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Forward

A nation or an individual who follows the strategies that God set down for the nation of Israel will be victorious in battle.

Throughout this study you will see how God blesses when his commands are followed.

Idolatry seems to always be present when Israel lost a battle.

David fought his battles the way God instructed him.

In each instance he (1) asked if he should fight or not, (2) followed instructions carefully, and (3) gave God the glory.

We can err in our “battles” by ignoring these steps and instead: (1) do what we want without considering God’s will, (2) do things our way and ignore advice in the Bible or from other wise people, and (3) take the glory ourselves or give it to someone else without acknowledging the help we received from God.

All these responses are sinful.

We are not given battles to make us fall, but to learn of the love, the power and how to follow the voice of God through the direction of the Holy Spirit in ever crisis.

May you battles become mountains of victory as you give praise to God, the sustainer and keeper. Be blessed as you pursue him.

Chapter 1



God fights for us.

Deut. 3:21-22

"At that time I said to Joshua, 'you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings. He will do the same to all the kingdoms on the west side of the Jordan.

Do not be afraid of the nations there, for the Lord your God will fight for you.'

What encouraging news for Joshua, who was to lead his men against the persistent forces of evil in the Promised Land! Since God promised to help him win every battle, he had nothing to fear.

Our battles may not be against godless armies, but they are just as real as Joshua's. Whether we are resisting temptation or battling fear, God has promised to fight with and for us as we obey him

Practice peace.

When the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar at the Jordan River, the rest of Israel feared that these tribes were starting their own religion and rebelling against God.

But before beginning an all-out war, Phinehas led a delegation to learn the truth, following the principle taught in Deut. 13:12-18.

He was prepared to negotiate rather than fight if a battle was not necessary. When he learned that the altar was for a memorial rather than for pagan sacrifice, war was averted and unity restored.

As nations and as individuals, we would benefit from a similar approach to resolving conflicts.

Assuming the worst about the intentions of others only brings trouble. Israel averted the threat of civil war by asking before assaulting. Beware of reacting before you hear the whole story.

Joshua 22:11-34

When the rest of Israel heard they had built the altar at Geliloth west of the Jordan River, in the land of Canaan, the whole assembly gathered at Shiloh and prepared to go to war against their brother tribes.

First, however, they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest. They crossed the river to talk with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

In this delegation were ten high officials of Israel, one from each of the ten tribes, and each a leader within the family divisions of Israel.

When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh,

"The whole community of the Lord demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel.

How could you turn away from the Lord and build an altar in rebellion against him? Was our sin at Peor not enough? We are not yet fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire assembly of the Lord.

And yet today you are turning away from following the Lord. If you rebel against the Lord today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

If you need the altar because your land is defiled, then join us on our side of the river, where the Lord lives among us in his Tabernacle, and we will share our land with you. But do not rebel against the Lord or draw us into your rebellion by building another altar for yourselves. There is only one true altar of the Lord our God.

Didn't God punish all the people of Israel when Achan, a member of the clan of Zerah, sinned by stealing the things set apart for the Lord? He was not the only one who died because of that sin."

Then the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered these high officials: "The Lord alone is God! The Lord alone is God! We have not built the altar in rebellion against the Lord.

If we have done so, do not spare our lives this day. But the Lord knows, and let all Israel know, too, that we have not built an altar for ourselves to turn away from the Lord. Nor will we use it for our burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings.

If we have built it for this purpose, may the Lord himself punish us.

"We have built this altar because we fear that in the future your descendants will say to ours, 'what right do you have to worship the Lord, the God of Israel? The Lord has placed the Jordan River as a barrier between our people and your people.

You have no claim to the Lord.' And your descendants may make our descendants stop worshiping the Lord. So we decided to build the altar, not for burnt sacrifices, but as a memorial.

It will remind our descendants and your descendants that we, too, have the right to worship the Lord at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and peace offerings. Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no claim to the Lord.'

If they say this, our descendants can reply, 'Look at this copy of the Lord's altar that our ancestors made. It is not for burnt offerings or sacrifices; it is a reminder of the relationship both of us have with the Lord.'

The tribes were concerned that, without some visible sign of unity between the people on the two sides of the Jordan, future generations might see conflict between them.

The altar, patterned after the altar of the Lord, was to remind these people that they all worshiped the same God. Often we need to be reminded of the faith of our fathers. W

What actions demonstrate to your children your reliance on God and remind them of what he has done? Take the time to establish family traditions that will help your children remember.

Far be it from us to rebel against the Lord or turn away from him by building our own altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifices. Only the altar of the Lord our God that stands in front of the Tabernacle may be used for that purpose."

When Phinehas the priest and the high officials heard this from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were satisfied.

Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, replied to them, "Today we know the Lord is among us because you have not sinned against the Lord as we thought. Instead, you have rescued Israel from being destroyed by the Lord."

Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the ten high officials left the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Gilead and returned to the land of Canaan to tell the Israelites what had happened.

And all the Israelites were satisfied and praised God and spoke no more of war against Reuben and Gad. The people of Reuben and Gad named the altar "Witness," for they said, "It is a witness between us and them that the Lord is our God, too."

The book of Joshua opens with a new leader being handed a seemingly impossible task—to lead the nation in taking over the land of Canaan. By following God closely, Joshua led the people through military victories and faithful spiritual obedience. In Joshua 24:16 we read that the people were sure they would never forsake the Lord.

The response of the whole nation during these many years is a tribute both to Joshua's leadership and to the God he faithfully served.

Fighting battles God's way.

2 Samuel 5:19-25

So David asked the Lord, "Should I go out to fight the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord replied, "Yes, go ahead. I will certainly give you the victory."

So David went to Baal-perazim and defeated the Philistines there. "The Lord has done it!" David exclaimed. "He burst through my enemies like a raging flood!" So David named that place Baal Perazim (which means "the Lord who bursts through").

The Philistines had abandoned their idols there, so David and his troops confiscated them.

But after a while the Philistines returned and again spread out across the valley of Rephaim. And once again David asked the Lord what to do. "Do not attack them straight on," the Lord replied. "Instead, circle around behind them and attack them near the balsam trees.

When you hear a sound like marching feet in the tops of the balsam trees, attack! That will be the signal that the Lord is moving ahead of you to strike down the Philistines."

So David did what the Lord commanded, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

How could David get such a clear message from God? He may have prayed and been urged to action by the Holy Spirit. He may have asked God through a prophet. Most likely, however, he went to the high priest,

who consulted God through the Urim and Thummim that God had told the Israelites to use for just such a purpose.

David fought his battles the way God instructed him. In each instance he (1) asked if he should fight or not, (2) followed instructions carefully, and (3) gave God the glory.

We can err in our “battles” by ignoring these steps and instead: (1) do what we want without considering God’s will, (2) do things our way and ignore advice in the Bible or from other wise people, and (3) take the glory ourselves or give it to someone else without acknowledging the help we received from God.

All these responses are sinful.

After David became king, his first order of business was to subdue his enemies—a task the nation had failed to complete when they first entered the land (Judges 2:1-4).

David knew this had to be done in order to (1) protect the nation, (2) unify the kingdom, and (3) prepare for building the temple (which would unify religion under God and help abolish idolatrous influences).

