

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE



**Judges, Ruth
And I and II Samuel**

Study Booklet #3

The Book of Judges

Chapter 1

The Agony of Apostasy

The Book of Judges covers four hundred years of Hebrew history. The opening sentence in the Book of Judges records the death of Joshua and the lack of leadership that followed his death. Joshua did not succeed in training a leader to follow him. In a sense, the Book of Judges describes how lost the Israelites became because Joshua failed to train a leader for them. Throughout the Book of Judges, we will see that all of these judges failed to train leaders who would succeed them and give continuity to their vision of how the people of God should be led.

The key verse in the Book of Judges tells us there was no king in Israel during this period of history, and "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:5-7) Many scholars believe Samuel was the author of the Book of Judges. Since there was no king during the days of the Judges, it may very well be that the author of this book wrote while looking back from the time of the monarchy. The days when the Judges ruled were the dark ages of Hebrew history before Israel had a king.

The devotional message of Judges deals with a basic problem called "apostasy." The word "apostasy," is a compound word that means, "to stand away from." Sometimes, the word means, "to fall away" from the commitments of faith. In the closing chapter of the Book of Joshua the children of Israel made a commitment and sealed their faith with a solemn covenant." Joshua said, "You must choose for yourself and your house, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." They

essentially pledged to God and Joshua, "We choose to put God first. We choose to serve and obey God."

They chose to serve the Lord, and they took that stand for themselves and their families. Apostasy is simply this: You take a stand like the children of Israel did, then later you stand away, or you fall away from your commitment to God and your covenant with God.

A Cycle of Apostasy

In the Book of Judges, we see a cycle of apostasy through which the children of Israel pass seven times in a little more than four hundred years. If you think of the face of a clock, this cycle of apostasy begins with the hour hand of the clock pointing to twelve o'clock. That represents the children of Israel when God is first and they are in alignment with God. At one o'clock, the children of Israel stand away from their commitment to God. At two o'clock there is moral corruption followed by political corruption at three o'clock. At four o'clock, a fierce enemy surfaces. At five o'clock Israel is conquered by that enemy. When the hand of the clock is pointing down to six o'clock, the children of Israel are the slaves of that conqueror.

As the hour hand of the clock moves up the other side, at seven o'clock there is a spiritual revival. The people of God cry out to God for mercy. At eight o'clock God raises up a leader whom He calls, equips and inspires to lead a revolution and overthrow the wicked conqueror. That leader is called a "judge." At nine o'clock the judge begins to assemble the ways and means of overthrowing the conqueror. At ten o'clock there is a revolution with victory coming at eleven o'clock. With the victory won and the conqueror overthrown, the children of Israel are back to twelve o'clock, serving and loving God again.

For varying periods of time, all is well - until we read those awesome words again: "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." We then realize that the cycle of apostasy is happening again - and - again - and again. The children of Israel had peace for as long as eighty years at times, but over and over again, apostasy surfaced and the cycle of apostasy was repeated seven times.

There are at least two devotional and practical applications for us as we read the Book of Judges. First, there is a personal application. Is it possible for us to stand away or fall away from what we believe? Is it possible for us to commit apostasy? The Book of Judges says, yes, it is!

We are warned in the Book of Deuteronomy and by the Apostle Paul, "Let him who thinks he stands (continuously) take heed lest he fall." The fact that we have entered our "promised land of Canaan" and conquered does not mean we cannot take a stand away from, or fall away from what we believe. The Book of Judges shows us again and again that the children of Israel did fall into apostasy. Like them, we all have those times when we make great commitments to God, but then we stand away or fall away from those covenants with God. When we do, we must eventually pay the high cost of apostasy.

The second devotional application of the Book of Judges is what we might call national apostasy. Just as the nation of Israel went through this cycle so many times in the Book of Judges, it is possible for other nations go through this cycle today.

There was a time when the Holy Land was "God's headquarters," and Jerusalem was the spiritual capital of the world. But, the spiritual leaders turned away from God and rejected Jesus Christ and His messianic claims. When Jesus came into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, He said to the

religious leaders, "If you will not bring forth the fruit of the kingdom of God, God will take the kingdom away from you and give it to a people who will." In other words, God will "move His headquarters" if a country does not bring forth the fruit of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Commitment to God is like falling on a stone. Either you fall upon this stone and are broken on this stone, or this stone falls on you and crushes you to powder." (Matthew 21:42-44)

When Jesus took the kingdom away from the religious leaders of Israel, He gave that kingdom to His church. That means the devotional application in this cycle of apostasy teaching should primarily be directed to the church. Since there is one interpretation but many applications of Scripture, this warning about apostasy can be applied to ministries like the thousands of church related colleges, universities, and seminaries that were founded to teach God's Word.

We must apply the awesome warnings regarding apostasy in the Book of Judges personally, institutionally, and nationally. The message of this book is that we should always be at "twelve o'clock," loving, worshipping, and serving God.

Chapter 2

Extraordinary Things Through Ordinary People

In addition to the warnings about apostasy in the Book of Judges, there are many devotional truths that can be learned from the personal lives of the judges. These judges are some of the best character studies in the Scripture.

Othniel was the first judge. According to the Scripture, his only credential seems to be that he was Caleb's nephew. The only credentials the second judge, Ehud, had is that he was left-handed. We are told that another judge, Deborah, was a mother in Israel. She had a hard time getting a military man, Barak, to get up the courage to go into battle with her. When Gideon was called, he said, "Oh my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest ... and I am the least in my father's house." (Judges 6:15) A theme that runs through the character profiles of all these judges is that they were very ordinary people.

Do you consider yourself a common, ordinary person? Do you believe that God would not, or even could not, use you because you are not a greatly gifted over achiever? This Book of Judges will show you that God delights in doing extraordinary things through very ordinary people just like you and me.

Othniel was Caleb's younger brother's son. The Bible says this about him: "The Spirit of the Lord took control of him and he reformed and purged Israel so that when he led the forces of Israel against the army of the enemy, the Lord helped Israel conquer completely." (Judges 3:10)

God delights in taking ordinary people and doing extraordinary things through them because His Spirit is controlling them. That is what the New Testament calls being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We see this in the life of the judge named Ehud whose only credential was that he was left-handed. Israel had been conquered by the Moabites. A king named Eglon had conquered them. When a nation conquered another nation in those days, they always placed unbearable tax burdens on those they had conquered. Ehud led a group that went to the capital of Moab to pay the taxes for Israel. Ehud went into Eglon's palace and

paid their taxes. Before he went on this mission, he made a dagger eighteen inches long.

When he stood before the very fat King Eglon, he said, "I have a message for you from God." We read that with his strong left hand, he pulled out his dagger and killed the king. Ehud started a revolution and the Moabites were overthrown. The only thing we are told about Ehud, is that he was left-handed. It is possible that his left hand was the only thing Ehud had to offer the Lord. God used it mightily. Have you offered your talents, big and small, to God? If you place your meager gifts and talents in God's hand, He will use them just like He used Ehud's left hand.

One of my favorite stories of these deliverers is the story of Deborah, a mother in Israel. Deborah had a special spiritual gift. She was a prophetess. She sat under a palm tree and prophesied and people came from all over Israel to hear her speak messages of God.

One day she essentially said to a man named Barak, "God Himself has a message for you. You are to mobilize ten thousand men and attack General Sisera, the Canaanite general who has nine hundred chariots of iron and leads a great army. Attack him and deliver Israel from the Canaanites." (Judges 4:5,6)

Barak said, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you do not go with me, I will not go." (Judges 4:7-9) Barak knew that if God was really saying this through her, then God would make him victorious. Perhaps to test Deborah, to see if she really believed it was a message from God, he said, "You come along. You march with us." Deborah agreed, but warned him, "It will go down in history that a woman delivered Israel from the Canaanites." (Judges 4:8-10) When Barak asked the Israelite men to go to the battle, ten thousand volunteered. That is exactly what Deborah told him would happen.

The battle was fought on Mount Tabor. God confused the nine hundred charioteers of Sisera. The Canaanite army panicked. Barak's men took control and Sisera tried to run. A woman named Jael offered to hide him in her tent. He fell asleep quickly and while he slept Jael took a hammer and a tent pin and nailed his head to the floor.

Remember, the basic message of Judges is apostasy and the awful consequences of apostasy. But, we also learn from lives of the judges that God uses little people. He loves to take ordinary people just like you and me and do extraordinary things through them. God does incredible things through ordinary people who are controlled by the Spirit.

Chapter 3

Every Man in His Place

Gideon is the most colorful of all these Judges. We will do a close-up of his life because his life has much to teach us. For example, if you have low self-esteem, consider what Gideon says of himself: "My clan is the weakest and I am the least in my father's house." He lived during the brutally cruel Midianite conquest of Israel. Many Israelites had been killed in the war with the Midianites and they had destroyed the crops of the chosen people leaving them nothing to eat.

