food, and it was the only food available, the high priest let David take it. Then David

asked, “Have you got any swords?” Ahimelech answered, “The only sword here is the one that belonged to Goliath. We’ve been keeping it here. You can take it.” David gladly took it, then he quickly left. As David left, he noticed that someone had been watching and listening to everything: it was Doeg, an Edomite who was the leader of King Saul’s shepherds. He hoped Doeg wouldn’t cause any trouble.

Yet David’s lie did cause trouble. David should never have lied to Ahimelech. If the high priest had known the whole truth of what was happening, he would have been able to do things differently. He didn’t know that Saul wanted to kill David, and that David was running away.

David continued escaping and lying to others on the way. He tried to find safety in the land of King Achish, a Philistine king. But soon King Achish found out that David had been the one to kill Goliath. “If David killed Goliath, then I should kill him!” thought King Achish. David heard that this king wanted to kill him. He was afraid, but instead of asking God for help, David lied again: he pretended to be crazy. He drooled and acted very strangely. “Oh, he’s ill and crazy,” the people said, and they left him alone, and David was able to leave that land. Why did David feel the need to deceive others and lie to them? Why was he so afraid, when he had God’s presence and protection? Didn’t he remember that Samuel had anointed him?

Now David fled to the cave of Adullam. His parents and brothers soon heard where he was, and joined him. They didn’t feel safe from Saul, either. By now, David’s family was sure that David would become the next king. Four hundred other men joined David in the cave, too. They were unhappy with Saul, or they felt troubled because they were going through some kind of problem. Some of them owed money and didn’t know how they would pay it back. All these men

wanted David to be their leader, because they could see that the Spirit of God was with him.

David didn't stay long in the cave of Adullam. A prophet warned him to flee, so he went to the forest of Hareth. Just after David left the cave, Saul and his soldiers arrived. When Saul realized that David had escaped, he was angry. "How did David know that I would come looking for him?" Saul asked angrily, "Who told him?"

Now Doeg, the Edomite who had seen David in the Tabernacle, decided to tell his own lie. He hoped that King Saul would like him and treat him well, so he said, "It was probably the high priest who told David that you would come after him. I saw him at the Tabernacle. The high priest even gave David the sword of Goliath!"

Of course, all of this information was twisted. It was not the real truth. Saul asked his men to bring Ahimelech the high priest to him. Ahimelech was confused. He said to Saul, "I didn't know that David was hiding from you. But, Saul, isn't David one of your best soldiers? Wasn't he doing a secret task for you?"

Saul answered angrily, "You're lying! You're against me, and you're helping David! Now we will kill you and your whole family." He ordered his men to kill Ahimelech, but none of them moved. The soldiers were horrified at the thought of killing the high priest. Also, all the men in Ahimelech's family were priests, too. How could they kill God's chosen priests? They couldn't, and they refused to do it.

But Doeg didn't care about priests; he was an Edomite, not an Israelite. "I'll do it," he offered. Then he killed Ahimelech and his whole family. He also went to the city of Nob and killed every single woman and child in Ahimelech's family, as well as their animals. Saul hadn't told him to do this, but he did it. All in all, he killed eighty-five

priests and their families. Now Israel had the Tabernacle and the ark, but they had no priests.

The whole of Israel was horrified. How could Saul have been able to do something like this? This was not the king that they had dreamed of having!

Only one man from Ahimelech's family escaped, a priest called Abiathar. He went to where David was hiding, and told him what had happened. David felt terrible. "I have caused the death of all your family," he said sorrowfully, "Stay with me; I will protect you."

David realized that his sin of not trusting in God had led him to lie, and this sin had led to the death of Israel's high priest and his whole family. It filled him with sorrow. When we lack faith in God, it not only affects us; it affects the people around us. Now David knew he needed to be even closer to God than before, so that this would not happen again.

Would you like your faith in God to grow? Would you like to be able to trust Him, even when you are going through problems? Remember, Jesus is "the author and finisher of our faith" – He's the one who produces this faith and gives it to us. He will gladly give it to you if you ask.

42. David Spares Saul's Life

The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 1 Samuel 24:12 (KJV)

1 Samuel 23, 24 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 65

While David was hiding from King Saul, he found out that the Philistines were attacking the town of Keilah in his land, Judah. He asked God, "Should I go and save Keilah?" God said he could. Then David asked again, because his men were afraid to go. Once more God answered, "Go to Keilah; I will deliver the Philistines into your hand."

David and his men saved the people of Keilah from the cruel Philistines. But soon Saul found out where David was, and made plans to catch him and kill him. God told David that the people of Keilah were willing to hand him over to King Saul, even though he had saved them from the Philistines. As soon as he could, David and his men, who were now 600, left Keilah and hid in the wilderness of Ziph, where there was a forest.

Jonathan found out where David was hiding, and he went to visit him and encourage him. "Don't be afraid, my father won't find you," he assured David, "You will be king of Israel, and I will be next to you. My father knows this." The two friends made a covenant with each other for the third time, then David stayed in the forest while Jonathan returned home.

But soon David had to run away again. The people of Ziph told Saul where he was, and David and his men had to hide in the mountains. They found a large cave and stayed there. Saul gathered three thousand soldiers and went looking for David. The search in the mountain was tiring, and Saul needed to rest. He found a cave and entered it alone, and there he lay down to sleep for a while. He didn't know that inside that cave David and all his men were quietly hiding.

They looked at King Saul sleeping, and one of David's men whispered, "God has delivered him into your hand! Kill him!" This was a big temptation for David, but he let the Spirit of God guide him, and he couldn't kill Saul. "I cannot touch the Lord's anointed," he said. He only came close to Saul and cut off a piece of Saul's robe. Then he felt guilty for doing even that.

When Saul awoke from his nap, he got up and left the cave. David called him from behind, saying, "My lord the king!" Then he bowed respectfully to Saul. He said politely, "You were told that I want to hurt you, but now you see that God delivered you into my hand today in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I said I would not touch the Lord's anointed. Look, my father, I took a piece of your robe, but I did not kill you. Yet you've been hunting me to kill me. I will let God judge between you and me, but I will not kill you."

Saul was moved when he heard this. He knew he had been wrong, and that David was right. David's forgiveness and kindness melted his heart, and he cried. He blessed David and said, "You are more righteous than I. You have been good to me, when I was evil to you. You let me, your enemy, go today. May the Lord reward you for what you have done for me today."

Then Saul said something that was hard for him to say, “I know well that you will surely be king. Please promise me that you won’t kill all my children and grandchildren once you are king, so that my family name doesn’t disappear.” David promised Saul that he would not hurt his family. After this, they said goodbye peacefully. Saul returned home, and David remained hiding in the mountains. He felt blessed by the words of King Saul, but he also knew that the king might quickly change his mind and try to kill him again. He felt safer in hiding than going back to his land.

David chose to do things God’s way. When God delivered Saul into his hands, he could have chosen to kill him – this is man’s way of doing things. Instead, he chose God’s way: he forgave him. And in doing this, he received beautiful words of blessing from the king himself. Through David, God gave Saul one more chance to repent and return to Him. Saul rejected this opportunity, but that was his choice. God was still calling him. David was always glad he had chosen to forgive his enemy and let God do the judging instead.

When people hurt us, the best we can do is to be peaceful and forgiving towards them, and trust that God will take care of the situation in the way He knows is best. When someone hurts you, will you remember that God will take care of it? Will you ask Him to give you love, patience and forgiveness towards that person?

43. Abigail's Wisdom

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
Matthew 5:9 (KJV)

1 Samuel 25 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 65

David was still hiding in the mountains when he heard the news that the prophet Samuel had died. Samuel had been a kind, gentle leader to the people of Israel, and they missed him. All his life he had blessed them with his counsel, and he had always pointed them to God. Now the people looked at Saul, the king they had asked for, and they were sorry. Saul was evil and almost like a madman. They didn't feel safe with him. They wished they had just had Samuel as their leader.

Now that Samuel was dead, David felt even less safe. He and his men moved to the wilderness of Paran to hide from Saul. There they found the land of a man called Nabal. This man was very wealthy. He owned many sheep and goats. David noticed that robbers often came to steal Nabal's sheep and to disturb the shepherds. David and his men began to protect Nabal's shepherds and flocks, so that the robbers were no longer able to steal anything.

David and his men ran out of food, so he sent ten of his young men to ask Nabal for food. It was normal for someone who was travelling or away from home to ask for food. Nabal should have been happy to do this for David, especially since David's men had been protecting his flocks. Nabal had more than enough food to share. But he was selfish and unfriendly, and he rudely replied, "Who is David?

What if he is a runaway slave? Why should I share my food with him and his men?" He sent David's men away empty-handed.

When David heard what Nabal had said, he was furious. How could someone be so rude? He decided to kill Nabal and all the men in his household. "Get ready," he commanded his men.

One of Nabal's servants quickly went to tell Nabal's wife, Abigail, what had happened. Abigail was a beautiful woman, and she was also wise. She was completely different in character to her foolish husband. She decided to be a peacemaker. Quickly and quietly, she loaded bread, wine, grain, raisins and cakes of figs onto her donkeys, and asked her servants to take them to David. She rode on her donkey behind them.

When she arrived to where David was, she got off the donkey and bowed down to him. Very respectfully she said, "Blame me for this sin, and please let me speak to you." She continued, "We have nothing against you; my husband is just a selfish and unhappy man. Now God is stopping you from killing needlessly. Please forgive my mistakes and accept this food from us. The Lord will strengthen you, because I know He is with you. And once you become king over Israel, you will be glad you didn't kill anyone here today."

David was moved when he heard Abigail's words. She was right; it would have been terrible to kill Nabal's household just because of anger. What would the Israelites have thought? David had always been good and kind to all Israelites. He was grateful that God was using Abigail to stop him from doing something terrible. He thanked her and blessed her for coming to talk to him. "May God be blessed for sending you to me," he said, "And may you be blessed for your good advice; you have stopped me from killing people today, and you

have saved your household. Go in peace." Then David gratefully accepted the food that she had brought.

Abigail returned home. She found that Nabal had been having a party, and now he was drunk, so drunk that she knew she would have to wait until morning to tell him what had happened. When Nabal woke up the next day, Abigail told him everything. Nabal was shocked and frightened; he hadn't realized that he had been in such danger because of his foolishness. He was so shocked and scared that his heart got sick, and he became paralyzed. He was sick for ten days, and then he died. It's sad that he never asked God, or David, to forgive him. He died without finding peace. David was grateful that he had allowed God to deal with Nabal, and that God had stopped him from killing Nabal's household.[4]

Abigail chose to be a peacemaker, and this saved many lives, as well as David's honor. She will always be remembered as a wise and intelligent woman for what she did that day. We, too, can choose to be peacemakers. Jesus says that the peacemakers will be called children of God. Will you be God's child today? Will you be a peacemaker with His help?