David consulted God before.

1 Chron. 14:10

So David asked God, "Should I go out to fight the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord replied, "Yes, go ahead. I will give you the victory."

Before David went to battle, he inquired of God first, asking for his presence and guidance. Too often we wait until we are in trouble before turning to God. By then the consequences of our actions are already unfolding.

Do you ask for God's help only as a desperate last resort? Instead, go to him first! Like David, you may receive incredible help and avoid serious trouble.

David's quick and decisive action against idols helped unify his kingdom and focus the people on worshiping the one true God. He was obeying the law that said, "This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire" (Deut. 7:5).

Most of David's successors failed to destroy idols, and this led to unbelievable moral corruption in Israel.

Often the soldiers wanted to keep souvenirs from the battle (and 2 Samuel 5:21 states that some of the men kept some of these idols), but David ordered them to burn the idols.

The only proper response to sin is to get rid of it completely. You cannot be a follower of God while continuing to hold on to parts of your past life that push God out of the center of your thoughts and actions. Eliminate whatever takes God's rightful place in your life, and follow him with complete devotion.

Babylon wins battle at Carchemish.

2 Kings 24:1

During Jehoiakim reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded the land of Judah. Jehoiakim surrendered and paid him tribute for three years but then rebelled.

Babylon became the new world power after overthrowing Assyria in 612 B.C. and defeating Egypt at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. After defeating Egypt, the Babylonians invaded Judah and brought it under their control. This was the first of three Babylonian invasions of Judah over the next 20 years.

The other two invasions occurred in 597 and 586 B.C. With each invasion, captives were taken back to Babylon. Daniel, who wrote the book of Daniel, was one of the captives taken during this first invasion (605 B.C.; Daniel 1:1-6).

Nebuchadnezzar took control as king of Babylon in 605 B.C. Earlier that year Nebuchadnezzar had defeated the Egyptians led by Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish. Thus Babylon took control of all Egypt's vassals (including Judah). Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land later in order to establish his rule by force.

The final battle of history

Rev. 16:16

And they gathered all the rulers and their armies to a place called Armageddon in Hebrew.

This battlefield called Armageddon is near the city of Megiddo (southeast of the modern port of Haifa), which guarded a large plain in northern Israel.

It is a strategic location near a prominent international highway leading north from Egypt through Israel, along the coast, and on to Babylon. Megiddo overlooked the entire plain southward toward Galilee and westward toward the mountains of Gilboa.

Sinful people will unite to fight against God in a final display of rebellion. Many are already united against Christ and his people—those who stand for truth, peace, justice, and morality.

Your personal battle with evil foreshadows the great battle pictured here, where God will meet evil and destroy it once and for all.

Be strong and courageous as you battle against sin and evil: you are fighting on the winning side.

Chapter 2



Are you fighting on the winning side?

The Battle for Ai

Joshua 8:1-29

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take the entire army and attack Ai, for I have given to you the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king. But this time you may keep the captured goods and the cattle for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city."

So Joshua and the army of Israel set out to attack Ai. Joshua chose thirty thousand fighting men and sent them out at night with these orders: "Hide in ambush close behind the city and be ready for action.

When our main army attacks, the men of Ai will come out to fight as they did before, and we will run away from them.

We will let them chase us until they have all left the city. For they will say, 'The Israelites are running away from us as they did before.'

Then you will jump up from your ambush and take possession of the city, for the Lord your God will give it to you. Set the city on fire, as the Lord has commanded. You have your orders."

So they left that night and lay in ambush between Bethel and the west side of Ai. But Joshua remained among the people in the camp that night.

Early the next morning Joshua roused his men and started toward Ai, accompanied by the leaders of Israel. They camped on the north side of Ai, with a valley between them and the city.

That night Joshua sent five thousand men to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. So they stationed the main army north of the city and the ambush west of the city. Joshua himself spent that night in the valley.

When the king of Ai saw the Israelites across the valley, he and all his army hurriedly went out early the next morning and attacked the Israelites at a place overlooking the Jordan Valley. But he didn't realize there was an ambush behind the city.

Joshua and the Israelite army fled toward the wilderness as though they were badly beaten, and all the men in the city were called out to chase after them. In this way, they were lured away from the city.

There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not chase after the Israelites, and the city was left wide open.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Point your spear toward Ai, for I will give you the city." Joshua did as he was commanded.

As soon as Joshua gave the signal, the men in ambush jumped up and poured into the city. They quickly captured it and set it on fire.

When the men of Ai looked behind them, smoke from the city was filling the sky, and they had nowhere to go. For the Israelites who had fled in the direction of the wilderness now turned on their pursuers.

When Joshua and the other Israelites saw that the ambush had succeeded and that smoke was rising from the city, they turned and attacked the men of Ai.

Then the Israelites who were inside the city came out and started killing the enemy from the rear. So the men of Ai were caught in a trap, and all of them died. Not a single person survived or escaped. Only the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

When the Israelite army finished killing all the men outside the city, they went back and finished off everyone inside.

So the entire population of Ai was wiped out that day—twelve thousand in all.

For Joshua kept holding out his spear until everyone who had lived in Ai was completely destroyed.

Only the cattle and the treasures of the city were not destroyed, for the Israelites kept these for themselves, as the Lord had commanded Joshua. So Ai became a permanent mound of ruins, desolate to this very day.

Joshua hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset the Israelites took down the body and threw it in front of the city gate. They piled a great heap of stones over him that can still be seen today.

After Israel had been cleansed from Achan's sin, Joshua prepared to attack Ai again—this time to win.

Joshua had learned some lessons that we can follow: (1) confess your sins when God reveals them to you (Joshua 7:19-21); (2) when you fail, refocus on God, deal with the problem, and move on (Joshua 7:22-25; Joshua 8:1).

God wants the cycle of sin, repentance, and forgiveness to strengthen us, not weaken us. The lessons we learn from our failures should make us better able to handle the same situation the second time around.

Because God is eager to give us cleansing, forgiveness, and strength, the only way to lose is to give up. We can tell what kind of people we are by what we do on the second and third attempts.

Why did God allow the Israelites to keep the plunder and livestock this time?

Israel's laws for handling the spoils of war covered two situations.

- (1) Cities like Jericho which were under God's *ban* (judgment for idolatry) could not be looted (see Deut. 20:16-18). God's people were to be kept holy and separate from every influence of idolatry.
- (2) The distribution of plunder from cities not under the ban was a normal part of warfare.

It provided the army and the nation with the necessary food, flocks, and weapons needed to sustain itself in wartime. Ai was not under the ban. The conquering army needed the food and equipment. Because soldiers were not paid, the loot was part of their incentive and reward for going to war.

The conquest of Ai was very important to the Israelites. Only 11 miles away from Jericho, Ai was a key stronghold for the Caananites and a buffer fortress for Bethel (Joshua 8:12).

If the Caananite kings got wind of an Israelite defeat at Ai, they could unite in a coordinated attack. They did not know that God had restored his power and protection to Joshua's troops.

We must depend on God with absolute obedience to be sure of the victory he has promised.

The Lord gave Joshua the city. Yesterday's defeat became today's victory. Once sin is dealt with, forgiveness and victory lie ahead. With God's direction we need not stay discouraged or burdened with guilt. No matter how difficult a setback sin may bring, we must renew our efforts to carry out God's will.