After seven years of poverty and cruelty, the people of Israel began to cry out to the Lord for help. The Lord called the man who was going to become their deliverer. That man was Gideon.

We read that the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress because he wanted to hide the wheat from the Midianites. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you, Oh mighty man of valor." Gideon's response to that was, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, then why has all this happened to us? Where are all His miracles?" (Judges 6:12-14)

Many years had passed since the crossing of the Red Sea and Gideon wanted to know if God would still grant his people a miracle like He did in the time of Moses. The angel of the Lord essentially told Gideon that if he wanted to find the miracle God was going to use to deliver the children of Israel from the Midianites, he should look in a mirror. We see the theme of this book emphasized again. God is going to delight in taking the least of the weakest in the weakest tribe and use the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary supernatural miracle He has planned for this deliverance.

It is important when God calls you to do a work for Him that you go into that work knowing that God has sent you and that God is with you. You must also learn some spiritual secrets that these Judges and other great deliverers like Moses had to learn. Those spiritual secrets are: It is not a matter of who and what you are; it is a matter of Who and what God is. It is not a matter of what you can do; it is a matter of what God can do. It is not a matter of what you want; it is what God wants that matters. When the miracles happen, you will then look back and say, "It was not what I did; it was what God did because God sent me, and God was with me."

God is not looking for super saints. He is very often looking for the least of the weakest because the least of the weakest is more likely to learn those spiritual secrets that

Moses and the other leaders of God's people learned. How can people learn these secrets if they are super saints? They will likely trust in themselves before they trust in God. But if they are the least of the weakest, God can get them to trust in Him. This was the kind of leader God raised up again and again in the Book of Judges.

When God called Gideon to overthrow the Midianites, there were hundreds of thousands of Midianites. They were like a plague of grasshoppers for multitude. God had to build Gideon's faith. God wants to do two things when He is trying to give a man the gift of faith. First, God wants to prove that man's faith by testing. Then God wants to prove Himself to the man. Observe how God will confirm the faith of people when He is trying to call them to do something that requires great faith. Psalm 37:23 reads that "The steps of a believer are confirmed by the Lord."

Most of us know the story of Gideon's fleece. God called Gideon to be Israel's deliverer from the Midianites. Gideon needed to know for sure that God was calling him, so he asked God to confirm his calling. At night, he placed a dry fleece of wool outside and he told the Lord that if the ground was dry the next morning but the fleece was wet, he would know that the Lord really was calling him to be a deliverer. When Gideon got up the next morning, the ground was dry, yet he squeezed a whole bowl of water out of his wool fleece. Still uncertain, the following night he asked the Lord to leave the ground wet and the fleece dry. The next morning the ground was drenched with dew and the fleece was very dry.

Because God was calling Gideon to do a great work, He did as Gideon asked. But we should be careful when we ask God to prove Himself to us. There is a fine line between putting out a fleece, as Gideon did, and putting the Lord to the test. When

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He was challenged to throw Himself from the highest point of the temple. If the angels saved Him, everybody would know that He was the Son of God. But Jesus said, "It is written, you are not supposed to put God to the test." We come to God by faith. There will be times when God is going to test us. However, we do not have the right to test God.

When you begin your spiritual journey, it is as if you are entering God's "University of Faith." You do not have the right to test God. But God does have the right to test you. He can give you "surprise test" and difficult examinations at regular intervals, but you never have the right to give Him exams. God knows there will be times when you really do have faith but still need some confirmation. That is not the same thing as putting God to the test because you are do not believe Him.

God proved Gideon's faith in still another way. Before they were to attack the Midianites, who were camped in the dark valley of Esdraelon, God told Gideon to sneak into the Midianite camp. He stood next to a tent of two Midianite soldiers and listened to one of them talk about his dream. He had wakened from a nightmare. He said, "I dreamed that this great big barley loaf came rolling down the mountain and crushed our tent, crushed it flat. I wonder what this could mean?" His fellow soldier said, "I know what it means. That is the sword of Gideon, that powerful Israeli army that is just over the hill. Your dream means that the army of Israel is going to come and crush the Midianite army." (Judges 7:12-14)

When Gideon heard that, he stood in the dark and bowed his head and worshipped. Then he went back to his people and said, "Get up, because God has given Midian into your hand." Is God grooming you for a work of faith? Is it possible that God wants

to do a great work through you but you are not close enough to Him to know that?

Before God uses Gideon to overthrow the Midianites, we see God proving Himself to Gideon in many wonderful ways, and we see God proving the faith of Gideon. The greatest challenge of Gideon's faith was when God asked Gideon to sacrifice the prize ox of his father. Gideon's father was an apostate father. He had built an altar to Baal, a pagan god. God told Gideon to get his father's best ox (in modern terms that would be like saying get his seventy-five thousand dollar tractor), chain it to the altar and pull it down. He told Gideon to then take his father's idol, chop it up and make a fire upon which he was to sacrifice the ox as a burnt sacrifice to God.

That was an enormous challenge. Many times in the Gospels, Jesus will say, "If you are not willing to put Me first, ahead of your father, you are not worthy of Me." Jesus challenges us to put Him first ahead of father and mother. That is what God was asking Gideon to do when He ordered Gideon to destroy his father's idol in this way.

Gideon obeyed God's command to the letter. The next morning, when the people in the city saw what had happened to their altar and their idol, they asked, "Who did this?" The answer came, "Gideon has done this." They wanted to put Gideon to death because he had offended the god of Baal. Because Gideon's father loved his son, he said to the town's people, "You are the ones who ought to be put to death for offending Baal because if he is a god, let him defend himself." That day Gideon was given the nickname Jerub-Baal, which means, "Let Baal defend himself."

God proved Gideon again when He told him to prune his army. Gideon was leading thirty-two thousand men out to attack the Midianites. As they were on their way, God said, "Gideon, you

have too many people." God did not want Gideon to think his victory was due to the number of men in his army. God ordered him to send home anyone who was frightened.

Remember, in Deuteronomy, Moses wrote the law that commanded this kind of challenge when an army of Israel was marching to a great battle? They were send home soldiers who were frightened, betrothed, or who had planted a vineyard and had not yet reaped the fruit of it. (Deuteronomy 20:1-8) When Gideon challenged the frightened to leave, twenty-two thousand soldiers went home.

He marched on with ten thousand soldiers and God said, "Gideon, you have got too many people." He knew that Gideon would still credit a victory to the number of men in his army. God told Gideon to let his men drink from a river and to separate those who lay down to drink from those who lapped the water as they marched through the water. Nine thousand seven hundred lay down to drink, and God essentially said, "Tell them to go home, we don't need them! By the three hundred who lapped going through the river, I will deliver the Midianites into your hand." (Judges 7:5-7)

That is less than one percent of what Gideon started out with. God does not need thousands of uncommitted followers. He never has. God needs a small group of totally committed servants.

God proved Gideon's faith again through the battle plan by which he conquered the Midianites. Gideon's victory required great faith, tremendous courage and a beautiful plan. The Midianites were camped in a very dark valley. God told Gideon to take his three hundred men, divide them into three companies of one hundred each, and place them in three locations: north, east and west of the Midianite army. Gideon was given clear instructions, which he passed on to his men.

This is a great study in leadership when Gideon says, "Watch me, ... follow my lead ... do exactly as I do." (7:17) That is the essence of real leadership. All of these men simply had to be totally committed to God and to Gideon. In their left hands they had a jug that was covering a torch. In their right hands they had a bugle. When Gideon gave the signal, they broke the jugs that covered their torches, and exposed one hundred torches. Then they blew on their one hundred bugles. They shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" That happened in three different locations.

If you were a Midianite, sleeping on the ground in the pitch black darkness, what would you think if you awoke and heard one hundred jugs crash then saw a hundred torches and heard a hundred horns blasting and a hundred men shouting north of your camp? Then, the same thing happens east of you and the same thing west of where you are encamped? You would probably think the great army of Gideon had surrounded you.

The Midianites did think they were surrounded. They panicked and in the dark started killing each other. Gideon's men ran them out of the valley like cattle. Then the men who had left Gideon's army returned to join the battle. Those who had gone home came back and together they completely destroyed the Midianites.

The verse that describes the victory gives us this description of the three hundred: "Every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army (of the Midianites) ran and cried out and fled." (7:21) If a percentage of the three hundred had not exposed their torches, blown their bugles and shouted on cue, the whole battle plan could have failed and they would have been slaughtered by the Midianites.