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[4] After Nabal's death, David asked Abigail to marry him. Saul had given his first wife, Michal, away to another man. But then David had married a woman called Ahinoam, and now he was marrying Abigail. In those days it was common for men to marry more than one woman, so they thought it was ok. Sadly, it was never God's plan for men to have more than one wife, and David's family had many problems later on because of this.

44. David Spares Saul's Life Again

Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 (BSB)

1 Samuel 26 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 65

David and his men moved back to the wilderness of Ziph. But it wasn't long before the people of Ziph told Saul that David was hiding there. Saul seemed to have forgotten that David had spared his life in the mountain cave, and he gathered his army to hunt for David again.

Some friendly spies came to warn David, "Saul is coming after you!" What could David do? He decided to quietly go to Saul's camp. Abishai, David's nephew went with him. David and Abishai were surprised when they reached the camp: they found that all the soldiers were sleeping! Not one soldier was awake to protect the camp. King Saul was sleeping. Next to him was a spear stuck to the ground, and a jug of water. Saul's commander in chief, Abner, was sleeping, too. What danger King Saul was in!

Abishai raised his spear and said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand today. Let me kill him now!" But David stopped him, "No, don't kill him; he is the Lord's anointed. God will decide when he will die. Now, let's just take his spear and water, and let's go." Not one soldier saw David and Abishai leaving the camp.

When David and Abishai had climbed up part of the hill, David began to call out loudly to Saul's camp, and especially to Abner, Saul's chief commander: "Aren't you a good warrior, Abner? Why didn't you take care of the king? People came to him who could have killed him. What you have done is not good. Where is the king's spear and water now?"

Saul recognized David's voice, and he called out, "Is it your voice, David my son?" David replied, "Yes, my lord, O king. Why are you chasing after me? What have I done wrong?" Once more, Saul's heart was softened. He said, "I have sinned. I won't hurt you anymore. You have spared my life, and I have been a fool."

David wanted to return Saul's spear and water, but he did not feel safe to go to Saul. "Here is the king's spear! Let one of the young men come and fetch it," David offered, "Today the Lord delivered you into my hand, but I refused to hurt the Lord's anointed."

Saul was deeply touched. This was the second time that David could have killed him, but David had forgiven him instead. He blessed David, "May you be blessed, my son David." Then, once again, he said something that must have been hard for him to say, because he was so jealous of David: "David, you will do great things, and you will be more powerful." After this, Saul and his army returned home, and David and his men returned to their hiding spot.

God, through David, had given Saul one more chance to repent. For at least a moment, Saul's heart was touched at such love and kindness. But sadly, he let Satan take over his mind, and his gentleness toward David did not last long. David knew this, and he still felt that it was not safe for him to return home. But he had the peace of knowing he had treated Saul the way God would have liked him to treat him. How do you treat those who hurt you? Ask God to

give you patience, peace and forgiveness toward them, just like he gave to David that day.

45. Saul's Worst Choice

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 28, 31; 1 Chronicles 10:1-14 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 66

The Philistines declared war against the Israelites. Saul was afraid. He had been so busy hunting David that he had stopped protecting his people from enemy nations. Now the Philistines had gotten stronger, and Saul did not feel confident that he would win.

The evening before the battle, Saul felt sure that something terrible was going to happen. He wished Samuel was alive so he could ask him for advice. He prayed, but he received no answer from God. God could not talk to him, because Saul refused to listen. His heart had never repented, and he had cut off all the people that God had tried to use to reach him: he had ignored Samuel while he was alive, he had killed all the priests, and he had tried to kill David. He had shown in every way that he was not willing to listen to God.

Now Saul did something terrible: he decided to visit a medium and consult her. A medium is a person who communicates with evil spirits. It was difficult to find mediums in Israel because as a young king, Saul had gotten rid of them all. But he found one hidden in a town called Endor. Saul disguised himself so that no one would recognize him, and he took two servants with him to see this medium during the night.

If Saul had trusted and obeyed God, he could have felt safe as Israel's king. But now he was going to get advice from Satan! By doing this, he cut off his last opportunity to reconnect with God.

When Saul arrived, the medium recognized him, even though he had disguised himself. She was afraid, but Saul promised her, "I will not punish you for doing this." Then he asked her, "Bring Samuel up." Could Samuel really be brought to Saul? No; he was dead. Dead people cannot speak or move; they are sleeping until Jesus comes to resurrect them. Instead of Samuel, an evil spirit appeared pretending to be Samuel. He looked, moved, dressed and sounded exactly like Samuel, but he wasn't Samuel.

"Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" asked the evil spirit that looked like Samuel. "I'm worried," answered Saul, "The Philistines are against me, and God won't answer me. I need you to tell me what to do." Satan enjoyed seeing Saul so anxious and worried. He had pushed Saul away from God, and now he made Saul feel worse than ever. The evil spirit said, "Why are you asking me if God has left you already? God will take your kingdom away from you and He'll give it to David, because you didn't obey Him. Also, you will be defeated by the Philistines."

These words were terrible for Saul to hear. The words were true, but they made him feel desperate and without hope. If he had asked God to forgive him, and if he had been willing to listen to the messengers that God sent to him, he would have found help and comfort. But when he came to Satan, he only heard words of condemnation and death.

Saul felt such a heavy weight in anguish and terror that he fell to the ground. The medium was scared. She didn't want the king to die in her home; that would bring her much trouble. "King Saul, I have

done what you asked me to do. Here is some food. Now, please get up and eat something!" Saul refused to eat, but his servants begged him to do what she asked. Finally, he accepted the food that the medium had prepared for him, then returned to his camp. By then it was almost dawn.

Saul was so filled with horror after what he had seen and heard that night, that he could not be a strong leader for his army. And of course, he could not help his soldiers to look to God for help. The Philistines were stronger and killed many Israelites. Saul saw three of his sons, including Jonathan, fall down dead. Then he got wounded, and he knew that his enemies would come for him and torture him. He said to his armor-bearer, "Please, just kill me with your sword, before the Philistines get me." The armor-bearer refused. Saul then took a sword, fell on it, and quickly died. The armor-bearer did the same.

It was a terrible day for Israel. The Philistines had killed many of their men, including their king. They also went into the towns and took their possessions. And they said, "Our idol, Dagon, helped us to defeat Israel today!" God was dishonored that day in the eyes of the Philistines and the Israelites, because Israel's king had chosen to ask for advice from Satan, after ignoring God's counsel for several years. That day, God had to withdraw and accept Saul's choice to do things completely without Him, and the consequences were horrible.

Hope, comfort and help can only come from God. Satan only brings ruin and desperation. Little by little, Saul broke his connection with God, until there was no more that God could do for him. God longs to help us be close to Him, to get to know Him more each day so that we can hear what He wants to say to us. Will you ask God to help you stay connected to Him today?

46. David in Ziklag

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. Psalm 56:3 (NKJV)

1 Samuel 27, 29, 30 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 66, 68

Some time before that terrible battle in which King Saul died, David and his men had moved to the land of the Philistines. David had asked King Achish, the Philistine king, to protect him. This was not God's plan, because the Philistines hated the Israelites. Yet God was patient with David all this time, because David was still trying to worship God.

King Achish was kind to David. He gave David and his men the city of Ziklag so they could settle there. This city was not near the other Philistine towns, so David and his men could worship God and stay away from all the Philistine idols.

Then King Achish realized that King Saul and his army were weak. "Let's attack Israel now," he said, "And let's ask David and his men to join us. The people of Israel don't want him, anyway." David had a big problem now. He did not want to attack Israel; he had been anointed for these people by Samuel! But he also couldn't say "no" to King Achish; it would look really bad, because King Achish had been so kind to David. What could he do? David said something that was not clear: "King Achish, you will know what your servant David can do." He hoped Achish would understand that he couldn't fight against Israel. But King Achish understood that David would join him.

With a horrible feeling, David and his men began marching with the Philistine army on the way to battle against the Israelites. Why

had he looked for protection among Israel's enemies? Why hadn't he just trusted God completely? David knew he had made a mistake, and he was sorry.

God kindly helped David to get out of this mess. God's angels put some thoughts into the minds of the Philistine soldiers, and the soldiers went to speak to King Achish. They said, "David and his men are Israelites. Why are they here? What if they turn against us and help the Israelites in battle? Don't forget that David killed Goliath!"

King Achish liked David and trusted him, but he decided to listen to his men. He kindly and peacefully asked David and his men to return home. How easily God had fixed this very difficult problem for David!

Now David and his men returned to their homes in Ziklag. But something horrible had happened while they were gone: a group of Amalekites had taken all their wives, children and possessions and had burnt down the city! David's men were heartbroken. They said angrily, "We will stone you, David! You brought us here to enemy land! Did you think we would be safe?"

David felt completely alone. His family had been taken away from him, his king, Saul, had driven him away, King Achish had sent him home, and now his men were angry at him. His only friend right now was God, and He prayed to Him. God tenderly comforted him. He used Abiathar the priest to give David a message: "Go, follow the Amalekites. You will be able to get everything back."

David's men were glad to hear what God had said. The six hundred men began to march quickly towards where the Amalekites were. In fact, they marched so quickly that two hundred of the men couldn't keep up. They stayed to rest and take care of everyone's things while the other four hundred men marched on.

As the four hundred marched on, they found an Egyptian man on the ground. He was almost dying from weariness and hunger. They fed him and helped him. He told them, "I was a slave to the Amalekites. I got sick and couldn't keep up with them, so they left me here to die." David said, "Please guide us to where the Amalekites are. We promise to protect you."

With the help of the Egyptian, David's army soon reached the Amalekite camp. They found that the Amalekites were having a huge feast with food and dancing. They were enjoying all the things they had stolen from Ziklag and from other towns. David's men attacked immediately, and they won easily. Out of the thousands of Amalekites who were there, only four hundred escaped, because they got on the backs of camels and rode off.

How happy David's men were to see their wives and children again! Not one person was missing. They gathered everything and began the joyful trip back to Ziklag. Soon enough, they reached the other two hundred men who had stayed back waiting for them.

The four hundred men who had attacked the Amalekites said selfishly, "These two hundred men stayed behind. They should only get back their wives and children, but none of the possessions, because they didn't fight." But David didn't agree. "No," he said, "Everyone will receive the same. We are all part of the same army."