The Battle for Gibeon

Joshua 10:16-28

During the battle, the five kings escaped and hid in a cave at Makkedah. When Joshua heard that they had been found, he issued this command: "Cover the opening of the cave with large rocks and place guards at the entrance to keep the kings inside.

The rest of you continue chasing the enemy and cut them down from the rear. Don't let them get back to their cities, for the Lord your God has given you victory over them."

So Joshua and the Israelite army continued the slaughter and wiped out the five armies except for a tiny remnant that managed to reach their fortified cities. Then the Israelites returned safely to their camp at Makkedah. After that, no one dared to speak a word against Israel.

Then Joshua said, "Remove the rocks covering the opening of the cave and bring the five kings to me." So they brought the five kings out of the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon.

Joshua told the captains of his army, "Come and put your feet on the kings' necks." And they did as they were told.

"Don't ever be afraid or discouraged," Joshua told his men. "Be strong and courageous, for the Lord is going to do this to all of your enemies."

Then Joshua killed each of the five kings and hung them on five trees until evening.

As the sun was going down, Joshua gave instructions for the bodies of the kings to be taken down from the trees and thrown into the cave where they had been hiding. Then they covered the opening of the cave with a large pile of stones, which remains to this very day.

That same day Joshua completely destroyed the city of Makkedah, killing everyone in it, including the king. Not one person in the city was left alive. He killed the king of Makkedah as he had killed the king of Jericho.

Placing a foot on the neck of a captive was a common military practice in the ancient Near East. It symbolized the victor's domination of his captives. These proud kings had boasted of their power. Now all Israel could see that God was superior to any earthly army.

With God's help, Israel won the battle against five Amorite armies. Such a triumph was part of God's daily business as he worked with his people for victory. Joshua told his men never to be afraid because God would give them similar victories over all their enemies. God has often protected us and won victories for us. The same God who empowered Joshua and who has led us in the past will help us with our present and future needs. Reminding ourselves of his help in the past will give us hope for the struggles that lie ahead.

The Battle for Hazor

Joshua 11:1-15

When King Jabin of Hazor heard what had happened, he sent urgent messages to the following kings: King Jobab of Madon; the king of Shimron; the king of Acshaph; all the kings of the northern hill country; the kings in the Jordan Valley south of Galilee; the kings in the western foothills; the kings of Naphoth-dor on the west;

The kings of Canaan, both east and west; the kings of the Amorites; the kings of the Hittites; the kings of the Perizzites; the kings in the Jebusite hill country; and the Hivites in the towns on the slopes of Mount Hermon, in the land of Mizpah

All these kings responded by mobilizing their warriors and uniting to fight against Israel. Their combined armies, along with a vast array of horses and chariots, covered the landscape like the sand on the seashore.

They established their camp around the water near Merom to fight against Israel.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them. By this time tomorrow they will all be dead. Cripple their horses and burn their chariots."

So Joshua and his warriors traveled to the water near Merom and attacked suddenly. And the Lord gave them victory over their enemies. The Israelites chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim, and eastward into the valley of Mizpah, until not one enemy warrior was left alive. Then Joshua crippled the horses and burned all the chariots, as the Lord had instructed.

Joshua then turned back and captured Hazor and killed its king. (Hazor had at one time been the capital of the federation of all these kingdoms.) The Israelites completely destroyed every living thing in the city. Not a single person was spared. And then Joshua burned the city.

Joshua slaughtered all the other kings and their people, completely destroying them, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded.

However, Joshua did not burn any of the cities built on mounds except Hazor. And the Israelites took all the captured goods and cattle of the ravaged cities for themselves, but they killed all the people.

As the Lord had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua. And Joshua did as he was told, carefully obeying all of the Lord's instructions to Moses.

There were two kings of Hazor named Jabin. The other, apparently a weak ruler, is mentioned in Judges 4:2-3. The Jabin of this story was quite powerful because he was able to build an alliance with dozens of kings. By all appearances, Jabin had a clear advantage over Joshua and his outnumbered forces. But those who honor God can be victorious regardless of the odds.

Victorious invaders usually kept captured cities intact, moving into them and making them centers of commerce and defense. For example, Moses predicted in Deut. 6:10-12 that Israel would occupy cities they themselves had not built.

Hazor, however, was burned. As a former capital of the land, it symbolized the wicked culture that Israel had come to destroy. In addition, its capture and destruction broke the backbone of the federation and weakened the will of the people to resist.

Joshua carefully obeyed all the instructions given by God. This theme of obedience is repeated frequently in the book of Joshua, partly because obedience is one aspect of life the individual believer can control.

We can't always control our understanding because we may not have all the facts.

We can't control what other people do or how they treat us. However, we can control our choice to obey God. Whatever new challenges we may face, the Bible contains relevant instructions that we can choose to ignore or choose to follow.

Deborah and Barak defeat King Jabin

Judges 4:1-24

After Ehud's death, the Israelites again did what was evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-haggoyim.

Sisera, who had nine hundred iron chariots, ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who had become a judge in Israel. She would hold court under the Palm of Deborah, which stood between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to settle their disputes.

One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: Assemble ten thousand warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor.

I will lure Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

Barak told her, "I will go, but only if you go with me!"

"Very well," she replied, "I will go with you. But since you have made this choice, you will receive no honor. For the Lord's victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.

At Kedesh, Barak called together the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand warriors marched up with him. Deborah also marched with them.

Now Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law Hobab, had moved away from the other members of his tribe and pitched his tent by the Oak of Zaananim, near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, he called for all nine hundred of his iron chariots and all of his warriors, and they marched from Harosheth-haggoyim to the Kishon River.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get ready! Today the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you." So Barak led his ten thousand warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle.

When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his charioteers and warriors into a panic. Then Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot.

Barak chased the enemy and their chariots all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera's warriors. Not a single one was left alive.

Meanwhile, Sisera ran to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because Heber's family was on friendly terms with King Jabin of Hazor.

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come into my tent, sir. Come in. Don't be afraid." So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

"Please give me some water," he said. "I'm thirsty." So she gave him some milk to drink and covered him again.

"Stand at the door of the tent," he told her. "If anybody comes and asks you if there is anyone here, say no."

But when Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, Jael quietly crept up to him with a hammer and tent peg. Then she drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died.

When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, "Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for." So he followed her into the tent and found Sisera lying there dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

So on that day Israel saw God subdue Jabin, the Canaanite king. And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin, until they finally destroyed him.

Israel sinned "in the eyes of the LORD." Our sins harm both ourselves and others, but all sin is ultimately against God because it disregards his commands and his authority over us. When confessing his sin David prayed, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4). Recognizing the seriousness of sin is the first step toward removing it from our lives.

Nothing more is known about Jabin. Joshua had defeated a king by that name years earlier and burned the city of Hazor to the ground (Joshua 11:1-11). Either the city was rebuilt by this time, or Jabin was hoping to rebuild it.

This is the only time during the period of the judges when the Israelites' enemies came from within their land. The Israelites had failed to drive out all the Canaanites.