That is a beautiful picture of the Church of Jesus Christ today. The risen Christ does not need thousands of uncommitted

followers. He needs a committed minority of dedicated disciples who will stand every one in his or her place. If God could get every one of us to stand in our place and use whatever spiritual gifts He has given us, in whatever place those gifts put us, with 100 percent commitment to Jesus Christ, then we could rout all the hosts of hell.

Remember that the key verse that unlocks the truth in the history books of the Old Testament is found in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul tells us to look for examples and warnings when we read Hebrew history (I Corinthians 10:11). In the Book of Judges the warnings cluster around the awesome consequences of apostasy.

The examples can be found in the lives of the Judges. There are others like Samson who is a warning and an example. Look for both in his life. All the examples of these judges model the dynamic truth that God delights in using very ordinary people to do very extraordinary things for Him to His glory. When we grasp that truth we should realize that our greatest ability is our availability to God and whatever He is calling us to do.

The Book of Ruth

Chapter 4

The Romance of Redemption

As we continue through the historical books of the Old Testament, having surveyed the books of Joshua and Judges, we

now come to the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth is a beautiful love story that took place "in the days when the judges ruled."

This love story mirrors salvation and our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Old and New Testament Scriptures tell us we are betrothed to Him. He is the Bridegroom and we, the church, are His "bride." The Book of Ruth presents this relationship a "Romance of Redemption." The Bible gives us this beautiful love story:

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. "And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." (Ruth 1:1-5)

Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons went to a far away country and fell on hard times. The land of Moab has a negative connotation for devout Jews that makes it like the far country of the prodigal son. The story of this family follows the same pattern as the story of the prodigal son. While the prodigal family was in the land of Moab, both of their sons died. Elimelech died as well. Naomi is the only surviving member of the family that traveled to Moab to escape a famine in Bethlehem-Judah.

With the focus on Naomi, we see a profile of some of the

patterns in the story of prodigals. While Naomi was in the far country of Moab, things were very hard. Before her two sons died, they married Moabite women, which was forbidden. She had gone to Moab with a husband and two sons. Now she has no husband, no sons, and two Moabite daughters-in-law.

The story continues, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." (Ruth 1:6) That nearly always happens to a prodigal. While they are in the far country of this world, they hear about how good it is back in the father's house.

"Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah." (Ruth 1:7) This was the return of the prodigal daughter. Before returning, Naomi turned to her daughters-in-law and she said, "Now you go and return to your mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. She kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept."

The story continues: "They said unto her, 'Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.' And Naomi said, 'Why will you go back with me? There are no more sons in my womb, and if there were, would you wait for them until they were grown so they could become your husbands?' She said, 'No, turn again my daughters and go your way; I am too old to have an husband.'" (Ruth 1:11-12) We read that Naomi's daughter-in-law, Orpah, kissed her and left. But Ruth stayed with her.

Naomi said to Ruth, "Behold thy sister is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister." This is where Ruth becomes the centerpiece of the book that is

named for her and we meet the main character of this beautiful love story. Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." (Ruth 1:16-18)

Ruth gave us a remarkable model of loyalty when she made this solemn commitment to Naomi. These two verses present a very good outline for wedding vows because they represent the kind of commitment that ought to be made between a man and wife. When you marry somebody, you are committed to go where they go and to live where they live. You may think you are not marrying into a family, but after a few years, you will discover that you had better say "Your people are my people" or you are going to have a strained relationship with your spouse.

The most important part of the commitment is "your God my God." If you do not have the same God, then you do not have a common basis for your value system. That is one of the causes of broken marriages. When couples do not have the same value system, they have problems. When they think about how they are going to spend their life together in terms of their time, their money and their energy, they will not agree on anything. The foundation that gives a married couple a common mind-set is to be able to say, "Your God is my God. When you get your values from your relationship with God, you will have a common value system.

The last verse of chapter one says, "So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." The fact that it was the beginning of the barley harvest when they returned to Bethlehem is very important. As these two women came to Bethlehem, Naomi

was a picture of a child of God returning to her father's house. The grace of God was waiting there to receive her, just like the father came running out to welcome, affirm, embrace, and accept the prodigal son. (Luke 15:20)

In this story, Ruth represents those people who are not part of God's family. Ruth was not a Hebrew. She was a foreigner. Does God have any grace for the person who is not a member of the family of God? Yes He does. Saving grace, which reached out to us when we were sinners, is how all of us become part of the family of God. As we will see, God's grace for Naomi and Ruth will be found in His law.

The first law of God that gave grace to Ruth and Naomi is found in Leviticus 19:9-10. This law, called the Law of Gleaning, tells harvesters not to pick up stray produce they have accidentally dropped on the ground, but to leave them for the poor and the foreigners to glean. Ruth decided on her first day in Bethlehem that she was going to glean in the fields. We read: "Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, 'Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace.' And Naomi said, 'Go, my daughter.' And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech." (Ruth 2:2-4)

Another law of Moses is an important backdrop that helps us to understand why this love story is in the Bible. That is the law in Deuteronomy chapter 25, which is called "The Law of the Kinsman Redeemer." This law states that if a man's brother dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. To continue his name in Israel her husband's brother must marry her. If the dead man's brother refuses, then she may report him

to the city elders. (This was the equivalent of taking him to court.) If he still refuses, before the elders, she may pull his sandal from his foot and spit in his face. From that day on his house would be called something like "The house of the man who had his sandal pulled off." It was a disgrace to wear that label in the culture of Israel.

Since Ruth was married to a Hebrew man, as a result of that marriage, she was brought into the family of God, the Hebrew nation. When her husband died, they had no children, so Ruth was no longer a member of the family of God. The law stated that she could go to a kinsman of her dead husband, and ask him to marry her. If he refused, she could press the matter in court. If he still would not marry her, the elders would go through the ceremony described in the law of the kinsman redeemer.

The man who agreed to marry such a woman did two things for her. First, he bought her back by paying any debts she owed. The second thing the redeemer did was to marry her. Establishing the relationship of marriage with her brought her back into God's family. That was Ruth's hope as she went back to Bethlehem-Judah. That is why chapter two begins with the exciting news that Ruth's deceased father-in-law had a kinsman who was a mighty man of wealth, and his name was Boaz.

As this love story continues, we will see a picture of God's grace for the prodigal child who was coming home, and God's grace for the person who is coming to Him for redemption.

Chapter 5

Love at First Sight

The story of Ruth took place in the days when the judges ruled, the spiritual dark ages of Hebrew history. The romance described in the Book of Ruth is a beautiful picture of our salvation and redemption. Ruth, the Moabitess daughter-in-law, is a picture of a person who is not part of the family of God. We see God show His love and grace for her in the redemption that is prescribed in the law of God.

Ruth went to glean in a field that belonged to Boaz. When Boaz came to work that day he saw Ruth and he appears to have been smitten by her beauty. He asked his servant, "Whose damsel is this?" He had obviously fallen in love with her. Ruth's name means "beauty" or "rosebud". His servant told him how she had been married to a Hebrew man in Moab who had died, and how she had made a great pledge of loyalty to her mother-in-law. He shared with Boaz the fact that Ruth had come to be a believer while she had been married to her Hebrew husband.

Boaz told Ruth to stay in his field where he could protect her. He made it very clear to Ruth that he cared for her. In verse 10, we read, "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, 'Why have I found grace in your eyes, that thou would take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?'" (Ruth 2:9-11) The word grace means "the favor and blessing of God that we do not deserve." Boaz told her that he knew about the death of her husband and her pledge to Naomi. He also told her that he knew she had come to believe in Israel's God.

She said, "Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord." (Ruth 2:12-14) At mealtime, Boaz asked her to join him for lunch. She ate until she was no longer hungry and Boaz saw to it that

she went home with large portions of produce from her gleaning in his fields that day. Boaz gave strict orders to his reapers that if they saw Ruth gleaning behind them they were to drop "handfuls on purpose" in the fields for Ruth. Boaz loved Ruth.

Romance in Reverse

Ruth chapter two ends by telling us that Ruth worked in the fields of Boaz through two harvests. That means she repeated the events of chapter one for six months. Chapter three begins, "Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said unto her, 'My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee that it may be well with thee?'" In other words, Naomi said, "Shall I find you a husband? Naomi had probably told Ruth all about the laws of gleaning and redemption. We can assume that Ruth knew about the law of the kinsman redeemer and that Boaz was their kindred. Boaz and his workers were threshing that night and they always slept by their harvest after threshing. Naomi told her to "Wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor ... ". Naomi was telling Ruth to propose to Boaz by asking him to be her kinsman redeemer.

There was also a banquet after the threshing. Naomi told Ruth to go and watch where Boaz laid his bedroll. "In the middle of the night," Naomi said, "go and present yourself to him and propose to him by telling him you want him to be your kinsman redeemer." This was not only a romance of redemption, it was a romance in reverse. In that culture Boaz could not propose to Ruth. She had to propose to him. There were many kinsmen of her dead husband. Under the law, Ruth had to go to one of them and ask him to be her kinsman redeemer. All Boaz could do was show her in many loving gestures that he would love to be her redeemer.