It was a happy group that returned to the ruins of Ziklag. Together they began to rebuild their city as they waited for news from the Philistine battle with King Saul. But this wasn't their land. When would they return to Israel? David hoped it would be soon. As he looked back, he wished he had always trusted God completely and stayed in Israel, and he was grateful that God had been patient and tender with him in his mistakes. This strengthened his faith in God.

Will you go to God when you are scared or worried? Will you trust that He is here to help you and guide you?

47. David the New King

[Be] Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.
Romans 12:12 (NKJV)

2 Samuel 1:1- 5:5; 1 Chronicles 11:1-3 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 68, 69

David and his group arrived in Ziklag and began to rebuild it. Only three days later, a messenger came with terrible news. "King Saul and three of his sons are dead!" he said. This messenger also added, "I helped King Saul die, because he asked me to." He hoped that David would give him a reward for killing Saul. But David was not pleased at all. He asked angrily, "Why weren't you afraid to kill the Lord's anointed?" Instead of rewarding this man, David ordered his men to kill him.

David was truly sad that Saul and Jonathan had died, and he and his men mourned for them until evening. After the time of mourning passed, he asked God, "Should I return to Judah?" "Yes," answered God, "Go to the city of Hebron in Judah."

The people of Judah were glad that David had returned. They anointed him – his second anointing – and accepted him as their king.

The people of Judah hoped that all of the Israelite tribes would accept David as their king, but they didn't. Abner, Saul's army commander, quickly crowned a new king for Israel: Saul's son Ishbosheth, the last of Saul's sons who was alive. Abner was jealous of David; he always remembered when David had taken Saul's spear

and water when all the soldiers were sleeping, and how humiliated that made him feel. He did not want David to be his king.

For two years Ishbosheth was king of Israel and David was king of Judah. Sometimes the armies of both kingdoms would fight: Abner commanded the army of Ishbosheth, and Joab5 commanded David's army. During one of these fights, Abner ended up killing Joab's brother. Joab never forgot this, and he hated Abner.

After a few months, Abner stopped liking King Ishbosheth. "David is stronger and better," he thought, "so now I want to help David to become king of the whole of Israel." He went to David and said, "I will help you become king over all the tribes of Israel." Abner had been David's enemy, but now he and David became friends. David treated Abner kindly and said, "Yes, I will accept your help." But there was one man who was not happy that David and Abner were friends: it was Joab. "Abner killed my brother," thought Joab, "I hate him, and I don't trust him. He shouldn't end up being one of David's important men." Joab called Abner to come to him, and killed him right there.

King David was upset when he heard that Joab had killed Abner. "I don't want the other tribes to blame me for the death of Abner," he said. He arranged a proper funeral for Abner, and made it clear that he had never wanted to kill him. But as for Joab, David decided, "I will not put Joab to death. He did this because of his brother. I will let God decide what will happen to him." When the leaders of Israel saw that David had been kind to Abner, they admired him and liked him.

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[5] Joab was Abishai's brother. Abishai was the friend who helped David when he took Saul's spear and water while he was sleeping. Joab and Abishai were also nephews of David, the sons of David's sister. Abner had killed Asahel, Joab and Abishai's brother.

David patiently continued being king of only Judah, but it wasn't long before others from Israel also wanted him to be their king. They could see that Ishbosheth was not a good king. Finally, two of King Ishbosheth's servants killed him while he was sleeping. These servants hoped that King David would reward them for doing this, but instead, David had them killed. "How could they kill a good man who was sleeping in his own house?" David asked indignantly. He wanted all of Israel to know that he was not responsible for the death of Ishbosheth.

After Ishbosheth died, the rest of the leaders of Israel came to David. "We want you to be our king," they said. Now David was anointed King of Israel – his third anointing. Thousands of joyful people came to watch him being crowned king. David had waited patiently for many years, and now God had opened the way for him to become king of Israel.

David had waited patiently for God to show him when he would become king. All these years, he had spent time getting to know God and learning His will. He had not tried to make himself king. And now, finally, the whole of Israel wanted him to be their leader. We, too, don't need to worry about how to become important. All we need to do is get to know God and spend time with Him. He will place us where we need to be. If we know God, we will be satisfied whether we have high positions or not. Will you spend time with God today, and get to know Him more?

48. King David's Battles

O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Psalm 105:1 (KJV)

2 Samuel 5:6-25; 8; 10; 1 Chronicles 11:4-9; 18; 19; 20. | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 70

All of Israel now accepted David as their king. He decided to move the capital of his kingdom from Hebron to the city of Jebus. But before he could live there safely, he would have to get rid of the Canaanites that lived there, the Jebusites. Because these people were idol worshipers and had long before lost God's protection, David and his commander-in-chief Joab were able to conquer them easily. David soon moved into this city and changed its name to Jerusalem. From then on, the Israelites always called it Jerusalem, the City of David.

The nations around Israel began to see that King David's kingdom was growing strong. The King of Tyre decided it would be best to make friends with David. He said to David, "I will help you so you can build your palace." He sent wood, building materials and workmen, and soon David had a comfortable palace to live in.

Other nations were not so friendly. The Philistines were jealous of David's power, so they decided to attack. David took his men into Jerusalem to safety, then asked God, "Should we face the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hand?" God replied, "Go; I will deliver them into your hand." Encouraged, David took his army and fought against the Philistines, and he won.

But the Philistines decided to try again. They gathered an even larger army, and prepared for battle. Once more, David asked God what to do. God said to him, “This time, don’t go straight to where they are. Go around behind them until you reach some mulberry trees. Then wait. When you hear the sound of marching on the tops of the mulberry trees, you can move. I will go before you to the camp of the Philistines.”

These instructions may have seemed strange, but David trusted God and followed His instructions. The Bible says that God “smote” the Philistine camp: this means that, since they had rejected His invitation to stop sinning, He gave them up – He stopped protecting them and opened a breach, so their enemies (David and his men) were able to do whatever they wanted with them.

Suddenly they heard a very scary sound coming from the tops of the mulberry trees: the sound of marching. This terrified the Philistines, and they ran away quickly. The Israelite soldiers could have just finished the battle there, but they ran after the Philistines and killed them. The Philistines would probably have died or gone far away without the need for the Israelites to kill anyone.

After this, King David and his kingdom enjoyed a time of peace. During this time, he brought the ark into Jerusalem and brought the people back to the worship of God. For a long time, none of the surrounding nations felt like attacking Israel.

Then David fought a few more battles and his army won. After this, several of the nations around them had to pay taxes to David. Then a big battle happened, one that David had never wanted. But after this battle, David’s kingdom ended up owning all the land that God had promised to Abraham.

It all started when David found out that the Ammonite king had died. David called in some servants and said, "I want you to go as messengers to King Hanun, the son of the king that died. Hanun's father was very kind to me when I was hiding from Saul, so I want to send a message of comfort and kindness to him."

Sadly, King Hanun didn't believe that David could be so kind. His men said, "Don't trust David. He sent these men so they can spy on us. He will attack us." In those days, messengers were supposed to be treated well, but King Hanun treated David's messengers terribly. He shaved off half of their beards, and cut their clothes in the middle. The men felt horribly humiliated. Now they didn't have proper clothes to wear, and half of their face was shaved off. Israelite men always had beards; they felt uncomfortable without beards. King Hanun had insulted the Israelite nation by doing this.

Now King Hanun said, "Israel will attack me because of how I treated their messengers. I will invite other kings to join me in battle." He gathered a huge army from the surrounding nations, and soon they fought against Joab's army. Joab encouraged his men, saying, "Have courage. Let's be brave for our people and our God. Let the Lord do what is good in His sight." Joab's army won the battle, but soon King Hanun and his friends attacked again. This time, King David joined in the battle with even more soldiers, and Israel won. After this, the whole region ended up being under Israel and had to pay taxes to King David.

Now every nation around Israel could clearly see that God was with David. "The Israelite God gives them special protection," they noticed. Yes, Israel was strong now, because the people had returned to God according to as much as they understood about God at that time. God had been waiting for this for a long time: He'd been

longing for the Israelites to worship Him and receive His full blessings. Now Israel was enjoying the blessings, and the other nations could see them, too.

God wants the same for us. Can the people around you see that God is with you? Can they learn about Him through you? Ask Him to be with you and use you so that others can get to know Him.

49. Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:
Hebrews 12:28 (KJV)

2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13:1-16:43 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 70

It was time to bring the ark from Kirjath-Jearim to Jerusalem. For many years, the ark had been in the house of a man called Abinadab. It had been there since the Philistines had returned it on a cart.

David set up a tent for the ark, then gathered the leading men of Jerusalem for a special ceremony. Thousands of people gathered to watch this joyful occasion. The ark was taken from Abinadab's home and placed on a new cart. No one covered it. Abinadab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, drove the cart. The men of Israel followed behind, singing joyfully and playing instruments to praise God.

What the people didn't know was that Uzzah was holding unconfessed sins in his heart. We're not sure what his sin was, but among other things, he must have been jealous because his younger brother was walking in front of him. This meant that his younger brother was receiving more honor than he was, even though he was the older brother. His sin was driving God's protection away from

him, and on top of that, the way that they were transporting the ark was already completely wrong.

The Israelites had received clear instructions from Moses on how to transport the ark: it had to be covered and placed on poles, and the Kohathites (a family among the Levites) had to carry those poles on their shoulders. Why had the Israelites chosen a cart? The Philistines had used a cart because they didn't know any better, but the Israelites had no excuse. God's protection was not with the Israelites right then, and Satan saw his opportunity to attack. The oxen shook the cart, and Uzzah saw that it might be a good idea to steady the ark so it wouldn't fall. He stretched out his hand and steadied the ark without even thinking of how holy it was, and he instantly fell to the ground, dead.

The people were shocked. It looked as if God had gotten angry and had struck Uzzah down! But God had not been the one to strike Uzzah; what had happened was that God had not been able to protect Uzzah for a long time, because his sins were separating him from God. Satan could have killed Uzzah long before; there was already a breach, a separation, between Uzzah and God, which left Uzzah without God's protection. But Satan waited for the right time to kill Uzzah – a time when everyone would think that God had done it because He was angry.

Everyone was terrified. David was upset. Why had this happened? David decided to leave the ark in a nearby home and think and pray about what had happened. A man called Obed-Edom lived nearby. He trembled at the thought of having the ark in his home, but he accepted.

For three months, David and the rest of the people thought about how reverently the things of God should be handled. David realized

they had not followed God's instructions at all. He was encouraged when he heard that the home of Obed-Edom was being really blessed since the ark had been placed there.