These Canaanites had regrouped and were attempting to restore their lost power. If the Israelites had obeyed God in the first place and had driven the Canaanites from the land, this incident would not have happened.

Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. Made of iron or wood, they were pulled by one or two horses and were the most feared and powerful weapons of the day.

Some chariots even had razor-sharp knives extending from the wheels designed to mutilate helpless foot soldiers.

The Canaanite army had 900 iron chariots. Israel was not powerful enough to defeat such an invincible army. Therefore, Jabin and Sisera had no trouble oppressing the people—until a faithful woman named Deborah called upon God.

After 20 years of unbearable circumstances, the Israelites finally cried to the Lord for help. But God should be the first place we turn when we are facing struggles or dilemmas.

The Israelites chose to go their own way and got into a mess. We often do the same. Trying to control our own lives without God's help leads to struggle and confusion.

By contrast, when we stay in daily contact with the Lord, we are less likely to create painful circumstances for ourselves. This is a lesson the Israelites never fully learned. When struggles come our way, God wants us to come to him first, seeking his strength and guidance.

Was Barak cowardly or just in need of support? We don't know Barak's character, but we see the character of a great leader in Deborah, who took charge as God directed.

Deborah told Barak that God would be with him in battle, but that was not enough for Barak. He wanted Deborah to go with him. Barak's request shows that at heart he trusted human strength more than God's promise. A person of real faith steps out at God's command, even if he or she must do so alone.

Sisera couldn't have been more pleased when Jael offered him her tent as a hiding place. First, because Jael was the wife of Heber, a man loyal to Sisera's forces (see the note on +Judges 4:11),.

Even though her husband, Heber, was loyal to Sisera's forces, Jael certainly was not. Because women of that day were in charge of pitching the tents, Jael had no problem driving the tent peg into Sisera's head while he slept. Deborah's prediction was thus fulfilled: the honor of conquering Sisera went to a brave and resourceful woman (Judges 4:9).

Gideon battles the Midianites

Gideon's Battle

Judges 6:11-7:25

Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the oak tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash had been threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. [12] The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

"Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The Lord brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

"But Lord," Gideon replied, "How can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!"

The Lord said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man."

Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. [18] Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you."

The Lord answered, "I will stay here until you return."

Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with half a bushel of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the oak tree.

The angel of God said to him, "Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it." And Gideon did as he was told. [21] Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the Lord disappeared.

When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

"It is all right," the Lord replied. "Do not be afraid. You will not die." And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it "The Lord Is Peace." The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.

That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second best bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it.

Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hill, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town. He knew what would happen if they found out who had done it.

Early the next morning, as the people of the town began to stir, someone discovered that the altar of Baal had been knocked down and that the Asherah pole beside it was gone. In their place a new altar had been built, and it had the remains of a sacrifice on it.

The people said to each other, "Who did this?" And after asking around and making a careful search, they learned that it was Gideon, the son of Joash.

"Bring out your son," they shouted to Joash. "He must die for destroying the altar of Baal and for cutting down the Asherah pole."

But Joash shouted to the mob, "Why are you defending Baal? Will you argue his case? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If Baal truly is a god, let him defend himself and destroy the one who knocked down his altar!"

From then on Gideon was called Jerubbaal, which means, "Let Baal defend himself," because he knocked down Baal's altar.

Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel.

Then the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him.

He also sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded.

Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, prove it to me in this way. I will put some wool on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised."

And it happened just that way. When Gideon got up the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew."] so that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

So Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh.

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.

Therefore, tell the people, 'Whoever is timid or afraid may leave and go home.' "Twenty-two thousand of them went home, leaving only ten thousand who were willing to fight

But the Lord told Gideon, "There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will sort out who will go with you and who will not."

When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the Lord told him, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream."

Only three hundred of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

The Lord told Gideon, "With these three hundred men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home."

So Gideon collected the provisions and rams' horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the three hundred men with him.

Now the Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon. During the night, the Lord said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them!"

But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah.

Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack."

So Gideon took Purah and went down to the outposts of the enemy camp.

The armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count!

Gideon crept up just as a man was telling his friend about a dream. The man said, "I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!"

His friend said, "Your dream can mean only one thing—God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over all the armies united with Midian!"

When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he thanked God. Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted "Get up! For the Lord has given you victory over the Midianites!"

He divided the three hundred men into three groups and gave each man a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch in it. Then he said to them, "Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do.

As soon as my group blows the rams' horns, those of you on the other sides of the camp blow your horns and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!' "

It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the one hundred men with him reached the outer edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the horns and broke their clay jars.

Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran.

When the three hundred Israelites blew their horns, the Lord caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. Those who were not killed fled to places as far away as Beth-shittah near Zererah and to the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath.

Then Gideon sent for the warriors of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, who joined in the chase after the fleeing army of Midian.

Gideon also sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down to attack the Midianites. Cut them off at the shallows of the Jordan River at Beth-barah." And the men of Ephraim did as they were told.

They captured Oreb and Zeeb, the two Midianite generals, killing Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. And they continued to chase the Midianites. Afterward the Israelites brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

Threshing was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called chaff. This was normally done in a large area, often on a hill, where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the farmer tossed the beaten wheat into the air. If Gideon had done this, however, he would have been an easy target for the bands of raiders who were overrunning the land. Therefore, he was forced to thresh his wheat in a winepress, a pit that was probably hidden from view and that would not be suspected as a place to find a farmer's crops.

"I will be with you," God told Gideon, and God promised to give him the strength he needed to overcome the opposition. In spite of this clear promise for strength, Gideon made excuses. Seeing only his limitations and weaknesses, he failed to see how God could work through him.

Like Gideon, we are called to serve God in specific ways.

Although God promises us the tools and strength we need, we often make excuses. But reminding God of our limitations only implies that he

does not know all about us or that he has made a mistake in evaluating our character. Don't spend time making excuses. Instead spend it doing what God wants.

After God called Gideon to be Israel's deliverer, he immediately asked him to tear down the altar of the pagan god, Baal—an act that would test Gideon's faith and commitment. Canaanite religion was very political, so an attack on a god was often seen as an attack on the local government supporting that god. If caught, Gideon would face serious social problems and probable physical attack. (For more on Baal and Asherah,

Gideon took a great risk by following God's higher law, which specifically forbids idol worship (Exodus 20:1-5).

After learning what Gideon had done, the townspeople wanted to kill him. Many of those people were fellow Israelites. This shows how immoral God's people had become. God said in Deut. 13:6-11 that idolaters must be stoned to death, but these Israelites wanted to stone Gideon for tearing down an idol and worshiping God!

When you begin to accomplish something for God, the very people who should support you may criticize you.

After seeing the miracle of the wet fleece, why did Gideon ask for another miracle? Perhaps he thought the results of the first test could have happened naturally. A thick fleece could retain moisture long after the sun had dried the surrounding ground. "Putting out fleeces" is a poor decision-making method. Those who do this put limitations on God. They ask him to fit their expectations.

The results of such experiments are usually inconclusive and thus fail to make us any more confident about our choices. Don't let a "fleece"

become a substitute for God's wisdom that comes through Bible study and prayer.

Facing overwhelming odds, Gideon was afraid. God understood his fear, but he didn't excuse Gideon from his task. Instead he allowed Gideon to slip into the enemy camp and overhear a conversation that would give him courage (Judges 7:12-15). Are you facing a battle?