What she did in chapter three was very proper. It was a

proposal of marriage. We read that at midnight Ruth went and lay at the feet of Boaz. Boaz was frightened when he found a woman there. He asked, "Who are you?" She answered, "I am Ruth, your handmaid. Spread therefore your blanket over thy handmaid for thou art a near kinsman." (Ruth 3:8-10) Boaz said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for you have showed me more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as you have not chosen young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that you require, for all the city knows that you are a virtuous woman." (Ruth 3:10-12) Boaz gives Ruth as much grain as she can carry and strict orders for her to go home to her mother in law.

Redemption in a Romance

We have seen our two lovers meet, fall in love and propose marriage. Because of Old Testament Hebrew law, we have seen the woman propose to the man. When she does, her lover must work out the legal details. At the beginning of the fourth chapter of this book, we see Boaz arranging a session of the elders in order to make the marriage legal.

Very early the next morning after Ruth proposed to him, Boaz saw the kinsman who was closer to Ruth than he and told him about Elimelech's property that needed to be redeemed. The man agreed to redeem it. But when Boaz told him that in order to redeem the property he would have to marry a Moabite woman, he no longer wanted to redeem it because it would "mar his inheritance," or put a blemish on his family tree. Then Boaz told the elders present that he was redeeming all the property of Elimelech and that he was redeeming by marriage, Ruth, the Moabite woman who was the widowed daughter in law of Elimelech.

To redeem means "to buy back" and "to bring back". Boaz redeemed Ruth in two ways. First, he bought her back when he

paid all her debts. Then he established a relationship with her that brought her back into the family of God.

In the fifth chapter of the Book of Revelation there is another beautiful picture of redemption. In heaven there is weeping because there is no (kinsman) redeemer who can break the seals of a scroll and redeem mankind. Then those in heaven who are weeping are told that they should weep no more because a Redeemer has been found Who is qualified and willing to redeem them. That Redeemer is Jesus Christ.

What is our hope of redemption when we realize that we must be redeemed? Our only hope of redemption is based on our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ was the price that had to be paid to buy us back into the family of God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that it is possible for us to establish a relationship with the risen, living Christ that is likened unto a marriage relationship in both the Old and the New Testaments. That relationship brings us back into fellowship with God, confirms our status as children of God, and brings us back into the family of God.

In the beginning, God and man were in a perfect fellowship that could be illustrated by clasping your hands together. Genesis tells us that God made man a creature of choice and man chose to turn away from God, which could be illustrated by unclasping your hands and turning them away from each other. The Good News is that God bought man back through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, which can be illustrated by clasping your hands together again. Peter writes that it was not earthly things, like silver and gold, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ that redeemed us (I Peter 18,19).

But that is only half the miracle of redemption. The marriage between Boaz and Ruth shows us the second dimension of the miracle of redemption. Jesus Christ was raised from the

dead and He is knocking at the door of our hearts. One of the most beautiful metaphors in the Bible pictures the risen, living Christ knocking on the door of our hearts. He tells us that He wants us to open the door of our hearts and invite Him to come in and have an intimate relationship with us. Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom and we are the "bride" in this relationship. (Matthew 25:1-13; John 3:29; Revelation 21:2; 22:17)

The Book of Ruth is a profound allegory that illustrates this same truth. That truth is what I call "The Romance in Reverse." In most cultures, the man chooses and proposes marriage to a woman. The laws of redemption that are applied in this beautiful love story meant that Ruth had to propose to Boaz. The same thing is true in our redemption. All Boaz could do was show Ruth that he loved her and that he wanted to redeem her. But she had to say, "I want it to be you, Boaz. I want you to be my kinsman redeemer!"

In the same way you and I must say to the risen Christ, as He stands at the door of your life, patiently knocking, "I want You to be my kinsman Redeemer! I want You to buy me back through Your death on the cross, and I want You to bring me back into the family of God by establishing an intimate relationship with me."

When we read the Book of Ruth there is another beautiful biblical word on which we should focus. That word is "grace." A few years into her marriage with Boaz, God gave Ruth and Boaz a son, whom they named, Obed. Obed became the grandfather of David, which put Ruth and Boaz in the bloodline of Jesus Christ. You will find their names in the genealogy of the Messiah in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

Imagine that Ruth is shopping in a marketplace with her little son and she sees some of the workers she met in the fields of Boaz. Suppose they say to her, "You really knew how

to win Boaz, Ruth by playing hard to get the way you did!" How do you think Ruth would have responded to something like that? Can you imagine how vehemently Ruth would have explained that she owed everything she was and had to the love of Boaz? As a devout believer, can you imagine her explaining that she owed everything to the love and grace of God for an alien like her, which was expressed in the laws of gleaning and redemption?

Also consider the way Naomi represents the disciple maker we are commissioned to be. It was Naomi who shared these laws of gleaning and redemption with Ruth. It was Naomi who encouraged Ruth to ask Boaz to be her redeemer.

Have you been redeemed? Have you been bought back to God by the blood of Jesus Christ? Have you been brought back to God because you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Have you personally asked Jesus Christ to be your Kinsman Redeemer?

Jesus Christ wants to be our Kinsman. He became a man. Jesus Christ is standing at the door of your heart right now. He wants to become your Redeemer. You must personally ask Him to be your Redeemer. That is the most important application to this beautiful Romance of Redemption.

Chapter 6

The Kingdom of God

In the previous booklet, we surveyed the first three Old Testament history books (Joshua, Judges, and Ruth), which are also known as "The Allegorical History Books" because of the examples and warnings they provide. When we come to First Samuel, we begin the next section of the history books, which are known as "The Kingdom Literature History Books." This

section includes First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, and First and Second Chronicles. All of these books are "kingdom literature" because they tell us about the Kingdom of God. In fact, some Bible versions list First and Second Samuel as First and Second Kings, and First and Second Kings as Third and Fourth Kings. The books of Chronicles repeat that same period of history, focusing the way God saw that period of Hebrew history.

The concept of the kingdom of God is the central theme of these books - and these books help us to understand this important concept when we read the New Testament, especially the teachings of Jesus. So, let us take some time to see what the Kingdom of God meant in Old Testament days as well as how significant it was in Christ's teaching.

The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

Under Moses, the children of Israel had leadership according to God's will. The Lord wanted them to live in a theocracy, which means God ruling His people. All God needed for a theocracy was a prophet-priest like Moses (and later, Samuel). When Moses interceded with God on the people's behalf, he was a priest (see, for example, Numbers 11:1-2; 21:7). When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with words from God for the people, he was a prophet (see Exodus 20-24). As long as God had someone like Moses, He could rule the people through that leader. This prophet-priest could be the vehicle of God's will, and God could govern the people of God. That was God's plan for the government of His chosen people.

In First Samuel, Samuel was the prophet-priest. But when Samuel grew old and the Israelites saw that his sons did not have the integrity of their father, they told Samuel that they wanted to have a king like all the other nations (I Samuel 8:1-

5). Distraught, Samuel fervently prayed to the Lord. God told him not to take this rejection personally. The people were really rejecting the Lord, preferring a human king in place of having God as their King. So God essentially told Samuel, "If they want kings, Samuel, we will give them their kings! (6-22)

This introduces us to the concept of the Kingdom of God. The kingdom the people wanted was a national, earthly kingdom that governed a specific nation of people. To make that arrangement work, God needed a king who would obey Him and He needed priests who would come into His presence on behalf of the people. He also needed prophets who would speak for Him to the people and their leaders.

The first King God gave the children of Israel was Saul, whom Samuel anointed. (I Samuel 9) Sadly, Saul proved to be disobedient; he did not have a heart for doing God's will. After some years, Samuel had to tell Saul that God had rejected him from being king of Israel. (Chapter 15) As we will see in all the kingdom literature, God still employed the prophet-priest in the kingdom age. If the king did not do God's will, the prophet-priest confronted him with the word of God. He would essentially say, "You had better do what God tells you to do, or you and all the people will suffer terribly."

When Saul would not obey God, Samuel, who had the privilege of hiring the first king of Israel, was ordered by God to fire the first king of Israel. In Saul's place, the Lord directed Samuel to anoint young David, who was a man after God's heart who would do all the will of God. (Chapter 16; see also Acts 13:22) David was the best king Israel ever had. God could work through him, because he obeyed God. He was not perfect, as we will see, but his heart was consistently tender and submissive to the Lord.

The next king was David's son Solomon. At first, Solomon looked like the kind of man God could use. He prayed for discernment to rule God's people with justice, for which God rewarded him with wisdom as well as wealth and honor (1 Kings 3:5-14). Solomon built the temple for the Lord that his father David had dreamed of building (see 1 Chronicles 22).