"We will bring the ark to Jerusalem now, but this time we will do it correctly," announced David. The leaders of Israel gathered once more, and thousands of people watched as the ark, covered, was reverently carried on poles upon the shoulders of the Kohathites. The Kohathites were the descendants of Kohath, one of Levite's sons. They had the special job of carrying the ark. Along the way, they would often stop to offer sacrifices of bulls and calves to God. God had not asked for these animal sacrifices, but David felt he had to do it anyway. And, as God has had to do many times, He overlooked their ignorance and accepted them.

As the ark was carried, the people sang praises to God and played instruments. David wanted the people to focus only on God and not on their king, so he took off his kingly robes and wore a simple white linen ephod. He was so full of joy that he danced and played music on the way. With joyful singing, the ark and the people entered the gates of Jerusalem and placed the ark in the tent that David had prepared for it.

Now David offered more animal sacrifices. Then he blessed the people. He gave them food to eat and grape juice to drink, and the people left feeling happy and grateful. Then David went towards his home. "I want to bless my family and my servants now," thought David.

But before he arrived home, his first wife, Michal (Saul's daughter) met him. Saul had given her to another man, but David got her back when he became king of Judah. Michal had seen him dancing in a simple white ephod, and she didn't like it. She said to

him, “Aren’t you ashamed? You, the king, were dressed in so little in front of all your servants. As a king, how can you do that?”

David felt sad that Michal didn’t care about God’s service. She didn’t think that what had happened that day was so special. He answered her, “I did this before the Lord. He chose me instead of your father, so I will play music for the Lord. And my servants will respect me.” Sadly, Michal missed out on special blessings because she was not interested in the things of God.

The ark was now safely in Jerusalem. David and his people understood how important it was to follow God’s instructions so that He could give them His full protection and blessings. They were ready to worship God, leave all their idols, and follow Him completely. This choice brought them peace and joy. We are also invited to come into God’s hedge of protection. His laws are there to protect us. He wants to bless us and give us life. Will you ask Him today to help you always stay within His hedge of protection?

50. God's Promise to David

For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.
Psalm 84:11 (KJV)

2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 6:31-48; 17 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 70

David and the Israelites had brought the ark from Kirjath-Jearim to Jerusalem, with much rejoicing and celebrating. Now that the ark was finally in Jerusalem, David did all he could to help encourage the worship of God at the Sanctuary. He wanted to bring the people back to God. Since David was a good poet and musician, he wrote several songs, or Psalms. Many of his songs are in the book of Psalms. He wanted these songs to be learnt and sung by all the people, not just by the priests. The people enjoyed singing David's songs, especially during their journeys to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts each year. David also made sure that there was beautiful music during the services at the Tabernacle. He also organized the singers of the Tabernacle. All of these singers were from the tribe of Levi. The main singers were Asaph, Heman and Ethan, but they worked together with several other singers. It must have been wonderful to hear beautiful, organized and well-prepared music during each service.

As the Israelites saw that King David was encouraging the worship of God in His Sanctuary, they began to lose interest in their

idols. It had been many years since the Israelites had truly worshiped God with their whole hearts. Now that they had returned to God and wanted Him in their lives, He was able to bless them and protect them, and the Israelite nation became strong. The surrounding nations noticed this. “Israel is doing very well. They have a good God,” they began to say.

David also had another plan. He called Nathan the prophet and said to him, “I have already built myself a beautiful palace, but the Lord’s ark is still in a tent. I want to build a temple for the Lord.” Nathan thought it was a good idea, and he encouraged David, saying, “Do what is in your heart; the Lord is with you.” He couldn’t think of a single reason why David shouldn’t build a beautiful temple for the Lord. Now Israel was enjoying a period of peace, and what better job could David do than to build God’s temple?

Yet that night, God came to Nathan with a message. God gently said, “Tell David that he will not build my temple.” Was God displeased with David? No, He wasn’t; but there was an important reason why David could not be the one to build the temple.

God continued saying, “I am with David, and I will make sure his family stays on the throne forever.” God would not take the throne away from David’s family the way He had had to do with Saul. But in our time, there is no king of Israel. There is no one from David’s family who is an earthly king right now. Why had God said this, then? He said this because Jesus, the Messiah, would be born from David’s family. And when Jesus comes for us and establishes His kingdom, He will be our king. In fact, Jesus wants to be the king of our hearts right now; He wants to guide us and help us. In Jesus, David’s family will always continue on the throne.

Then God said, “After David dies, his son Solomon will become king and build my temple. David can’t build my temple because he has fought many wars and killed many people. But Solomon will be a man of rest, and he will build my temple.” God is a God of life and peace; He is not a God of death. For this reason, it was best for David, who had killed so many people, to not be the one to build the temple. Yet God wanted David to know that He loved him and would bless him and his family.

Nathan gave David this message from God. David listened, and he was grateful. “I am not worthy, O Lord; why is my family so important that you do all this for me?” David felt humbled and honored that God would keep his family on the throne forever. He could have felt jealous that he would not be the one to build the temple, but he understood and accepted what God was telling him. He gladly worked where God needed him: he established a strong kingdom, brought the people back to the worship of God, and wrote beautiful poems and songs for them. David’s work would make it easier for his son, Solomon, to build the temple later on. David focused on God’s goodness and on God’s promises to him and his family.

God has beautiful promises for you, too. He wants to bless you, help you and use you. Will you ask Him to show you what He would like you to do? Will you be patient and trusting if God’s plans are different from yours? Ask Him to give you faith in His promises to you.

51. David's Loyalty

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour. Proverbs 21:21 (KJV)

2 Samuel 4:4; 9; 23:13-17; 1 Chronicles 11:15-47 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 70, 72

David was loved by his people because he was humble and loyal. When he became King of Israel, he gathered the strongest, bravest men to help him in battle. These men trusted David and respected him because he was humble and respectful to them, even though he was their king.

One time when David's army was at war with the Philistines, David and his men were hiding in the cave of Adullam. David was feeling really thirsty, and they had no water in the cave. The only way to get water was to go to the well at Bethlehem. But this well was far away, and the Philistines were near that well. "Oh, I wish someone could give me water from the well of Bethlehem!" David said. He didn't expect anyone to get water for him. But to his amazement, three of his mighty men decided to get water for David. They walked for forty kilometers (twenty-five miles) and reached the well of Bethlehem. They managed to get water from this well without being seen by the Philistines, and they brought it to David.

David was moved by his men's kind, brave act. But he felt it would be selfish for him to drink this water. They had risked their lives to do this for him! Even though he was thirsty, he said, "I will give this water to the Lord," and he poured it out on the ground. He

willingly waited until he and all his men could drink water together. "David values our lives," the men said to each other, "He will never give us orders just to benefit himself. He cares about us."

There was another time when David's people saw how kind he was. David never forgot his friend Jonathan and the promise he had made to him. One day he called one of Saul's servants, Ziba, to come to him. "I want to show kindness to Jonathan's family. Are any of his family members alive?"

"Yes," answered Ziba, "Jonathan's son Mephibosheth is still alive. He can't walk. He became lame when Saul died. He was a little child, and everyone was trying to escape from the city before the Philistines arrived. His nurse was carrying him, and she accidentally dropped him, and from then on, he has not been able to walk."

"Bring Mephibosheth here," commanded David. Mephibosheth came to see David, but he was scared. He didn't like David at all. "David took my grandfather's throne," thought Mephibosheth. But as soon as he met David, he changed his mind. David treated him kindly. "Don't be afraid. I want to show you kindness because of your father Jonathan," explained David, "I will give you back all the land that belonged to Saul. Ziba and his sons will be your servants and they will care for your land. And you can live with me, and eat from my table every day." Mephibosheth loved David from that day on.

The Israelites heard of the way in which David treated his men and his friends, and they loved David. They were grateful to have such a kind, loyal and humble man as their king. Through David, they were able to better understand that God is a kind and loyal King. This made it easier for them to trust God and truly follow Him. David's kindness came from God. This kindness helped to make David's kingdom stronger, and it brought the people closer to God. Do you

wish to be loyal and kind to others, too? Jesus can help you to be like this, because this is what His character is like. All you have to do is ask Him to do this for you.

52. David Sins and Repents

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Psalm 51: 10-12 (KJV)

2 Samuel 11, 12 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 71

Israel was still at war, fighting against the Ammonites. They had just defeated the Syrians, so the war was going very well. David stayed in his palace while he waited for his army to finish the battle. He took a long nap, then got out of bed in the evening and went to the roof of his palace to look around. Why was David relaxing so much and doing nothing useful, when his men were fighting in battle? David forgot that his kingdom was so successful because God was blessing it. He thought, "We're doing well! My kingdom is strong!" He had stopped holding on to God and depending on Him.

As David walked on his roof, he saw the top of another house nearby. There was a woman taking a bath there. He thought she was very beautiful, and he invited her to come into his palace. He treated her as if she was his wife. But this was very wrong: David was already married, and so was this woman. Her name was Bathsheba, and she was married to Uriah the Hittite, one of David's best soldiers. While Uriah was fighting in battle, David did this terrible thing.

Then Bathsheba found out that she was pregnant. Now David knew he was in trouble. “I will bring Uriah from battle so he can spend time with his wife. Then he’ll think the baby is his,” thought David. But when Uriah came home, he refused to go inside his home. “How can I sleep in my comfortable bed, eat delicious food and spend time with my wife, when all my friends are fighting in battle?” said Uriah. Instead of going home, he slept at the door of David’s palace, with David’s servants. The next day, David tried to get Uriah drunk. He hoped that this way, Uriah would go home and be with his wife. But Uriah did not go home.

Now David thought of another plan, a very wicked one, to get out of his trouble. He sent a letter to Joab, the commander of his army. “Joab, place Uriah right in the front of the battle, and don’t protect him, so that he can die,” wrote David. Joab should have refused to do this horrible thing, but he obeyed David, and Uriah died in battle.

After Uriah died, David married Bathsheba and added her to his many wives. He thought that he was safe from his sin now, and that no one would ever know what he had done. But God knew, and was grieved by what David had done. Some of David’s servants also knew. Soon everyone would know, and the Israelites would lose some of their respect towards David. Some of them would also think that if David could take someone else’s wife, then they could, too.

God sent Prophet Nathan to speak to David. Nathan said to King David, “There were two men. One was really rich and had thousands of sheep. The other was poor and had only one sheep. He raised this sheep in his house like a pet with his children. The sheep slept on his chest and ate from his hand. The sheep was like part of his family. One day the rich man had visitors. He wanted to give them food, but

he didn't want to kill any of his thousands of sheep. Instead, he took the poor man's sheep, killed it, and cooked it for his visitors."