God can give you the strength you need for any situation. And don't be startled by the way he helps you. Like Gideon, you must listen to God and be ready to take the first step. Only after you begin to obey God will you find the courage to move ahead.

An enemy soldier dreamed of a loaf of barley bread tumbling into camp. Barley grain was only half the value of wheat, and the bread made from it was considered inferior. In the same way, Israel's tiny band of men was considered inferior to the vast forces of Midian and Amalek. But God would make the underdog Israelites seem invincible.

Gideon's army simply watched as the army of Midian fell into panic, confusion, and disordered retreat. Not one man had to draw a sword to defeat the enemy. Gideon's small army could never have brought about such a victory in their own strength. God wanted to demonstrate to Israel that victory depends not on strength or numbers, but on obedience and commitment to him.

Chapter 3



Jephthah fights the Ephraimites

Judges 12:1-7

Then the tribe of Ephraim mobilized its army and crossed over to Zaphon. They sent this message to Jephthah: "Why didn't you call for us to help you fight against Ammon? We are going to burn down your house with you in it!"

"I summoned you at the beginning of the dispute, but you refused to come!" Jephthah said. "You failed to help us in our struggle against Ammon. So I risked my life and went to battle without you, and the Lord gave me victory over the Ammonites. So why have you come to fight me?"

The leaders of Ephraim responded, "The men of Gilead are nothing more than rejects from Ephraim and Manasseh." So Jephthah called out his army and attacked the men of Ephraim and defeated them.

Jephthah captured the shallows of the Jordan, and whenever a fugitive from Ephraim tried to go back across, the men of Gilead would challenge him. "Are you a member of the tribe of Ephraim?" they would ask. If the man said, "No, I'm not," they would tell him to say "Shibboleth." If he was from Ephraim, he would say "Sibboleth," because people from Ephraim cannot pronounce the word correctly. Then they would take him and kill him at the shallows of the Jordan River. So forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

Jephthah was Israel's judge for six years. When he died, he was buried in one of the towns of Gilead.

Philistines capture the ark.

The Ark's Travels

1 Samuel 4:1-7:1

And Samuel's words went out to all the people of Israel.

At that time Israel was at war with the Philistines. The Israelite army was camped near Ebenezer, and the Philistines were at Aphek. [2] The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing four thousand men. [3] After the battle was over, the army of Israel retreated to their camp, and their leaders asked, "Why did the Lord allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?" Then they said, "Let's bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies."

So they sent men to Shiloh to bring back the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, helped carry the Ark of God to where the battle was being fought. [5] When the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord coming into the camp; their shout of joy was so loud that it made the ground shakes!

"What's going on?" the Philistines asked. "What's all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?" When they were told it was because the Ark of the Lord had arrived, they panicked. "The gods have come into their

camp!" they cried. "This is a disaster! We have never had to face anything like this before! Who can save us from these mighty gods of Israel? They are the same gods who destroyed the Egyptians with plagues when Israel was in the wilderness. Fight, as you never have before, Philistines! If you don't, we will become the Hebrews' slaves just as they have been ours!"

So the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; thirty thousand Israelite men died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed.

A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day. He had torn his clothes and put dust on his head to show his grief. Eli was waiting beside the road to hear the news of the battle, for his heart trembled for the safety of the Ark of God. When the messenger arrived and told what had happened, an outcry resounded throughout the town. "What is all the noise about?" Eli asked.

The messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, "I have just come from the battlefield—I was there this very day."

"What happened?" Eli demanded.

"Israel has been defeated," the messenger replied. "Thousands of Israelite troops are dead on the battlefield. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed, too. And the Ark of God has been captured."

When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and very fat. He had led Israel for forty years.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time of delivery. When she heard that the Ark of God had been captured and that her husband and father-in-law were dead, her labor pains suddenly began. She died in childbirth, but before she passed away the midwives tried to encourage her. "Don't be afraid," they said. "You have a baby boy!" But she did not answer or respond in any way.

She named the child Ichabod—"Where is the glory?" murmuring, "Israel's glory is gone." She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured and because her husband and her father-in-law were dead. Then she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured."

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the city of Ashdod.

They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside the idol of Dagon.

But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord! So they set the idol up again. But the next morning the same thing happened—the idol had fallen face down before the Ark of the Lord again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact.

That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon will step on its threshold.

Then the Lord began to afflict the people of Ashdod and the nearby villages with a plague of tumors. When the people realized what was happening, they cried out, "We can't keep the Ark of the God of Israel here any longer! He is against us! We will all be destroyed along with our god Dagon." So they called together the rulers of the five Philistine cities and asked, "What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

The rulers discussed it and replied, "Move it to the city of Gath." So they moved the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath. But when the Ark arrived at Gath, the Lord began afflicting its people, young and old, with a plague of tumors, and there was a great panic.

So they sent the Ark of God to the city of Ekron, but when the people of Ekron saw it coming they cried out, "They are bringing the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us, too!" So the people summoned the rulers again and begged them, "Please send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its own country, or it will kill us all." For the plague from God had already begun, and great fear was sweeping across the city?

Those who didn't die were afflicted with tumors; and there was weeping everywhere.

The Ark of the Lord remained in Philistine territory seven months in all. Then the Philistines called in their priests and diviners and asked them, "What should we do about the Ark of the Lord? Tell us how to return it to its own land."

"Send the Ark of the God of Israel back, along with a gift," they were told. "Send a guilt offering so the plague will stop. Then, if the plague doesn't stop, you will know that God didn't send the plague after all."

"What sort of guilt offering should we send?" they asked.

And they were told, "Since the plague has struck both you and your five rulers, make five gold tumors and five gold rats, just like those that have ravaged your land. Make these things to show honor to the God of Israel. Perhaps then he will stop afflicting you, your gods, and your land.

Don't be stubborn and rebellious as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were. They wouldn't let Israel go until God had ravaged them with dreadful

plagues. Now build a new cart, and find two cows that have just had calves. Make sure the cows have never been yoked to a cart. Hitch the cows to the cart, but shut their calves away from them in a pen.

Put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, and beside it place a chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors. Then let the cows go wherever they want. If they cross the border of our land and go to Beth-shemesh, we will know it was the Lord who brought this great disaster upon us. If they don't, we will know that the plague was simply a coincidence and was not sent by the Lord at all."

So these instructions were carried out. Two cows with newborn calves were hitched to the cart, and their calves were shut up in a pen.

Then the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors were placed on the cart. And sure enough, the cows went straight along the road toward Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went.

The Philistine rulers followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they saw the Ark, they were overjoyed! The cart came into the field of a man named Joshua and stopped beside a large rock. So the people broke up the wood of the cart for a fire and killed the cows and sacrificed them to the Lord as a burnt offering.

Several men of the tribe of Levi lifted the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors from the cart and placed them on the large rock.

The people of Beth-shemesh offered many burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord that day. The five Philistine rulers watched all this and then returned to Ekron that same day.

The five gold tumors that were sent by the Philistines as a guilt offering to the Lord were gifts from the rulers of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The five gold rats represented the five Philistine cities and their surrounding villages, which were controlled by the five rulers. The large rock at Beth-shemesh, where they set the Ark of the Lord, still stands in the field of Joshua as a reminder of what happened there.