Solomon tragically surrendered to his lusts, marrying seven hundred women and keeping another three hundred as concubines! These women worshiped idols, and Solomon joined them in their pagan worship. (1 Kings 11:1-8) The sin of David was very serious sin, as we will see. However, it was the sin of Solomon that brought chaotic consequences upon this chosen nation. Solomon's son Rehoboam followed Solomon as the fourth king of Israel (11:9-13).

After Solomon, Israel became a divided kingdom. Ten tribes went to the north and called themselves Israel. Two stayed in the south (Judah and Benjamin), and they called themselves Judah. Many kings are named in the history books of First and Second Kings and in The Chronicles. The northern kingdom did not have a single good king. The wicked and unspeakably cruel Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom and took the ten northern tribes into captivity. They were never heard from again. Judah was eventually taken into captivity by Babylon, where they lived for seventy years. When Persia conquered Babylon, God directed the new emperor, Cyrus the Great, to decree that any Jew who wanted to could return to their land to rebuild the Lord's temple (see 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1).

The Kingdom Literature History Books can be confusing, and you must have a strong stomach to read them, but you can always maintain some historical equilibrium if you clearly focus on seven basic facts of Hebrew history:

1. The united kingdom (under Saul, David, and Solomon)

2. The divided kingdom
3. The Assyrian captivity of The Northern Kingdom: Israel
4. The extinction of The Northern Kingdom
5. The Babylonian captivity of The Southern Kingdom: Judah
6. The Persian conquest of Babylon
7. The return from the Babylonian (Persian) Captivity

To sum up, then, in the Old Testament God's kingdom was literal. It was a historical and geographical realm over which God was sovereign, with God Himself wanting to be the only ruler over a specific people in a specific place at a specific time in history. The people, however, rejected God as their king and asked for human kings, which they got. The result? Tragedy.

I remember a lady who had never read the Bible before. She was a cultured, sophisticated person, and she said of this section of Scripture, "I have never read anything so horrible in my life. If it were not for the Holy Spirit, I could never have gotten through these books. This is terrible!" Well, it is! Remember that God never wanted His people to have these kings or the consequences of having their kings. The Lord was not responsible for all that we read about in the kingdom literature - the kings were, because most of them were wicked. The people, too, were responsible because they wanted and chose those kings. Never forget that as you read these Kingdom Books.

The Kingdom of God in the New Testament

The Kingdom Literature Books provide a context that helps us understand the concept of The Kingdom of God in the New Testament. Historically, after the Jews returned to their land to rebuild their temple and their city, they experienced four hundred silent years after Nehemiah and the prophet Malachi died. God did not speak in the sense of Special Revelation again until the New Testament period.

By that time the Jews had been conquered again. This time their conqueror was the Roman Empire. That chapter of Hebrew history began when John the Baptist and Jesus Christ the Messiah broke a four-hundred year silence by preaching God's message. What was their message? The Good News of The Kingdom of God!

Jesus basically said that He was not preaching a geographical, national, or historical kingdom, because the people had rejected that long ago. Rather, He wanted the people to know that God was willing to be their King again, but this time on an individual basis. This time the kingdom of God would be within them (Luke 17:20-21). Do you realize what this means? Any man, woman, boy, or girl who surrenders to God and asks God to fly His flag in their heart, confessing: "I want You to be my King, and I want to be Your subject," has entered into the Kingdom of God!

Jesus talked with a rabbi named Nicodemus and told him that unless he was born again, he could not see God's kingdom. According to Jesus, only people who are born again can have eyes to see that God wants to be their King (John 3:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:3), and once they have seen the kingdom, then they can enter that kingdom. We hear a lot about being born again, and rightly so. But in this passage, the primary subject is not the new birth, but the kingdom of God. The new birth is not an end in itself but a way to reach a final objective - and that objective is the Kingdom of God.

Do you remember the value system Jesus communicated in the Sermon on the Mount? What did He say should be the most important thing in our lives? To seek first the Kingdom of God: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Based on how you spend your time, money, and energy, what are your priorities? The purpose of the new birth is to bring

us into God's kingdom, where He reigns over our lives. Picture your priorities as if they were a target with a red circle at the center and ten circles around that red center. According to Jesus, the kingdom of God and what He shows you to be right are at the center, and all your priorities need to be defined as the circles around that center. We need to recognize and serve Him as our King, and our priorities will reflect how sincerely we are doing that. Our prayers also need to reflect what Jesus taught us: "Our Father, in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread ..." (Matthew 6:9-11)

Observe that, before Jesus told us to pray, "give us", three times He told us to put God first. He told us to pray, "God, Your name, Your kingdom, Your will. That is what is first in my priorities." Then and only then, do we pray, "Give us." We can have things our own way, as the Israelites did; but if we do, we must be prepared to eat the banquet of bitter consequences that comes with putting ourselves, and our own priorities, first.

This is something to keep in mind as you study the kingdom of God in the kingdom literature historical books. If you understand this concept in the Old Testament, it will burst upon you like a revelation when you reach the New Testament! Remember, the purpose of the new birth is to see and enter God's kingdom. Have you seen His kingdom? Have you entered it? Have you been born again?

Chapter 7

Heard of God

As we saw in our previous chapter, the kingdom of God is a crucial concept to keep in mind as we study the Kingdom Literature Historical Books of the Old Testament. Another important facet of these books is the examples and warnings they provide. As the apostle Paul wrote: "All these things happened to them as examples - as object lessons to us - to warn us against doing the same things; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days as the world nears its end." (1 Corinthians 10:11) We will find plenty of examples and warnings in the books before us!

First and 2 Samuel were considered one book long ago, as were 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The books of Samuel communicate God's truth to us in the form of short biographies, focusing on three people in particular. The first eight chapters of 1 Samuel give us a positive example to follow in the life and leadership of the prophet Samuel. In chapters 9 through 15, the focus shifts to Israel's first king, Saul, whose life is one awesome warning. Beginning with 1 Samuel 16 and going all the way through the end of 2 Samuel (thirty chapters in all), the primary character is David. David is the best king Israel ever had, and judging from the amount of space the Holy Spirit gave to his story, he is one of the most important characters in all the Bible.

In addition to the space dedicated to him in the books of Samuel, David also wrote about half the Psalms. Many of the psalms he wrote contain an inscription (or superscription, technically) that notes what was going on in his life when he wrote that particular psalm. We can bring much more understanding to our reading of his psalms from knowing about

his life in 1 and 2 Samuel. And we can gain insight into his life and emotions in the books of Samuel from the psalms he wrote about his experiences that are recorded in those two historical books.

So the three main characters we will look at in our survey of 1 and 2 Samuel are Samuel, Saul, and David. Let us begin with Samuel.

Samuel

Samuel's name is composed of the two Hebrew words for "heard" and, "of God." This is very appropriate, considering how he came to be born. His mother, Hannah, had lived for years with the anguish of being barren. In those days, bearing children was a sign of God's blessing, so Hannah must have thought that her barrenness meant that God was displeased with her.

One day, when her family was worshiping the Lord at the tabernacle in Shiloh, she wept bitterly and prayed for God to give her a son. She prayed so fervently, with her lips moving soundlessly to the pleas of her heart, that the old priest, Eli, thought she was drunk! "Throw away your bottle," he told her. (1 Samuel 1:14) When Hannah explained her situation, Eli was so touched that he pronounced a blessing on her and said that God would answer her prayer (15-17). And He did. Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel, because the Lord heard her request (20). (By the way, any time a name in Scripture ends with "el", that name has something to do with God, like Daniel, because the Hebrew word for God is EL.)

After Samuel was weaned, Hannah took him up to the tabernacle and literally gave him to God by presenting him to the priest, Eli. Here his name proved to be fitting once again, because when Samuel was a small child being raised by Eli in

God's presence, Samuel heard the Lord's voice. (Chapter 3) Sadly, the message rebuked Eli for not disciplining his sons, who disobeyed God and defiled His worship. (see 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36) Samuel, who looked to Eli as a father, had to tell the old priest that he would be removed from the priesthood.

The name "Heard of God" also fit Samuel when he became a man. The Scripture says that from the northern tip to the southernmost point ("from Dan to Beersheba"), all Israel recognized when Samuel spoke that God had sent them a prophet. (3:19-4:1) All Israel heard the word of God through this man, so, "Heard of God" is a very appropriate name for him indeed.

Samuel's life provides us with several positive examples. First, he and his mother show the value of godly nurture and education. To be effective and godly, we need to consider our role as parents to be a sacred calling and responsibility. We must also consider our children as great blessings from God. (Psalm 127:3) When we profess and affirm this priority focus, like Samuel, and later John the Baptist, our children will have the blessings of spiritual nurture.