King David felt angry when he heard this story. "That man should die!" he said, "And he should return four times as much as he took!" Nathan said to David bravely, "You are that man. God gave you so much, but you killed Uriah and took his wife." Would David accept these words? Nathan kept on speaking. He wanted David to know what the natural consequences of his act would be, "Now the sword will always be in your home. You will have trouble in your own house."

David listened, heartbroken. He knew that Nathan was right. "I have sinned against the Lord," he said. Nathan was glad that David was repenting. What if David had gotten angry instead? Now God could work through David again. Nathan said, "God forgives you. You won't die. But the child you had with Bathsheba will die, because through your sin you have given God's enemies a chance to speak badly about Him, thinking that He accepts such behavior."

People would look at David and say, "If David could sin like that, then sin is not so bad." Of course, this wasn't true, so God had to allow the natural consequences of David's sin. He had to step back and let Satan attack in order to show the people how deadly sin is.

David and Bathsheba's baby got sick and died. David was heartbroken, but he understood that this was a result of his sin. There were more sad results: David felt uncomfortable correcting his sons when they did something wrong, because they all knew what a terrible thing he had done. His children became more selfish and spoilt after that, and this caused many problems.

God did not protect David from the consequences of his sin, but He fully forgave David and began working through him again. David

was comforted by God's love and forgiveness, and he wrote a beautiful song, Psalm 51, which tells about how sorry he was for his sin, and how God could give him a clean heart again.

God longs to forgive our sins and restore us. He forgave David and made him better. He didn't leave David. He won't leave you and I, either. If you let go of God and forget to trust Him, and that leads you to sin, He will always take you back because His love for you lasts forever. When you repent (turn back to God), you are showing Him that you trust that He has forgiven you, and He will make you a better like He did David. Ask Him to help you stay close to Him today and always.

53. Amnon and Absalom

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. James 1:15 (NKJV)

2 Samuel 13, 14 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 72

David had sinned against God. He had taken the wife of Uriah, and he had made sure that Uriah died in battle so that no one would find out what he had done. But people did find out, and most importantly, God knew what had happened. David realized what a terrible thing he had done, and he fully repented of it. But for many years after, his family had serious problems. This was a consequence of his sin.

After David sinned, he felt bad correcting his sons. How could he tell them that they were wrong, when he had been wrong, too? Slowly he noticed some of his sons becoming selfish, spoilt and evil. Because David had many wives, there was also jealousy among David's many children.

In this story, we will see what happened to three of David's children: Amnon, Absalom and Tamar. Amnon was David's firstborn son, the son of David's wife Ahinoam. Absalom and Tamar both had the same mother: David's wife Maacah, the daughter of the king of Geshur. So even though Absalom, Tamar and Amnon were siblings, Amnon had a different mother than Absalom and Tamar did.

One day, Amnon, did something terrible. He tricked his half-sister Tamar and treated her very badly. What Amnon did to Tamar was

horrible. Everyone thought he should be punished for it, but David didn't do anything.

Absalom, Tamar's brother, was furious at Amnon for what he did, and he was angry at their father, David, for not punishing Amnon. "If our father won't punish Amnon, then I will," he thought angrily. He waited for a chance to do this.

Two years passed, and Amnon never repented of what he had done to his half-sister Tamar. Then Absalom saw his chance to get back at Amnon: he planned a banquet and invited all of his brothers to come. Now that all the brothers were together, Absalom asked one of his servants to kill Amnon, and he did. When the other brothers saw that Amnon was dead, they all got on their mules and galloped away as quickly as possible; they didn't want anyone to kill them! Absalom also fled. He was afraid of what his father would do to him for killing Amnon, so he went to the country of Geshur. The king of Geshur was his grandfather, and there he felt safe.

David was heartbroken that Amnon had died. He had not punished Amnon when he should have, but now he felt he should punish Absalom. "Absalom is not allowed return to Israel now, because he killed his brother," David commanded. For three years, Absalom stayed in Geshur.

Joab, David's army commander, knew that David missed Absalom. Of course, David would always love his son, no matter what had happened. Joab decided to help them get back together. To do this, Joab sent a woman to see David. She told King David a story: "I'm a widow and I had two sons. One day they fought, and one killed the other. Now all my relatives want my son to die for killing his brother. But if he dies, there will be no one left to carry on the

family name." Then King David said to her, "I will completely protect your son. No one should take his life."

The woman then said to David, "May I say something to the king?" "Speak on," said David. The woman said, bravely, "Why are you protecting my son, but you're not letting your own son return? Why are you doing this against God's people? You know that we must all die, and we are all like spilt water that no one can gather up again. Yet God would not take away someone's life; he would find ways to let that person come back to Him."

Now David realized that someone had sent this woman with this message so that he would forgive Absalom. "Tell me", he said to her, "Did Joab send you here with these words?" "Yes," she admitted, "It was Joab's idea. He told me what to say."

David decided to listen to Joab's advice. He called Joab and commanded him, "Go and bring Absalom back." Joab was overjoyed that David would allow Absalom to come back. He traveled to Geshur and brought Absalom home. But King David said, "Absalom cannot come to the king's court, and he will not see my face yet. But he can live in his own home again."

For two years Absalom lived in his house but was not able to see his father, David. Finally, he got tired of waiting. "I want Joab to help me meet my father," he thought. He called for Joab, but Joab didn't come to see him. "I'll get Joab to come now," thought Absalom. He asked his servants to set Joab's field on fire.

Of course, now Joab came quickly to see Absalom! "Why are your servants burning up my field?" he demanded. "I just wanted you to come and see me," answered Absalom, "I want to see my father. Please speak to him." This is how Absalom was; he was just as selfish

as the brother he had killed. Was it necessary to destroy Joab's field just so that he could talk to him?

Joab went to David and asked him to meet with Absalom. Finally, David and Absalom met. They hadn't seen each other for five years. Absalom bowed to his father, and David kissed his son. David was ready to forgive Absalom and to have things as they were before. He had really missed his son and wanted to see him. He also missed Amnon who had died.

Slowly but surely, David was beginning to see the sad results of his sin on his family. God had told him through Prophet Nathan that there would be killing in his family. Now David, and all of Israel, could see that sin really does bring horrible consequences. His only comfort was that God loved him and forgave him. But how much better it would have been if he had always stayed close to God, and never sinned with Bathsheba! It would have saved him and his children so much pain and sorrow. God wants to save you from sin and its horrible consequences. He invites you to come to Him, to stay close to Him and let Him lead you. Will you accept His invitation?

54. Absalom Rebels against David

**The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)**

2 Samuel 15 – 16:19 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 72

Absalom, David's son, had killed his brother Amnon. He had escaped to the land of Geshur, but now he was back in Israel. David forgave him and accepted him again, but Absalom didn't love his father back. He would meet with his father, and he acted as though he wanted to help his father, but he was actually planning to do things that would hurt David.

The people loved David's son Absalom. "He killed his brother, but his brother deserved it," the people said. They thought Absalom was a hero for what he had done, when David hadn't done anything. Absalom sat at the city gate each day, and he would listen to people's problems and give them advice. If anyone wanted to speak to King David about an issue, Absalom would say, "Come and speak to me first." He made people think that he was the only one who could understand their troubles, and the people began to really like him.

They also noticed that Absalom was very handsome. He had long, thick hair. His hair grew so quickly and felt so heavy that every year he had to cut it, and the hair he cut weighed more than two kilograms (5.5 pounds)! Absalom didn't only act and look like a king; he also lived like one. He rode around the city in a chariot with fifty

soldiers running in front, just as if we were a king. David didn't mind what his son was doing. He thought, "It's good that Absalom is loved by the people. He is helping my kingdom. If they love my son, they love me, too."

But sadly, Absalom was not helping his father. He was trying to get the people to choose him as their king, so he could take the kingdom away from his father. Finally, Absalom found a way to start his kingdom. He first went to his father and said, "Let me go to Hebron to keep a promise that I made to God while I was living in Geshur." David thought, "How wonderful that my son wants to worship God!" He blessed Absalom and told him to go to Hebron.

But Absalom had lied. He didn't go to Hebron to worship God. Instead, he took many people with him, and there he made himself king. Soon there were messengers going all over Israel, telling the people, "Absalom is now the king!"

David was heartbroken. His own son was doing this to him! "I have to protect Jerusalem," thought David, "If I stay, then Absalom's men will come and kill many people here just to be able to kill me. If I leave, then Absalom can just settle in the city without killing anyone. I will leave. Whoever wants to come with me, may come with me."

When David left the city, a group of 600 people joined him. They loved David and wanted to help him. Among the group there was a man called Ittai. He was a foreigner, but he and his people had come to Jerusalem several years before. David had protected them, and now they wanted to protect David. "Ittai, you may return home," David said to him kindly. "No, we will follow you and stay with you," Ittai said firmly. Ittai and his people had learnt about God because of

David. They didn't want to go back to their land, where everyone worshiped idols.

Now David saw that the priests and Levites had joined him. They were even bringing the ark with them! David was glad that the priests were with him, but he thought it would be better for them and the ark to be in Jerusalem. He spoke to Zadok, the high priest, and said, "Return the ark to Jerusalem. If God wants me to be back, I will return. It would be better if you and your sons, the priests, returned to the city. If you see that it's safe for me to come back, please send me a message."

David and his group continued walking to the wilderness. They cried bitterly along the way. Then someone told David, "Your best counselor, Ahitopel, is helping Absalom." David was sad. Ahitopel had been a good friend, but now he had turned into an enemy. "Well, I deserve this," thought David, "Ahitopel is Bathsheba's grandfather. He is probably still angry at me for my sin with her. Now he can get back at me by helping Absalom." David prayed and asked God, "Lord, please make Ahitopel give foolish advice to Absalom!"

Now David and his people climbed up a mountain. When they reached the top, David prayed some more. Only God could give him strength and comfort right now. Just then, another of David's good counselors, Hushai, came to him. How could he help David? David said to him, "Return to Jerusalem. Give advice to Absalom that will undo any good advice that Ahitopel gives him." How grateful David was for this good friend! Hushai agreed to do this for David.

After this, someone else came to see David: it was Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth (Mephibosheth was Jonathan's son, who couldn't walk). Ziba brought some donkeys loaded with food for David. David was grateful for all the food, but he wondered why Ziba

was doing this. Ziba said, “My master Mephibosheth stayed in Jerusalem. He is hoping that God will give him back his grandfather Saul’s kingdom.” David didn’t stop to think about whether this was true or not. He decided to just believe Ziba. He thought that Ziba was trying to help him and protect him from Mephibosheth. David said to Ziba, “You can keep all of Mephibosheth’s possessions.” This was exactly what Ziba had been hoping for.