But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done.

"Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" they cried out. "Where can we send the Ark from here?" So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Please come here and get it!"

So the men of Kiriath-jearim came to get the Ark of the Lord. They took it to the hillside home of Abinadab and ordained Eleazar, his son, to be in charge of it.

Saul Defeats the Ammonites.

1 Samuel 11:1-15

About a month later, King Nahash of Ammon led his army against the Israelite city of Jabesh-gilead. But the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace. "Make a treaty with us, and we will be your servants," they pleaded.

"All right," Nahash said, "but only on one condition. I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace to all Israel!"

"Give us seven days to send messengers throughout Israel!" replied the leaders of Jabesh. "If none of our relatives will come to save us, we will agree to your terms."

When the messengers came to Gibeah, Saul's hometown, and told the people about their plight, everyone broke into tears. [5] Saul was plowing in the field, and when he returned to town, he asked, "What's the matter? Why is everyone crying?" So they told him about the message from Jabesh.

Then the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul, and he became very angry. He took two oxen and cut them into pieces and sent the messengers to carry them throughout Israel with this message: "This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who refuses to follow Saul and Samuel into battle!" And the Lord made the people afraid of Saul's anger, and all of them came out together as one.

When Saul mobilized them at Bezek, he found that there were 300,000 men of Israel, in addition to 30,000 from Judah.

So Saul sent the messengers back to Jabesh-gilead to say, "We will rescue you by noontime tomorrow!" What joy there was throughout the city when that message arrived!

The men of Jabesh then told their enemies, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you can do to us as you wish." But before dawn the next morning, Saul arrived, having divided his army into three detachments. He launched a surprise attack against the Ammonites and slaughtered them the whole morning. The remnant of their army was so badly scattered that no two of them were left together.

Then the people exclaimed to Samuel, "Now where are those men who said Saul shouldn't rule over us? Bring them here, and we will kill them!"

But Saul replied, "No one will be executed today, for today the Lord has rescued Israel!"

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us all go to Gilgal to reaffirm Saul's kingship." So they went to Gilgal, and in a solemn ceremony before the Lord they crowned him king. Then they offered peace offerings to the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites were very happy.

At this time, Israel was very susceptible to invasion by marauding tribes such as these Ammonites from east of the Jordan River. Saul's leadership in battle against this warlike tribe helped unify the nation and proved that he was a worthy military ruler. Saul's kingship was solidified when he saved the nation from disgrace and spared the people who had criticized him.

Why would Nahash give the city of Jabesh Gilead seven days to find an army to help them? Because Israel was still disorganized, Nahash was betting that no one would come to the city's aid. He was hoping to take the city without a fight and avoid a battle. He also may not have been prepared to attack the city because a siege against its walls could last weeks or months.

Anger is a powerful emotion. Often it may drive people to hurt others with words or physical violence. But anger directed at sin and the mistreatment of others is not wrong. Saul was angered by the Ammonites' threat to humiliate and mistreat his fellow Israelites.

The Holy Spirit used Saul's anger to bring justice and freedom. When injustice or sin makes you angry, ask God how you can channel that anger in constructive ways to help bring about a positive change.

Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, is often mentioned separately from the other 11. There are several reasons for this. Judah was the largest tribe (Numbers 1:20-46), and it was the tribe from which most of Israel's

kings would come (Genesis 49:8-12). Later, Judah would be one of the few tribes to return to God after a century of captivity under a hostile foreign power. Judah would also be the tribe through which the Messiah would come (Micah 5:2).

Saul had been anointed by Samuel at Ramah (1 Samuel 10:1); then Saul was publicly chosen at Mizpah (1 Samuel 10:17-27); his defeat of the Ammonites confirmed his kingship in the people's minds; at this time, all the people confirm his rule.

The Israelites sacrificed fellowship offerings to God as they made Saul their first king. The instructions for giving these offerings are given in Leviticus 3. The fellowship offering was an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving to God, symbolizing the peace that comes to those who know him and who live in accordance with his commands.

Although God did not want his people to have a human king, the people were demonstrating through their offerings that he was still their true King. Unfortunately, this attitude did not last, just as God had predicted (1 Samuel 8:7-19).

Jonathan defeats the Philistines

Jonathan's Bravery

1 Kings 14:1-23

At that time Jeroboam's son Abijah became very sick. So Jeroboam told his wife, "Disguise yourself so that no one will recognize you as the queen. Then go to the prophet Ahijah at Shiloh—the man who told me I would become king. Take him a gift of ten loaves of bread, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and ask him what will happen to the boy."

So Jeroboam's wife went to Ahijah's home at Shiloh. He was an old man now and could no longer see. But the Lord had told Ahijah, "Jeroboam's wife will come here, pretending to be someone else. She will ask you about her son, for he is very sick. You must give her the answer that I give you."

So when Ahijah heard her footsteps at the door, he called out, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam! Why are you pretending to be someone else?" Then he told her, "I have bad news for you.

Give your husband, Jeroboam, this message from the Lord, the God of Israel: 'I promoted you from the ranks of the common people and made you ruler over my people Israel.

I ripped the kingdom away from the family of David and gave it to you. But you have not been like my servant David, who obeyed my commands and followed me with all his heart and always did whatever I wanted him to do.

You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made other gods and have made me furious with your gold calves. And since you have turned your back on me,

I will bring disaster on your dynasty and kill all your sons, slave or free alike. I will burn up your royal dynasty as one burns up trash until it is all gone. I, the Lord, vow that the members of your family who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the field will be eaten by vultures.' "

Then Ahijah said to Jeroboam's wife, "Go on home, and when you enter the city, the child will die. All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only member of your family who will have a proper burial, for this child is the only good thing that the Lord, the God of Israel, sees in the entire family of Jeroboam.

And the Lord will raise up a king over Israel who will destroy the family of Jeroboam. This will happen today, even now! Then the Lord will shake Israel like a reed whipped about in a stream. He will uproot the people of Israel from this good land that he gave their ancestors and will scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, for they have angered the Lord by worshiping Asherah poles.

He will abandon Israel because Jeroboam sinned and made all of Israel sin along with him."

So Jeroboam's wife returned to Tirzah, and the child died just as she walked through the door of her home. When the people of Israel buried him, they mourned for him, as the Lord had promised through the prophet Ahijah.

The rest of the events of Jeroboam's reign, all his wars and how he ruled, are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel.

Jeroboam reigned in Israel twenty-two years. When Jeroboam died, his son Nadab became the next king.

Meanwhile, Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen

years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen from among all the tribes of Israel as the place to honor his name. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman. During Rehoboam's reign, the people of Judah did what was evil in the Lord's sight, arousing his anger with their sin, for it was even worse than that of their ancestors.

They built pagan shrines and set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree.

Chapter 4



David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:1-54

The Philistines now mustered their army for battle and camped between Socoh in Judah and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. Saul countered by gathering his troops near the valley of Elah. So the Philistines and Israelites faced each other on opposite hills, with the valley between them.

Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was a giant of a man, measuring over nine feet tall!

He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leggings, and he slung a bronze javelin over his back. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed fifteen pounds. An armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a huge shield.