Second, Samuel was a great example of what godly nurture can accomplish when we see him lead Israel out of her spiritual dark ages, which are known as "the days when the judges ruled." Some scholars consider him to be the last judge, so his life was a landmark in Hebrew history.

We see a third positive example in these books of Samuel when we see this great man become a great political leader, bridging the time of the judges with the time of the kings. He anointed Saul and David, Israel's greatest king. Through times of turmoil, such as Saul's faltering reign, Samuel remained faithful to the Lord and to the people of Israel to the end of his life.

Saul

Where Samuel's life gives us positive examples to follow, Saul's life rings out with mournful warnings.

Saul is a controversial figure in Scripture because his life raises a thorny theological issue: Can a person be saved today and lost tomorrow? Some say, no, you cannot lose your salvation and quote many Scriptures supporting their argument that prodigals always return. But others say yes, you can lose it; and they use the experience of Saul, and many other Scripture passages to say that you can lose your salvation. Saul appears to have experienced authentic regeneration and then it seems as if he lost that miraculous work of regeneration in his life. Those who take this position believe that you must be born again every time you become a prodigal.

I believe the Bible teaches election, or that God chooses and saves us solely by His grace and sovereignty. So if a person has experienced authentic, genuine salvation - if they have truly been born again - they will not lose their salvation.

Saul had a spiritual experience and at first appeared to have become a spiritual man. After Samuel anointed him, God changed his heart (10:9). Saul even prophesied with a band of prophets when God's Spirit came powerfully upon him (10:10-11). It becomes obvious, however, as we continue to study Saul's life, that he lost that spirituality.

First Samuel 9 introduces us to Saul. The first thing we learn about him was that he was head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land and impressive to look at (9:2). A person's physical appearance should not be the criteria by which we judge people or consider them for leadership. In contrast, the Lord later told Samuel when he went to anoint David: "Do not consider his appearance or his height... The Lord does not look at

the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (16:7)

When we first meet Saul, he and a servant are looking for his father's lost donkeys and are having no success in finding them. As they are about to give up the search, Saul's servant remembers that a prophet (Samuel) is nearby. So they go to the man of God, where God had supernaturally prepared Samuel for their visit (9:3-14, 18-20). "For the Lord had told Samuel the day before that a young man from the tribe of Benjamin was coming to see him, and Samuel was to anoint him as the first king of Israel." (9:15-16) So when Saul met Samuel, he was in for a big surprise.

Samuel invited him to a banquet, told him that the donkeys had been found, and informed him that he was the king Israel longing for! (9:19-20) Stunned, Saul replied that he was nobody - a man from the smallest tribe of Israel, Benjamin, and the least of its clans. (21)

Saul adds his voice to the chorus of voices we have now heard in the Old Testament when God is calling a leader. Gideon said these same words and Moses raised these same objections when God called him to be the great deliverer. If you remember, at the end of Judges, the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out after the men of Gibeah raped to death a Levite's concubine in one of the most sordid incidents recorded in Scripture (see Judges 19-20). Only six hundred men of Benjamin were left after the rest of Israel ended their civil war against them, and wives had to be found for them so the tribe wouldn't perish from the face of the earth (Judges 21).

That was Saul's heritage. No wonder he said that he came from the least tribe and was the least of the least. His humility was honest and healthy. Nevertheless, Samuel broke

bread with Saul and anointed him king the next day, at God's command. (1 Samuel 9:22-10:1)

Saul was not a good king. He could have been a great king and a great man spiritually. God was planning to make him and his descendants, kings of Israel forever. But because of his disobedience, the kingdom was torn away from him. (13:13-14)

What happened to the man whose heart God had changed? He had once been small in his own eyes (15:17), but now he seemed to think that his own ideas were more important than God's. He disobeyed not once but twice. First, in a battle against the Philistines, he panicked when Samuel was late in coming to offer the sacrifice, so he took over the priestly duty and offered the sacrifice himself (Chapter 13).

When Samuel rebuked him, he also foretold David's great rule as the greatest king Israel ever had. Samuel prophesied that God would give His kingdom to a man after His own heart, who would obey Him and do His will. (13:14) This is the first we hear of David.

Second, Saul ruined the second chance God gave him by not annihilating the Amalekites. (Chapter 15) Saul was ordered to destroy everything - all the people, all the oxen, sheep, camels, donkeys. Everything! But Saul and his army kept the best of the plunder for themselves and even spared the Amalekite king. The Lord told Samuel, "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has again *refused to obey me!*" (15:11)

Grieved, Samuel confronted Saul, who claimed to have obeyed the Lord completely, despite the bleating of sheep in the background. (13-14) Then Saul made the excuse that he and his men saved the animals to sacrifice them to the Lord. But Samuel believed none of it. He told Saul that God took more pleasure in obedience than in sacrifice, and that his stubborn rebellion was as bad as witchcraft and idolatry. When Samuel tried to

leave, Saul grabbed him and tore his robe. Samuel told Saul that in that same way the Lord had torn the kingdom away from Saul. (15:22-29)

Later, we see that God's Spirit left Saul (18:17). The word for that is "Ichabod," which means, "the glory has departed." In Old Testament times the Spirit of God came upon people, and if they did not obey Him, the Spirit left. Today we have the promise of the risen Christ that when He indwells us, He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) However, Saul's life is a somber warning for us. Although He will not leave us today, we can leave Him, grieve Him and quench Him. Saul's life is a warning against anointed disobedience - a warning against squandering the grace and the blessings of God.

Chapter 8

Anointed Obedience

As we continue to explore the lives of Saul and David, we need to remember that the anointing of the Holy Spirit does not make people robots. We still have a free will. In Saul's case, he was fully able to make choices, and he consistently made the wrong ones. So the Lord withdrew His Spirit from him (1 Samuel 16:14; 18:12).

Can what happened to Saul happen to us today? I believe that the Holy Spirit dealt differently with people in Old Testament times than He does with us because of the Cross and Pentecost. We hear David pray, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:11) Jesus now tells us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

(Hebrews 13:5) Once we experience the new birth, God begins His spiritual work in us and performs it " ... until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6; 2:13). In our day, the Holy Spirit's work has two dimensions: (1) His work in us, which is the new birth, and that dimension of His work is revealed as the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) (2) His blessing or anointing upon us. That dimension of His work is revealed through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which empower us for a variety of ministries and service.

Sadly, Saul's disobedience caused the Lord to cast him away from His presence and take His Holy Spirit from him. When that happened, the life of Saul became a walking definition of what we describe in our culture as the disintegration of a personality.

Saul's Disintegration

Today, we would probably label Saul "paranoid with schizophrenic overtones." The dictionary defines the latter term as "the disintegration of a personality." That definition certainly fits Saul's situation. Saul was also paranoid. He came to believe that everyone was conspiring against him, especially young David. He eventually became insanely jealous of David, convinced that he planned to steal the kingdom from him (1 Samuel 18:8; 20:30-31). In a way, Saul might have been tortured by Samuel's prophecy about tearing the kingdom away from him and giving it to someone better - someone who would do all the will of God with all his heart. (13:14)

The dominating characteristic of Saul's life, in one word, was disobedience. The one word God wrote over the life of Saul was, "Ichabod" which means, "the glory has departed".

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

David's life was the absolute exact opposite of the life of Saul. The dominating characteristic of David's life was obedience - he was a man after the Lord's own heart who would do all God's will. Where Saul's life was disintegrating because he had divorced himself from God, God was bringing everything in David together because David was more focused on obedience than Saul was focused on disobedience.

God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, to anoint Saul's successor King of Israel. But the prophet-priest thought that the handsome oldest son looked like he would make an impressive king, so God corrected his perspective with this significant truth: "Don't judge by a man's face or height, for this is not the one. I don't make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance, but I look at a man's thoughts and intentions." (16:7)

Jesse paraded seven of his strong sons before Samuel, but the Lord had not chosen any of them. Perhaps a bit confused, Samuel asked Jesse if these were all the sons he had (16:10). Well, he had one more - David - his youngest son who was watching the sheep (11). Samuel told Jesse to go get him, and of course, David, the youngest and least of his brothers, (Does this sound familiar?) was the one God had chosen to be the next king! (12) So Samuel anointed him, and the Holy Spirit came upon David from that day forward. (13)

It took a long time, though, for David to become king. For most of 1 Samuel, we see David in God's seminary of preparation. As Saul jealously and murderously pursued him, David went through all kinds of trials that taught him to trust and obey the Lord no matter what. Everything he experienced made him fit for God's purposes for his life. Did you know that God does that for us too? Every day we live prepares us for every other

day we are going to live. If we love God and are called according to His purposes, everything we experience contributes to what God wants us to do in our future (see Romans 8:28).