Suddenly another man appeared. It was Shimei, a relative of King Saul, and he hated David. He began to throw stones at David, and shouted lies about David :“You killed the house of Saul! Now God is doing this to you,” he yelled. Abishai was annoyed at what Shimei was doing. Abishai was David’s nephew, and one of David’s best soldiers. He asked David, “Shall I kill this man?” “No,” commanded David, “If my son wants to kill me, then why wouldn’t this man want me to be dead? Leave him alone. God is allowing this. God will see my sadness and make it better.”

David was going through one of the worst moments of his life. His son was against him, he didn’t know if he would get his kingdom back, many of his friends had left him, and he knew that much of this trouble was a consequence of his sin. In all this, he stayed close to God. He trusted that God would help him and comfort him. He prayed and told God his problems, and he knew that God would do what was best for him. Even if much of this trouble was caused by his own sin, he trusted in God’s forgiveness and comfort. He found strength just by knowing that God was with him.

God wants you to stay close to Him always, so you can avoid the pain that sin brings. But He also wants you to know that, even if you have made mistakes, He is waiting for you to come to Him, so He can comfort you and make things better, just like He did with David. Will

you stay close to God? If you see yourself leaving Him, will you return to Him, and ask Him to lead you again?

55. Absalom Dies

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3 (NKJV)

2 Samuel 16:20 – 19:8 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 72

David and his men had left Jerusalem and were hiding in the wilderness. Absalom was glad. How easy it was to enter Jerusalem now that his father wasn't there! There was no one to fight him when he entered the city gates, and no one stopped him when he entered his father's palace. He happily began living in David's palace.

Absalom had a special counselor called Ahitopel. Remember him? He had been David's counselor before, but now he had betrayed David and was helping Absalom instead. Ahitopel thought, "I have to make sure that Absalom never, ever makes peace with his father again. If he does, I will be killed, because I am now David's enemy." He gave Absalom some very evil advice. After Absalom followed this advice, everyone was sure that he would never make friends with his father again.

Then Ahitopel said, "Gather an army so that they can kill only David. Let the rest of David's people return to Jerusalem alive." Absalom told Hushai, David's friend and counselor, what Ahitopel had suggested. Absalom didn't know that Hushai was still David's friend. Hushai had promised David, "I will give Absalom advice that will help David, not Absalom."

Now Hushai said to Absalom, “Ahitopel’s advice isn’t good. Your father has really good soldiers, and he’s hiding. Your men will never find David, but they will be attacked by David’s men. Why don’t you gather a large army and lead it yourself? Your army will be much larger than David’s army.” Absalom said, “I like this idea. I will follow your advice.” He didn’t know that Hushai’s advice was bad for him.

When Ahitopel heard of Absalom’s new plan, he was afraid. He knew that if Absalom did things the way that Hushai was suggesting, David would win. “If David wins, I will get killed, because I turned into his enemy,” thought Ahitopel. He could have repented and asked God to forgive him and help him, but instead, he hanged himself and died that night. Ahitopel had been a smart counselor, but sadly, he had never asked God to be his counselor, and he ended up losing his life.

Absalom began gathering his army. Meanwhile, the priest’s sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, went to tell David what Absalom’s plan was. Before they reached David, someone saw what they were doing and told Absalom. Absalom’s servants began looking for these two young me, to kill them.

Quickly, Jonathan and Ahimaaz reached a house where they found help. The woman of that house helped them to hide. She let them go inside her well, then she covered the well with a cloth, and put ground grain over it. No one would ever know that someone was hiding under that grain. Absalom’s men were not able to find them, and soon Jonathan and Ahimaaz were able to get away. They reached David as soon as they could, and they told him, “Cross the Jordan quickly!”

David and his men had just enough time to cross the wide Jordan River that night. After they crossed, some rich men who knew David

brought food for the whole group. Even in all this trouble, God was giving David and his people everything they needed.

Now David's group prepared for battle. David's army was smaller than Absalom's army, but he had well-trained men. "Please, whatever you do," David begged his soldiers, "Don't kill my son Absalom!"

The two armies battled in a forest. David's men were much more skillful than Absalom's men. Soon Absalom realized that his army would lose. He began to flee on a donkey, but his long, thick hair got caught in a branch. His donkey galloped away, and Absalom was left hanging helplessly on the tree.

Joab found out that Absalom was stuck in a tree. He was angry at Absalom for many reasons. What would he do now? Absalom had lost God's protection; he had purposely rejected God by all the bad things he had been doing. Now Joab could do whatever he wanted with Absalom. Joab could have done things God's way and brought Absalom alive to David so that they could restore their relationship, but he didn't. He killed Absalom right there, then covered him with stones. In his sinful ignorance, he thought it was the best thing to do.

Now that Absalom was dead, the battle was finally over. David should have been relieved that he could return home, but he was heartbroken that his son was dead. Instead of thanking his soldiers for their hard work, he cried. As the soldiers entered the city of Mahanaim where they were all staying, they could hear King David crying, and they entered quietly, as if ashamed. They did not come in rejoicing like they usually did when they won a battle.

Joab went to David and said to him sternly, "These soldiers protected you and saved your life! You're making me think that if Absalom was alive and all of us had died, you would have been ok with it. Now, please go and speak kind words to your soldiers. They

won't want to stay with you if you treat them like this!" David knew that Joab was right. He was grateful for all the help he had received from his men. He went to them and spoke kind, encouraging words to them, even though his heart was breaking because his son was dead.

David was grateful for the brave, faithful friends who helped him, but he was also going through one of the saddest times of his life. Right then, he found comfort and strength in God. When difficult things happen to you, remember that God is right there, ready to comfort you and strengthen you. Will you go to Him today, and ask Him to give you peace and comfort?

56. David Returns to his Kingdom

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him I will trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.
2 Samuel 22:2-3 (KJV)

2 Samuel 19:9 – 22:51.

The trouble with Absalom was over. David still hadn't returned home to Jerusalem. He was waiting for the tribes to invite him to be their king again. But for some time, no message came, because the tribes could not agree with each other. Finally, David sent a message to the priests in Jerusalem. In his message, he said, "Ask the leaders of Judah why they haven't called me back. They are my tribe."

David also told them that he wanted to have a new commander for his army. Joab had killed Absalom, so he would not be commander any longer. "I would like Amasa to lead my army," David said. Amasa had been the leader of Absalom's army. By inviting Amasa to become his commander-in-chief, David was showing forgiveness, and he was trying to bring everyone together again.

The men of Judah liked David's message, and they called him home. "We want you to be our king," they said to him. A whole group

from Judah and Benjamin came to meet David. They brought a boat so he could easily cross the Jordan and return home.

Now that David was king again, someone came to see him. It was Shimei, the man who had thrown stones at him on the mountain and had said horrible things against him. He bowed down to David and begged for his forgiveness. “I was wrong!” he said. David kindly forgave Shimei.

Then someone else came to see David: it was Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son. Mephibosheth had been so sad when David left, that he hadn’t worn shoes, changed his clothes or trimmed his beard since David had left. David asked him, “Why didn’t you come with me when I left?” Mephibosheth answered him, “My servant Ziba lied to me. He said he would go to see you himself, because I can’t walk. Then he told you lies about me. I know God is with you, and that you will be able to decide what to do with us.”

David looked at Mephibosheth. It really did seem like he had been sad that David had left. He also remembered that Ziba had said, “Mephibosheth is hoping he can get his grandfather’s kingdom now that you’re gone.” Who was telling the truth?

David wanted peace. He decided, “I had promised Ziba that he could keep all your land. Now, why don’t you divide the land between both of you?” Mephibosheth accepted David’s decision. “Ziba can take all the land,” said Mephibosheth, “I’m just glad that you arrived home in peace.”

Now that David was returning home, the other tribes felt jealous. They came and asked, “Why did only the men of Judah bring David home? He is our king, too!” The men of Judah and the leaders of the other tribes of Israel argued back and forth over who David belonged to. While the tribes were arguing, a man called Sheba decided that he

could be king instead of David, and he made himself king. All the tribes joined him, except for Judah. The people of Judah stayed with David.

David's new commander, Amasa, prepared to fight against Sheba, the new king. But before he could do anything, Joab came and killed Amasa. Joab thought, "Amasa helped that rebel Absalom. How can he be commander-in-chief now?"

Now that Amasa was dead, David's army followed Joab. Joab and his army began to look for Sheba. "He's hiding in a city called Abel!" someone told Joab. Quickly, Joab's army went to that city and surrounded it. Now no one from this city could go in or out. No one would be able to get food or water. The people were afraid. They didn't know why Joab's army was surrounding them; they only knew that if the army didn't go away, everyone in the town would die.

A wise woman from the town called to Joab and said, "Can I speak with you?" Then she asked him, "Why are you doing this? You will destroy a whole city!" Joab told her, "We just want Sheba, because he has acted against the king. We don't want to hurt anyone else in the city." Now that the people of the town understood what Joab wanted, they found Sheba and killed him, and Joab and his army were able to return to Jerusalem.

Just when David felt that his kingdom could begin to enjoy some peace, a famine began. The famine lasted three years. David asked God, "Why is this happening?" Was this a result of his sin as well? God answered him, "This is happening because of something Saul did many years ago; he killed the Gibeonites, when the Israelites had promised to never kill them." The famine was a natural consequence of Saul's sin, and it was affecting David and his people now.

David went to speak to the Gibeonites. “What can I do for you? How can we fix our problem with you?” he asked them humbly. The Gibeonites replied, “We don’t want any silver or gold. We just want you to give us seven of Saul’s sons or grandsons, so that we can hang them.”

Would God have wanted the problem to be solved this way? Of course not! But to David, this sounded like a sensible plan. He gave seven of Saul’s sons and grandsons to the Gibeonites, and they killed them. But David kept Mephibosheth safe, because of his promise to Jonathan. How would God have solved this problem? Why didn’t David even think to ask? David understood so much about God, but when it came to things like these, he thought he was doing what was best. How sad God must have felt!

How many problems David’s kingdom had been facing! David understood that many of these problems were a result of his own past sins, or the past sins of others. Soon after all this, David and his people finally enjoyed a time of peace. David could see that God had been with him even when things were not going well. He knew he could trust God even in difficult times.

When bad times come, will you hold on to God and trust Him? Will you praise Him and thank Him for being with you? When bad things happen because of your own bad choices, or because of the wrong decisions of others, will you go to God for comfort and peace? He wants to give this to you.