Goliath stood and shouted across to the Israelites, "Do you need a whole army to settle this? Choose someone to fight for you, and I will represent the Philistines. We will settle this dispute in single combat!

If your man is able to kill me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will be our slaves! I defy the armies of Israel! Send me a man

who will fight with me!" When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.

Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons in all. Jesse's three oldest sons—Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah—had already joined Saul's army to fight the Philistines.

David was the youngest of Jesse's sons. Since David's three oldest brothers were in the army, they stayed with Saul's forces all the time. But David went back and forth between working for Saul and helping his father with the sheep in Bethlehem.

For forty days, twice a day, morning and evening, the Philistine giant strutted in front of the Israelite army.

One day Jesse said to David, "Take this half-bushel of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread to your brothers. And give these ten cuts of cheese to their captain. See how your brothers are getting along, and bring me back a letter from them."

David's brothers were with Saul and the Israelite army at the valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines. So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts. He arrived at the outskirts of the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries.

Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, he saw Goliath, the champion from Gath, come out from the Philistine ranks, shouting his challenge to the army of Israel.

As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright. "Have you seen the giant?" the men were asking. "He comes out each day to challenge Israel. And have you heard about the huge reward the king has offered to anyone who kills him? The king will give him one of his daughters for a wife, and his whole family will be exempted from paying taxes!"

David talked to some others standing there to verify the report. "What will a man get for killing this Philistine and putting an end to his abuse of Israel?" he asked them. "Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?" And David received the same reply as before: "What you have been hearing is true. That is the reward for killing the giant."

But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. "What are you doing around here anyway?" he demanded. "What about those few sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and dishonesty. You just want to see the battle!"

"What have I done now?" David replied. "I was only asking a question!" He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer. Then David's question was reported to King Saul, and the king sent for him.

"Don't worry about a thing," David told Saul. "I'll go fight this Philistine!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!"

But David persisted. "I have been taking care of my father's sheep," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, [35] I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If the animal

turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. [36] I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God!

The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!"

Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!"

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before. "I can't go in these," he protested. "I'm not used to them." So he took them off again.

He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them in his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across to fight Goliath.

Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy.

"Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. [44] "Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled.

David shouted in reply, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel!

And everyone will know that the Lord does not need weapons to rescue his people. It is his battle, not ours. The Lord will give you to us!"

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it from his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face downward to the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine giant with only a stone and sling. And since he had no sword, [51] he ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. David used it to kill the giant and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. Then the Israelites gave a great shout of triumph and rushed after the Philistines, chasing them as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. The bodies of the dead and wounded Philistines were strewn all along the road from Shaaraim, as far as Gath and Ekron.

Then the Israelite army returned and plundered the deserted Philistine camp. (David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem, but he stored the Philistine's armor in his own tent.)

In the days of the exodus, most of the Israelites had been afraid to enter the Promised Land because of the giants living there (Numbers 13:32-33).

King Og of Bashan needed a bed over 13 feet long (Deut. 3:11). Now Goliath, over nine feet tall, taunted Israel's soldiers and appeared invincible to them. Saul, the tallest of the Israelites, may have been especially worried because he was obviously the best match for Goliath.

In God's eyes, however, Goliath was no different than anyone else.

An army often avoided the high cost of battle by pitting its strongest warrior against the strongest warrior of the enemy. This avoided great bloodshed because the winner of the fight was considered the winner of the battle. Goliath had the definite advantage against David from a human standpoint. But Goliath didn't realize that in fighting David, he also had to fight God.

Why would this go on for 40 days without one side attacking the other? They were camped on opposite sides of a valley with steep walls. Whoever would rush down the valley and up the steep cliffs would be at a disadvantage at the beginning of the battle and probably suffer great casualties. Each side was waiting for the other to attack first.

What a difference perspective can make. Most of the onlookers saw only a giant. David, however, saw a mortal man defying almighty God. He knew he would not be alone when he faced Goliath; God would fight with him. He looked at his situation from God's point of view. Viewing impossible situations from God's point of view helps us put giant problems in perspective. Once we see clearly, we can fight more effectively.

Criticism couldn't stop David. While the rest of the army stood around, he knew the importance of taking action. With God to fight for him, there was no reason to wait. People may try to discourage you with negative comments or mockery, but continue to do what you know is right. By doing what is right, you will be pleasing God, whose opinion matters most.

Chapter 5



Saul dies in the battle at Gilboa.

The Battle at Gilboa.

1 Samuel 28:1-20

About that time the Philistines mustered their armies for another war with Israel. King Achish told David, "You and your men will be expected to join me in battle."

"Very well!" David agreed. "Now you will see for yourself what we can do." Then Achish told David, "I will make you my personal bodyguard for life."

Meanwhile, Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him. He was buried in Ramah, his hometown. And Saul had banned all mediums and psychics from the land of Israel.

The Philistines set up their camp at Shunem, and Saul and the armies of Israel camped at Gilboa.

When Saul saw the vast Philistine army, he became frantic with fear. He asked the Lord what he should do, but the Lord refused to answer him, either by dreams or by sacred lots or by the prophets.

Saul then said to his advisers, "Find a woman who is a medium, so I can go and ask her what to do." His advisers replied, "There is a medium at Endor."

So Saul disguised himself by wearing ordinary clothing instead of his royal robes. Then he went to the woman's home at night, accompanied by two of his men.

"I have to talk to a man who has died," he said. "Will you call up his spirit for me?" "Are you trying to get me killed?" the woman demanded. "You know that Saul has expelled all the mediums and psychics from the land. Why are you setting a trap for me?"

But Saul took an oath in the name of the Lord and promised, "As surely as the Lord lives, nothing bad will happen to you for doing this."

Finally, the woman said, "Well, whose spirit do you want me to call up?" "Call up Samuel," Saul replied.

When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed, "You've deceived me! You are Saul!" "Don't be afraid!" the king told her. "What do you see?"

"I see a god coming up out of the earth," she said. "What does he look like?" Saul asked.

"He is an old man wrapped in a robe," she replied. Saul realized that it was Samuel, and he fell to the ground before him. "Why have you disturbed me by calling me back?" Samuel asked.

"Because I am in deep trouble," Saul replied. "The Philistines are at war with us, and God has left me and won't reply by prophets or dreams. So I have called for you to tell me what to do."

But Samuel replied, "Why ask me if the Lord has left you and has become your enemy? The Lord has done just as he said he would. He has taken the kingdom from you and given it to your rival, David.

The Lord has done this because you did not obey his instructions concerning the Amalekites.

What's more, the Lord will hand you and the army of Israel over to the Philistines tomorrow, and you and your sons will be here with me. The Lord will bring the entire army of Israel down in defeat."

Saul fell full length on the ground, paralyzed with fright because of Samuel's words. He was also faint with hunger, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night.

When the woman saw how distraught he was, she said, "Sir, I obeyed your command at the risk of my life. Now do what I say, and let me give you something to eat so you can regain your strength for the trip back."

But Saul refused. The men who were with him also urged him to eat, so he finally yielded and got up from the ground and sat on the couch.

The woman had been fattening a calf, so she hurried out and killed it. She kneaded dough and baked unleavened bread. [25] She brought the meal to Saul and his men, and they ate it. Then they went out into the night.