Let us look at some of the experiences God took David through and see how they shaped him into the man God wanted him to be.

David the Shepherd

Many of the Bible's great leaders, like Moses and David, were shepherds. There is a reason for that, and David's experience shows us why. On several occasions while guarding his father's flock, David had to fight off lions and bears that attacked the sheep. (1 Samuel 17:34-36) Like Jesus Christ the Messiah, David was willing to lay down his life for the sheep (compare John 10:11-15). God must have seen this and thought, "If that young boy feels like that about his father's sheep, he will feel that way about My sheep. I'm going to make him a king!"

David the Musician

When Saul was in dark moods we would label depression today, he needed help. His servants suggested music as a therapy, and someone happened to know about David's talent: one of them said he knew a young fellow in Bethlehem, the son of a man named Jesse, who was not only a talented harp player, but was handsome, brave, and strong, and had good, solid judgment. "What is more," he added, "the Lord is with him." (16:18)

So David soothed Saul's spirit with his music (23), and he most likely also sang psalms that he had written. Remember, David wrote about half the inspired Book of Psalms, which was Israel's hymnbook. Toward the end of his life, he also arranged for the temple's administration and the structure of its worship

- which included four thousand priests who played musical instruments David himself had made "To praise the Lord." (1 Chronicles 23: 5). More than any other person in the history of the people of God, David brought music and the Word of God together and married them forever.

David the Warrior

At a young age, David fought the Lord's battles. Do you remember the story of David and Goliath? (1 Samuel 17) Goliath was the Philistines' champion warrior, and he was a giant - more than three meters tall! (4) He mocked the Lord's armies, which were paralyzed with fear. Then David, who went to the battlefield only to bring his brothers and their commanders food, heard Goliath's challenge. He declared that he would fight the "uncircumcised Philistine", and when he faced Goliath, he told him: "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me ... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's." (17:45-47)

In essence, David said that the cause was God's and the battle was the Lord's.

David the Leader of Men

David also became a great general with tremendous influence. His men were willing to risk their lives for him. When David was a fugitive from the mad Saul and hiding in the caves of Adullam, the Philistines invaded Israel and occupied Bethlehem. When three of David's elite force came to see him, he casually wished aloud for a drink of water from Bethlehem's

city well. So those men braved the enemy army, broke through their ranks, and brought David back some water from that well! David, however, would not drink it - he poured it out before the Lord, saying that he was not worthy to drink that water because those brave men had risked their lives to bring him that water. (2 Samuel 13-17) They say a leader is a man with followers. David was a true leader of men.

David and Jonathan

One of the most beautiful examples of friendship in the world is found in David's friendship with Saul's son Jonathan. When David got word that Jonathan had been killed, he said, "How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan; how much I loved you! And your love for me was deeper than the love of women!" (2 Samuel 1:26)

Many men cannot look another man in the eye and say, "I love you." That may be because they fear a homosexual relationship. But friendship between a man and a man or between a woman and a woman is a beautiful thing. In my experience, when God designs something beautiful in this life, the devil distorts it with the ugliest sins around that beautiful spiritual blessing God wants to give us, to scare us away from what God intended. It was God who knit David's and Jonathan's hearts together.

What was the spiritual secret of David's life? He was a man completely yielded to God, who wanted to do all the will of God. David stands on the pages of Scripture as a great example of what God can do with a person who is completely committed to the Lord.

Chapter 9

How to Fail Successfully

In Scripture, the key to being anointed by the Holy Spirit is obedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [the Holy Spirit]." (John 14:15, 23) In other words, obedience is the prerequisite for experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:32). For much of his life, David was a shining example of this truth.

The Sunrise of Success

David's example of anointed obedience reached its peak in 2 Samuel 7. He had it on his heart to build a house for God. He himself lived in a cedar palace, so he wanted to build a great palace for God because God's earthly dwelling at that time was a tent. But Nathan the prophet told David that God did not want David to build a house for Him, because He was going to build a house for David - a dynasty, a succession of sons who would rule Israel, an everlasting kingdom. The Messiah would come from David's lineage, and of His kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:33)

David responded with a beautiful prayer: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant... What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant." (2 Samuel 7:18-21)

It is not because of our achievements or our performance that God blesses us. The essence of what David said in his prayer was that, God blesses us because of His grace.

The Storm Clouds of Sin

When we come to 2 Samuel 11, we begin another chapter in David's life - one of the longest and most difficult chapters in the life of David. David ceases to be an example here and his life becomes one of the greatest warnings in the Bible. David committed the sins of adultery and murder; and for a whole year, he tried to cover up his sin.

How could a man after God's own heart, whose heart was to do all the will of God, fall so tragically? I see several explanations for David's sins. First, David sinned because he was human. Even though he was a godly man, he was a man and he was not beyond the possibility of sin or spiritual failure. (see 1 Corinthians 10:12,13)

Second, David's success made him vulnerable. We read in 2 Samuel 11:1: "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem."

When he should have led his army into battle, David stayed behind in Jerusalem and sent Joab in his place. David sinned because he was out of the will of God for his life. I believe that David also sinned because he was at the peak of his success. The Apostle Paul once said, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound." (Philippians 4:12) It takes a lot of spiritual maturity to handle being in need. And it takes perhaps even more spiritual maturity to handle having more than enough. We do not depend on God as much when we're abounding, and this makes us, like David, spiritually

vulnerable.

While David's army was besieging the city of Rabbah, at night, back in Jerusalem, he went out on a balcony and saw a beautiful woman bathing - and he wanted what he saw. Since he was the king, he had the power to take what he wanted. And he took her. David's adultery was not a mutual love affair - make the observation as you read, that Bathsheba had nothing to say about this affair. It was not what she wanted. Her husband Uriah was one of David's mighty men, and she appears to have loved her husband deeply. But her husband was far away, fighting David's battle.

When David learned that Bathsheba had conceived, he brought her husband back from the war. David tried to get Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife, Bathsheba, but he was such a loyal soldier that he would not do it. David even got Uriah drunk, but he still would not go home and sleep with his wife while his fellow soldiers were facing hardship in the field of battle. So David sent a message - by Uriah's own hand - to his general, Joab: "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is most violent . Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die" (2 Samuel 11:15).

General Joab soon sent a message back to the king, giving a full account of the battle and adding: "Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." (21) Uriah was killed, so David was not only guilty of adultery but also murder. When this sin is reviewed later in the Chronicles, the murder of Uriah is focused as the heart of David's sin. And he was guilty of living a lie. David covered his sin for a whole year, thinking that nobody knew but himself and perhaps his trusted general, Joab. That year of cover-up was probably the unhappiest year of David's life (read his heart Psalms 32 and 51)

The guilt David felt actually made him physically ill. Finally, he turned to the Lord: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). David said that godly people should pray for the blessedness of forgiveness. Does that suggest that godly people can sin? Yes, of course it does. But there is a sense in which the greatness of David is emphasized by the way he responded to his sin and to the consequences of his sin.

Rays of Light in a Dark Sky

When we fail, the important thing is what we do about our failure - how we respond to it. It is at this point that David's life, even when he sinned, becomes one of the greatest examples in the Bible for us.

Confrontation

In 2 Samuel 12, a courageous prophet named Nathan came to David's court. He told a story about a wealthy man who had a lot of livestock and a poor man in the same town who had only one little ewe lamb. The poor man loved his lamb; it was like a pet to his children. That lamb ate at his table and drank out of his cup. When a guest came to stay with the wealthy man, he did not kill one of his animals but butchered that poor man's one little pet lamb for the meal.

When David heard this, he angrily exclaimed, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" (5) Then Nathan pointed to David and said: "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul... I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise

the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own.'" (2 Samuel 12:7-9

In front of the entire court, Nathan confronted David with his sin. Remember, David was king and could have said, "Take his head off." But he did not do that. Instead, he humbly confessed his sin. (12:13a) God forgave him (12:13b), but David still had to sit at the terrible banquet of his sin's consequences.

Consequences

Nathan conveyed this word of the Lord to David: "Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house.. Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you" (12:10a, 11a). Since David sinned in the family relationship, that is where God punished him. In chapter after chapter of the remainder of 2 Samuel, we see Nathan's prophecy fulfilled.

First, the prophet told him that the child he and Bathsheba conceived would die. For six days and nights, David fasted, prayed, and lay prostrate before the Lord. But the child only grew more ill, and on the seventh day, the child died. When David learned of it, he got up, washed, changed clothes, worshiped at the tabernacle, and ate. His behavior puzzled his servants, but David explained that while his baby lived, there was a chance that God would show mercy and spare him. But since he died, David said he could do nothing to bring him back, adding, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." (12:23)

I believe this story is telling us that when God takes the life of a child, we need have no doubt about his or her eternal destiny. David expressed that hope when he said, "I will go to him." Contrast this behavior of David with his extreme grief

when he received word of the death of his son, Absalom, later in this story of David's chastisement.