57. Men of Honor during the Time of David

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Ephesians 6:10 (KJV)

1 Chronicles 4:9- 10; 11:10-47; 20:4-8; 2 Samuel 19:31-40; 21:16-22; 23:8-39;

King David was a blessing to Israel because he helped the people to leave their idols and to come back to God. There were hundreds, or even thousands, of families who turned to God during that time and chose to follow Him. We don't know all of their stories, but the Bible does tell us about a few of these brave men of faith during David's time.

One of these good men was Barzillai. He lived on the other side of the Jordan River. When David had to hide from his son Absalom, Barzillai was one of the people who gave him food. When David was finally able to return home, Barzillai crossed the Jordan River with him to make sure he crossed safely. David was grateful to this kind, generous friend. He wanted to reward him somehow. Barzillai was already eighty years old, and David gave him the kindest offer he could think of: "Barzillai, come and live in Jerusalem, and eat at my table. Let me take care of you." But Barzillai answered, "Thank you for this great honor, but it would be better if I stayed in my own city, since I'm already very old. Why doesn't my relative Chimham go with

you instead?" David agreed. He blessed Barzillai, then took Chimham with him to Jerusalem.

David had thirty strong, brave men in his army. They were called "David's mighty men", and their acts of bravery and strength amazed the people. Abishai was the leader of David's three mightiest men. Abishai was also David's nephew, Joab's brother, and David's close friend. Abishai was such a strong man that one time he killed three hundred enemy soldiers with just a spear!

He also saved David's life: David was already older and weaker, but he was fighting against a Philistine giant, a man just as tall as Goliath had been. The giant was strong and fierce, and David almost died while fighting him. But Abishai came, helped David and saved his life. All in all, David and his mighty men ended up defeating five Philistine giants. One of these giants had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot! Did young David somehow know that he would defeat these five giants when he picked up the "five smooth stones" out of the brook before defeating Goliath with only one stone?

After Abishai saved David's life, he and the other men begged King David, "Please don't fight in battle anymore! You are the light of Israel; we don't want you to get killed!" The men thought that even though David wasn't such a strong warrior anymore, he was still a strong spiritual leader. They saw that David always helped the people to look to God for help and guidance. They loved him for this, and didn't want to lose him.

Adino de Eznite was another one of David's mighty men. He was so strong that, like Abishai, he was able to fight with only a spear instead of a sword, and he killed eight hundred enemy soldiers with that spear.

Another mighty man, Eleazar, fought against the Philistines all by himself, after all the other soldiers had run away. He fought so hard and became so tired that his hand cramped and it got stuck around his sword. Thanks to that cramp, his sword didn't fall off his hand, and he was able to finish the battle. God gave him the strength he needed that day.

Beniah, another mighty man, once fell into a pit while it was snowing. A lion attacked him in the pit. Any other person would have died, being stuck in a freezing pit and being attacked by a ferocious lion. But God gave Beniah strength, and he did what seemed impossible: he killed the lion. Beniah was so brave and strong that David asked him to become one of his bodyguards.

Then there was Shammah, another mighty man. During a battle, he found a pile of lentils on the ground. Armies always liked finding food, and of course, the Philistine soldiers wanted to take the lentils away from him. All the other Israelite soldiers fled, but Shammah stood firm and fought the Philistines all by himself. God gave him victory that day; he was able to keep the lentils!

These mighty men did what they understood they had to do. They didn't get discouraged, and they never ran away when things got difficult. Because of this, God was able to strengthen them and to help them do great things.

Why did these good men kill so many people? Because from Joshua's time, the Israelites had decided that, to send the idol-worshiping people away from their land, they needed to be the ones to kill them. Since then, this is what the Israelites understood was correct. This is not how God had originally planned it, but He worked through them anyway. Since God could no longer protect the nations that had rejected Him, He had to allow the Israelites to do what they

wanted with them. These nations would have died one way or another, because God was no longer protecting them.

Remember, too, that killing was not the only custom that the Israelites had which was different to what God would have wanted: the Israelites owned slaves and often had many wives, and they didn't realize how wrong and hurtful this was. God still patiently worked through them as best as He could, because they were sincerely doing what they understood was best, and they wanted to follow God. It would take more time for the people to understand God's true character and ways through the prophets, and later, through Jesus, the Messiah.

The last honorable man in this story is Jabez. He was not a soldier, and he was not a mighty man, but he was full of faith in God, and he wanted to follow God and do His will. Jabez means "sorrow", but he was one man who did not bring sorrow to God or to his family. He had brothers who were not good men, but he decided that he would be different. He refused to follow their bad example.

Jabez prayed to God, and pleaded, "Please bless me, make my territory larger, be with me and protect me from evil!" God heard this beautiful prayer of Jabez, blessed him and gladly gave him what he had asked for.

God is looking for men, women and children who are willing to follow Him fully and to be used by Him. He did wonderful things through Barzillai, Jabez and David's mighty men. He wants to do wonderful things through you. Would you like to be one of God's mighty men, or mighty women? Ask Him to help you get to know Him today, and to come close to Him.

58. A Plague in Israel

For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. Psalm 44:6-7 (KJV)

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 73

David had returned to Jerusalem. He was king once more. After some time, David began to wish that he had more power. He stopped focusing on God's power, and on how God could protect his kingdom no matter how small his army was. Instead, he began to look at how much human power his kingdom had. He wanted to make his army bigger, and for this he needed to know how many strong men there were in his kingdom. "We are going to take a census of Israel," David decided, and he asked Joab to be in charge of this task.

Joab knew this was not a good idea. If David made his army bigger, then what would the other nations see? Would they look at Israel's powerful God, or would they only see a huge army? Joab said to David, "Why are you doing this? Why will you cause Israel to sin?" But David wanted to do it anyway, so even though Joab was not happy, he began to number the Israelites.

Before the census had even been completed, David began to feel guilty. He knew he shouldn't have done this. "I have sinned," he confessed to God, "Please remove this sin from me. It was not good to do this." The next morning, God sent Prophet Gad to speak to David. David's sin would leave Israel unprotected. Gad said to David, "God

says you can choose between three years of famine, three months of enemy attacks, or three days of pestilence."

David said, "I am in deep trouble. Let me fall into the pestilence. I'd rather God give me the consequences, and not man, because God is merciful." The plague began, and seventy thousand people died. Why did God let so many people die, when it had been David who had wanted this census? The truth is that the people had felt just like David. They had enjoyed feeling safe because of their large army. They had also stopped depending on God for their protection. This is why, when the pestilence came, He could not protect them.

David then saw the angel of God standing between earth and heaven and holding a sword over Jerusalem. No one was dying from this sword; they were dying from a plague. The angel wasn't killing anyone with the sword; he was just holding it up, pointing to Jerusalem, to show that Jerusalem was receiving a judgment from God for its sins. What is this judgment? It is when God withdraws because of the people's sins; He was going to stop protecting Jerusalem, and Satan would be free to send a plague upon it.

King David and the elders were all dressed in sackcloth to show how sad and repentant they felt. They bowed to the ground, and David pleaded to God, "Wasn't I the one who commanded the people to be numbered? What have the people done? Please bring the plague on me and my house, not on your people." But the people had joined David in this sin, too; they had also felt smug and safe by looking at the power of their army. They had also stopped trusting in God for their protection.

After David's prayer, he saw that the angel was standing on the threshingfloor of a man called Ornan6. A threshingfloor is a flat, outdoor area where farmers would separate grain. This spot was very special, because hundreds of years before, Abraham had offered his son Isaac right there. Now God was giving David a chance to give an offering in this special place. David was too afraid to go to the Tabernacle right then, so God invited him to come to this spot. Prophet Gad told David, "Go to Ornan's property and build an altar to the Lord."

Meanwhile, Ornan didn't know what was happening. He was threshing wheat with his sons, and suddenly they saw the angel standing on his threshingfloor. This frightened them! Ornan and his four sons ran and hid; they didn't know what to do. While they were still hiding, Ornan received another surprise: King David came into his property! When Ornan saw King David, he left his hiding place, went to David and bowed down. He politely asked David, "Why have you come here?" King David responded, "I came to buy this threshingfloor from you, to build an altar here so that the plague can be stopped."

Ornan answered, "I would like to give it to you as a gift. I also have oxen you can offer." David was thankful for Ornan's kindness, but he answered, "I want to pay the full price for it. And I will pay for the oxen as well. I don't want to offer God something that cost me nothing." Then David paid fifty shekels of silver for the land and the oxen. He built an altar and offered the oxen there and prayed. God accepted the offering and sent fire from heaven to burn it up.

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[6] The Bible also calls him Araunah.

Was it necessary for David to kill two oxen so that God could forgive him? God says in other places in the Bible that He doesn't really want animals to be killed. God didn't really want this sacrifice, but He asked for it anyway because He knew that the people wanted it; the people felt that they had to sacrifice something so that God could forgive them. God hoped that, by letting them offer this sacrifice, they would believe He accepted and forgave them, and He could change their hearts, so that no more sacrifices would be necessary.

After David's sacrifice, God stopped the plague in Israel. David saw that God commanded the angel, and the angel put his sword away. David was relieved and grateful.

Our safety and protection can never come from men. The size of an army doesn't mean anything if God is not with them. In Israel's history, God had used small armies, weak armies, and even women to give victory to His people. David did not need a bigger army.

Now David and his people could depend on God again, and stop worrying about numbers and power.

What makes you feel strong and safe? Do you trust in your talents and abilities, and in the things you have? Or do you trust in God's care and guidance? It is easy for us to forget how much we need God, and how little anything else can help us. Ask God today to protect you and guide you. Ask Him to make you feel safe and sure, and to help you stop depending on things that won't really help you.

59. Solomon Becomes King

For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.
1 Chronicles 29:14 (KJV)

1 Kings 1, 2; 1 Chronicles 28, 29 | Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 73

David grew old. He was now seventy years old, and had to be in bed most of the time. It was clear that soon he would die, and there would be a new king in Israel.

David already knew which of his sons would be the next king: God had chosen Solomon. But one of David's sons, Adonijah, didn't care what God had said; he decided he would make himself king. Hadn't he learnt anything from his brother Absalom? Didn't he know that making himself king, without his father's blessing, would be a disaster? No, Adonijah did not think about these things. He had not learnt to think about the consequences of his actions. Sadly, his father David, after sinning with Bathsheba, had felt he could not correct his sons or teach them what was right, so Adonijah had grown up spoiled and selfish.

Adonijah found two important men who wanted to help him become king: Joab the army commander, and Abiathar the high priest. These men had been close to David before, but now they betrayed David and joined Adonijah. Adonijah prepared a big feast outside the city. He invited Joab, Abiathar, all his brothers except for Solomon, and some other men to come to this feast. Once they were

together, Adonijah sacrificed some sheep and cattle, and made himself king.