1 Samuel 29:1-30:20

The entire Philistine army now mobilized at Aphek, and the Israelites camped at the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers were leading out their troops in groups of one hundred and one thousand, David and his

men marched at the rear with King Achish. But the Philistine commanders demanded, "What are these Hebrews doing here?"

And Achish told them, "This is David, the man who ran away from King Saul of Israel. He's been with me for years, and I've never found a single fault in him since he defected to me."

But the Philistine commanders were angry. "Send him back!" they demanded. "He can't go into the battle with us. What if he turns against us? Is there any better way for him to reconcile himself with his master than by turning on us in battle?"

Isn't this the same David about whom the women of Israel sing in their dances, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"

So Achish finally summoned David and his men.

"I swear by the Lord," he told them, "you are some of the finest men I've ever met. I think you should go with us, but the other Philistine rulers won't hear of it. please don't upset them, but go back quietly."

"What have I done to deserve this treatment?" David demanded. "Why can't I fight the enemies of my lord, the king?"

But Achish insisted, "As far as I'm concerned, you're as perfect as an angel of God. But my commanders are afraid to have you with them in the battle. Now get up early in the morning, and leave with your men as soon as it gets light."

So David headed back into the land of the Philistines, while the Philistine army went on to Jezreel.

Three days later, when David and his men arrived home at their town of Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had made a raid into the Negev

and had burned Ziklag to the ground They had carried off the women and children and everyone else but without killing anyone.

When David and his men saw the ruins and realized what had happened to their families,

they wept until they could weep no more. David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel, were among those captured.

David was now in serious trouble because his men were very bitter about losing their wives and children, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

Then he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring me the ephod!" So Abiathar brought it. Then David asked the Lord, "Should I chase them? Will I catch them?"

And the Lord told him, "Yes, go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!" So David and his six hundred men set out, and they soon came to Besor Brook. But two hundred of the men were too exhausted to cross the brook, so David continued the pursuit with his four hundred remaining troops.

Some of David's troops found an Egyptian man in a field and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and some water to drink. They also gave him part of a fig cake and two clusters of raisins because he hadn't had anything to eat or drink for three days and nights. It wasn't long before his strength returned.

"To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" David asked him.

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"I am an Egyptian—the slave of an Amalekite," he replied. "My master left me behind three days ago because I was sick. We were on our way back from raiding the Kerethites in the Negev, the territory of Judah, and the land of Caleb, and we had just burned Ziklag."

"Will you lead me to them?" David asked.

The young man replied, "If you swear by God's name that you will not kill me or give me back to my master, then I will guide you to them."

So the Egyptian led them to the Amalekite encampment. When David and his men arrived, the Amalekites were spread out across the fields, eating and drinking and dancing with joy because of the vast amount of plunder they had taken from the Philistines and the land of Judah.

David and his men rushed in among them and slaughtered them throughout that night and the entire next day until evening. None of the Amalekites escaped except four hundred young men who fled on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, and he rescued his two wives. [

Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter, nor anything else that had been taken. David brought everything back.

His troops rounded up all the flocks and herds and drove them on ahead. "These all belong to David as his reward!" they said.

Joab vs. Abner

2 Samuel 2:1-32

After this, David asked the Lord, "Should I move back to Judah?"
And the Lord replied, "Yes."

Then David asked, "Which town should I go to?"
And the Lord replied, "Hebron."

David's wives were Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. So David and his wives [3] and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled near the town of Hebron. Then Judah's leaders came to David and crowned him king over the tribe of Judah.

When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, [5] he sent them this message: "May the Lord bless you for being so loyal to your king and giving him a decent burial. [6] May the Lord be loyal to you in return and reward you with his unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done. [7] And now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and loyal subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king."

But Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had already gone to Mahanaim with Saul's son Ishbosheth. [9] There he proclaimed Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel. [10] Ishbosheth was forty years old when he became king, and he ruled from Mahanaim for two years. Meanwhile, the tribe of Judah remained loyal to David. [11] David made Hebron his capital, and he ruled as king of Judah for seven and a half years.

One day Abner led some of Ishbosheth's troops from Mahanaim to Gibeon. [13] About the same time, Joab son of Zeruiah led David's troops from Hebron, and they met Abner at the pool of Gibeon. The two groups sat down there, facing each other from opposite sides of the pool. [14] Then Abner suggested to Joab, "Let's have a few of our warriors put on an exhibition of hand-to-hand combat."

"All right," Joab agreed. [15] So twelve men were chosen from each side to fight against each other. [16] Each one grabbed his opponent by the hair and thrust his sword into the other's side so that all of them died. The place has been known ever since as the Field of Swords. [17] The two armies then began to fight each other, and by the end of the day Abner and the men of Israel had been defeated by the forces of David.

Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, the three sons of Zeruiah, were among David's forces that day. Asahel could run like a deer, [19] and he began chasing Abner. He was relentless and single-minded in his pursuit. [20] When Abner looked back and saw him coming, he called out, "Is that you, Asahel?"

"Yes, it is," he replied.

"Go fight someone else!" Abner warned. "Take on one of the younger men and strip him of his weapons." But Asahel refused and kept right on chasing Abner.

Again Abner shouted to him, "Get away from here! I will never be able to face your brother Joab if I have to kill you!" [23] But Asahel would not give up, so Abner thrust the butt end of his spear through Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He stumbled to the ground and died there. And everyone who came by that spot stopped and stood still when they saw Asahel lying there.

When Joab and Abishai found out what had happened, they set out after Abner. The sun was just going down as they arrived at the hill of

Ammah near Giah, along the road to the wilderness of Gibeon. [25] Abner's troops from the tribe of Benjamin regrouped there at the top of the hill to take a stand. [26] Abner shouted down to Joab, "Must we always solve our differences with swords? Don't you realize the only thing we will gain is bitterness toward each other? When will you call off your men from chasing their Israelite brothers?"

Then Joab said, "God only knows what would have happened if you hadn't spoken, for we would have chased you all night if necessary." [28] So Joab blew his trumpet, and his men stopped chasing the troops of Israel.

All that night Abner and his men retreated through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, traveling all through the morning, and they did not stop until they arrived at Mahanaim.

Meanwhile, Joab and his men also returned home. When Joab counted his casualties, he discovered that only nineteen men were missing, in addition to Asahel. [31] But three hundred and sixty of Abner's men, all from the tribe of Benjamin, had been killed. [32] Joab and his men took Asahel's body to Bethlehem and buried him there beside his father. Then they traveled all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.



David defeats the Philistines

- . 2 Samuel 5:17-25

David and the Ammonites

- . 2 Samuel 10:1-19

Absalom's Rebellion.

2 Samuel 15:1-18:18

Israel and Judah fight Moab.

War against Moab.

2 Kings 3:1-27

Chapter 5



Israel Taken Captive.

2 Kings 17:1-23

Assyria advances toward Jerusalem

Assyria Advances

. Isaiah 36:1-37:38

The Battle at Carchemish

2 Chron. 35:1-26

Judah taken captive.

Juda Exiled.

2 Kings 24:1-25:26

The battles between the Israelites and Philistines.

CHART: Israelites vs. Philistines