But there were some men who had not been invited to Adonijah's feast. Adonijah had not invited Prophet Nathan, Zadok the other high priest, Benaiah the bodyguard, David's mighty men, nor his brother Solomon. Why not? Because Adonijah knew that these men would not agree with what he was doing, and they would try to stop him.

As soon as Prophet Nathan found out what Adonijah was doing, he told Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Bathsheba quickly went and told king David, "You said that Solomon would be the next king. But now Adonijah has crowned himself king without telling you. Joab and Abiathar are with him!" Then Prophet Nathan arrived and told King David the same story.

David said, "God chose Solomon to be the next king. I will make sure that he becomes king." So David called Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah. He said to them, "Please make Solomon ride on my mule. Anoint him king and blow the trumpet to announce it to the people. Then Solomon can sit on my throne. He will be king over Israel and Judah."

David's friends were happy to do this. They followed all his instructions and made Solomon king. When they blew the trumpet and cried out "God save King Solomon!" all the people were glad.

But someone was not glad when he heard what was happening: it was Adonijah. Now he was afraid. He was sure Solomon would want to kill him, so he ran to the Tabernacle for protection. He went to the altar of sacrifice and held onto the horns of the altar – this is what the Israelites did when they thought their life was in danger. "Please don't kill me!" he begged his brother. King Solomon decided to forgive his

brother. “As long as you don’t cause trouble, no one will hurt you,” he promised.[7]

After Solomon became king, David gathered all the leaders of Israel together to give them one last message. He told them, “God has chosen my son Solomon to be king. Please support him. Solomon will build the temple for our God.” David continued saying, “I have already made the plans, and I have saved gold, silver and other building materials.” Then David encouraged the leaders of Israel, saying, “Please keep God’s commandments, so that He can bless you, and you can live in this land forever.”

Then, in front of all the leaders, David said to Solomon, “My son, you need to know God and serve and follow Him with all your heart. God has chosen you to build His temple. He will be with you and help you to do it.”

Now David looked at all the men who were gathered there, and he asked them, “Who is willing to give their lives to God today?” All of them said they would. Then each man there decided to give gold, silver, brass and precious stones for the building of the temple. No one asked them to do this; it was their own decision, and they were joyful as they brought their offerings.

David was full of joy. He had written the music for the worship services, he had helped to gather the building materials, and now he was dedicating all the leaders to God. David and the whole group of men praised and thanked God. Then David prayed, “Thank you for all of this. Everything we have came from you. Whatever we give you comes from all that you have given to us.”

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[7] Sadly, after David died, Adonijah behaved wickedly, and Solomon put him to death. The same thing happened to Joab. And as for Abiathar, he was allowed to live, but Solomon did not let him be a priest any longer.

Just before David died, he spoke to Solomon one last time. “Follow God and keep His law, and you will do well in everything you do,” David said, “God promised that if my children followed Him, our family would always be on the throne.” Then David sang a beautiful song about trust and faith. He died believing that God loved him and had forgiven him.

Solomon had a lot to think about. God Himself had chosen him to be king. He had been blessed with everything he needed to become a good king for Israel. Everything he had was from God. Would he give back to God some of all that God had given him? Would he follow his father’s advice and be a good king? He could choose now whether to accept what God was offering him to do.

We also have a choice to make. God gives us many blessings each day. Will we give back to Him some of what He has given us? Will you follow God and give your time, money and talents to His work? He is the one who gave you all these things. Ask God to help you see your many blessings, and to help you use them for His glory.

Thematic Index

We have provided this index to help you reference specific stories. The numbers **refer to the stories (not page numbers)** within the book.

Abdon 19
Abel (city) 56
Abiathar 46 59,
Abigail 43
Abimelech 18
Abinadab 30, 49
Abishai 44, 54, 57
Abner 44, 47
Absalom 53, 54, 55
Adino the Eznite 57
Adonijah 59
Ahimelech 41
Ahinoam 43, 53
Ahitopel 54, 55
Achan 4
Achish 46
Achsah 12, 13
Adonibezek 11
Adonijah 59
Adonizedek 7
Agag 36
Ahio 49
Ai 4
Altar 5, 15
Altar, destroy 15, 36
Amalekites 15, 16, 46
Amasa 56
Ammonites 19, 33, 48, 52
Amnon 53
Amorites 7, 11
Angel 15, 20, 46, 58
Anointing 32, 37
Araunah/ Ornan 58
Ark 2, 10, 29, 30, 49, 54
Armor-bearer 35
Arrows 40
Baal 15
Barak 14
Barzillai 57
Bathsheba 52, 59
Beniah 57, 59
Benjamin 24, 32
Bethel 11
Bethlehem 51
Beth-Shemesh 30
Boaz 25, 26
Bochim 11
Bread from the Sanctuary 41
Caleb 8, 12
Camels 46

Cart 30, 49
Census 58
Chariots of iron 11, 14
Chariots, burn 8
Cave of Adullam 41, 51
Chilion 25
Chimham 57
Chord, red 1
Climbing 35
Concubine 24
Covenant 5, 10, 39, 40, 42
Cows 30
Cramped hand 57
Dagon 29, 45
Dan 23
Daughter 19
David 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59
Deborah 14
Defeated, Israel 4
Delilah 22
Dividing the land 8
Doeg 41
Donkey 12, 19, 32, 43, 54, 55
Ebenezer 30
Eglon 13
Egyptian 46
Ehud 13
Eleazer 57
Eli 27, 28, 29
Eliab 37, 38
Elimelech 25
Elkanah 27
Elon 19
Endor, 45
Ephraim 8, 11, 17, 19, 33
Eye, right 33
Famine 56
Five sisters 12
Flax stalk 1
Fleece 15
Foxes 21
Gaal 18
Gad 58
Gate 22
Gaza 22
Geshur 53
Giants 57
Gibeah 24
Gibeonites 6, 7, 56
Gideon 15, 16, 17, 18
Goliath 38
Hanged 55, 56
Hannah 26
Hanun 48
Hail 7
Hair 22, 54
Hebron 8, 47, 54
Helpful Canaanite man 11
Honey 21, 35
Hophni 28, 29
Horses, lame 8
Hushai 55
Ibzan 19
Ishbosheth 47
Ittai 54
Jabesh-Gilead 24, 33
Jabez 57
Jabin 8, 14

Jael 14
Jair 19
Javelin 40
Jawbone of donkey 21
Jephthah 19
Jericho 3
Jerusalem 48, 54, 56, 58
Jesse 37, 38
Jesus 50
Joab 47, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59
Jonathan 34, 35, 39, 40, 45
Jordan, crossing 2, 55, 57
Joshua 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Jotham 18
Judah 11, 21, 33, 56
Jug 44
Kenites 14
Keilah 41
King, Israel asks for 31
Killing of priests 41
Kinsman-redeemer 26
Kirjath-Sepher 12
Kirjath-Jearim 30, 49
Kohathites 49
Lame 51
Left-handed 13
Lentils 57
Levite 23, 24, 30, 49, 50, 54
Lion 21, 57
Maacah 53
Mahlon 25
Manoah 20, 21
Marching 3, 48
Medium 45
Mephibosheth 51, 54, 56
Merab 39
Micah 22
Mice 29, 30
Michal 39, 40, 49
Midianites 15, 16
Mighy Men 57
Millstone 18
Moabites 13
Monument 2, 5, 9, 10, 30
Mount Ebal 5
Mount Gerizim 5, 18
Mulberry trees 48
Mule 53, 59
Musician 38, 39, 49, 50
Nabal 43
Naomi 25, 26
Nathan 50, 52, 59
Nob 41
Obed 26
Obed-Edom 49
Ornan/ Araunah 58
Orpah 25
Othniel 12, 13
Ox goad 13
Passover 2
Peninnah 27
Philistines 19, 20, 21, 29, 30, 34, 38, 39, 40, 42, 45, 46, 48, 51, 57
Phinehas, high priest 9
Phinehas, son of Eli 28, 29
Pillar of cloud 1
Pillars 22
Pit 57
Pitcher 16
Plagues 29, 58

Prophesying 32, 40
Ramah 32
Rahab 1, 3
Reading of the law 5
Rejected as king, Saul 36
Repentance 46, 52
Rock 15, 17, 20, 30
Rooftop 52
Ruth 25, 26
Samson 20, 21, 22
Samuel 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40
Samuel's sons 31
Sanctuary 1
Saul 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45
Saul, sacrifice 34
Shamgar 13
Shammah 57
Shave beards 48
Sheba 56
Shechem 5, 18
Sheep, pet 52
Shekels 23, 58
Shiloh 8, 24, 27
Shimei 54, 56
Silver 23
Simeon 11
Sisera 14
Sling 38
Snow 57
Solomon 50, 50, 59
Sparing Saul 41, 44
Spear 39, 44, 57
Spies, two young men 1
Spring of water 12
Statue 40
Stones, twelve 2
Stones, throw 4, 54
Storm 30
Sun stopping 7
Sword 3, 16, 18, 38, 41, 57, 58
Tamar 53
Temple 50, 59
Tent peg 14
Three hundred men 16
Threshingfloor 58
Thumbs and big toes 11
Timnath-serah 8
Tola 19
Torch 16
Tower 18
Trees, parable 18
Tribes of Reuben and Manasseh 2, 9
Trumpets 3, 5, 13, 16
Tumors 30
Tyre 48
Uriah 52
Uzzah 49
Warrior 3
Water, poured to the ground 51
Weeping 11
Well 32, 51, 55
Widow 53
Wilderness of Paran 43
Wilderness of Ziph 42
Winepress 15
Window 1
Wise woman 43, 56
Zadok 59

Ziba 51, 54

Ziklag 46

The Conquest and THE JUDGES

The Israelites have arrived at Canaan! God tells them, "Enter the land; I give it to you. The Canaanites will be so afraid that they will leave. Also, hornets will come and chase them away." Yet even with all of these promises from God, the Israelites chose their own way of doing things. They attacked and killed the unprotected Canaanites as they took the land for themselves. This was not God's plan, but He worked with them as much as circumstances allowed. Then, once the Israelites were settled in the land, God became their King. He communicated with them through judges. During the time of the judges, the Israelites mostly chose to do things their own way. They finally decided that they wanted a new type of government. "We want a king, like all the other nations!" they declared. Even as the people rejected God's plan, He did not give up on them.

Read the stories of how God reached out to the Israelites in the times of the conquest, the judges, and the first two kings of Israel. See how God blessed those who accepted Him as their Father and guide.

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