As we read chapter 13 and beyond, we discover that the consequences of the sin of David continued. David's son Amnon raped his half sister Tamar. Then David's son Absalom, Tamar's full brother and the apple of David's eye, killed Amnon and fled for his life as a fugitive. With some intriguing intercession on the part of Joab, Absalom was able to return to Jerusalem. However, even though David permitted the return of Absalom, he refused to see him.

David longed for fellowship with Absalom, but David actually failed to forgive him and restore their relationship. (14:24) Alienated and angry, Absalom started a revolution against his father, eventually driving David out of Jerusalem. Adding to the betrayal, Absalom was aided by David's own trusted counselor, Ahithophel. He advised Absalom to incite David to fight before he was ready by taking his father's ten concubines who remained in Jerusalem onto the roof of the palace and, in the sight of all Israel, rape them. Tragically, Absalom followed this treacherous counsel.

When David received word of this atrocity - when he learned that his dear friend, the man who was like a father to him, had advised his son to attack these defenseless women - he wrote Psalm 55. Read Psalm 55 and you will see that David's heart was filled with horror. You can read all the tragic details of this horrible chapter in David's life by reading 2 Samuel, chapters 11-18.

In spite of everything Absalom did, when the great battle was about to take place between David's mighty men and the army of Israel under Absalom's leadership, David cautioned his troops not to harm his son. The final blow God dealt David was the message that Absalom had been killed. Again, observe the

difference between his response when his baby died and his response to the death of Absalom. When Absalom was killed, David's grief overwhelmed him. He said over and over again, "Oh my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you - Oh Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33)

Absalom had started a revolution against his own father, so why did David react this way? Unlike the death of his baby, David could not say of Absalom, "I will go to him." I think that is why his grief for Absalom was so great. It is likely, too, that David believed Absalom died for his father's sins, and David wished it could have been the other way around.

As you read the story of the sin of David, and especially the consequences of David's sin, realize that none of us are beyond failing (I Corinthians 10:12,13). Realize that David showed all of us how to cope with spiritual and moral failure. Then appreciate the words of our Lord Jesus when He said, "Go, and sin no more." (John 8:11)

Chapter 10

The Blessedness of Forgiveness

One of the objectives I have for this survey of the Bible in one word is correlation. I want to show how the books of the Bible relate to one another, or the unity of the Bible. For example, having surveyed the historical books, when you get to the prophets, you realize that you already have the historical context in which these great prophets lived, preached, suffered, and died. The historical literature also equips you to

understand one of the greatest books in the Bible, the Psalms, and especially the psalms of David.

David's Heart in the Psalms

The psalms of David and 2 Samuel 11-18 come together in a beautiful way. In the psalms that were written during this period of his life, we come to understand the greatness of David, even though this was a time in his life when he failed morally and spiritually.

Psalm 3

When David fled into the wilderness to escape Absalom, a man named Shimei cursed him (2 Samuel 16:5-8). David's general said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head". (9) But David replied, "Let him curse, for the Lord has told him to (curse me)" (11b).

As David retreated from Jerusalem, he wrote Psalm 3, which begins: "O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him.'" (1-2) That is what Shimei said when he cursed David and threw rocks at him. But David wrote (and this is where he showed what a godly man he was), "But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill (3-4).

As he looked back into his past, David could see miracle high points - answered prayers - in his path. And these gave him the confidence and faith to trust God in the present and for the future.

Psalm 4

Psalm 4 also fits into this period of David's life. He tells us that if our emotional climate is one of distress or

stress and we cannot sleep, it may be because we have a big decision to make that involves doing the right things. In the middle of the night when he could not sleep, he resolved in his heart to "offer right sacrifices and [to] trust in the LORD" (5). His motivation for doing right was that he was surrounded by people who were saying, "Who can show us any good?" (6) We are all surrounded by people looking for someone who will do the right thing, not the convenient thing. When they see it, as well as the cost we are paying to do the right thing, they are greatly blessed and turned toward God by what they see.

Psalm 23

In Psalm 23:3, David said, "He restores my soul." When the Lord has made us lie down and acknowledge the fact that we are sheep and He is our shepherd, we get up again. But when we take over and play shepherd, those green pastures get brown, those still waters get turbulent, and that full cup empties out. When we forget who is the shepherd and who is the sheep, we need to be restored.

How does God restore us? He is very practical. David put it this way, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." (3b) Revival is more than going forward in a church service in response to an invitation. It is more than a prayer experience at an altar. God says, "Listen, this is how I would like to restore you. You come and walk in the paths of righteousness for a couple of years. And as you walk in the paths of righteousness, those paths will restore your soul."

That is what we see happening in David's life in 2 Samuel 11-18. David had committed himself to God and said, "I will come and walk in the paths of righteousness for Your name's sake." When David responded to God's chastisement, and all the

other consequences of his sin by walking in the paths of righteousness, God restored David's soul.

David was a king for forty years - for sixteen years before he sinned, and for twenty-four more years after God restored his soul and kingdom. But that restoration only came after David walked in the paths of righteousness by confessing his sin, repenting of it, and committing himself to follow the Lord's way.

Are you personally in need of confession and genuine, authentic repentance? In other words, do you know how to fail successfully? In all love and sincerity I say to you, you will never know the blessedness of forgiveness until you follow David's example and confess your sin to God. Remember, confession simply means to say the same thing that God says about your sin. I encourage you to read Psalms 32, 51, 55, 23, and let David's words guide your confession. Then, like him, you will experience the blessedness of God's gracious forgiveness.

Singing the Songs of Forgiveness

Have you ever asked yourself, "How do I know my sins are forgiven?" Some say you know because the Bible says it: "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it." But there is another way you can know that your sins are forgiven: when God removes your guilt.

Today many therapists deal with the guilt problem another way. They say, "There should be no such thing as guilt because there is no such thing as right and wrong. There is nothing you should not do. There is nothing you must not do. There are no moral absolutes. Guilt is for children, because only children let people tell them what is right and wrong. Do not let anybody tell you that what you are doing is wrong." I am amazed

at the number of people who try to solve their guilt problem that way.

In contrast to that, David essentially said, "I have a guilt problem because I am guilty. I have a guilt problem because I have sinned." God's solution to our guilt problem is to confess that we are guilty, that we have sinned. We show that we understand and believe God's solution to our guilt problem when we offer the sacrifices of righteousness that express our repentance and confession, and put our trust in the Lord. Then, and only then, we will experience the blessedness of forgiveness, because our guilt will then be removed.

Psalm 51 is not only David's confession of his sin, but it also gives us a window through which we can see the greatness of this man. In Psalm 51 observe several things. First, David prayed to God about the source of his sin: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place." (6) In answer to that petition, God gave David a revelation, and he wrote: "My sin is always before me... Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (3b, 5)

Next observe David's great petition: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (10) The word create in this verse is that Hebrew word "bara", which means, "to make something out of nothing." It is used only three times in Genesis 1, and it is used here in Psalm 51:10, where it means that David is essentially asking, "You have nothing to work with. I am asking You to make something out of nothing. Put something in me at the core of my being that was not there when I was born. You must perform a miracle act of creation in my inner person. That is the only way I have any hope of living a life that glorifies You."

The answer to that prayer is what the New Testament calls

the "new birth." Jesus says, "That which is born of the flesh is (only) flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" - or, rather, that you need another act of creation in your heart (John 3:6-7).

The apostles call the new birth "creation": "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17) God has created something at the core of a man or woman who has been born again. David had prophetic insight when he prayed this petition a thousand years before Jesus said, "You must be born again."

Also observe David's motivation for wanting this restoration: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your way, and sinners will turn back to you" (Psalm 51:12-13). David loved the Word of God - loved to preach it, teach it, and sing it. And he wanted to guide other sinners back to the Author of that Word as he had many times in the past.

And finally, observe the uncommon insight David showed at the end of his psalm: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings." (16) Remember when we studied the tabernacle in the wilderness? The people would take an animal down to the Tent of Worship and offer it as a sacrifice for their sins. The type of animal or the number of animals depended on the degree of the sin and on the person's economic status.

David knew that he could afford to drive a whole herd of animals down to that Tent of Worship, but he also knew that God did not want that. In so many words, David said, "That is not what You want, God. You want a revolution in my inner man. You want a heart broken before You and You want a contrite spirit."

The word contrite means "exceedingly sorry for sin." David said, "That is what You want, God." So he prayed, "Break me in the core of my being. Heal me in the core of my being. Create something at the core of my being that was not in me when I was born physically, and then I will live a life that glorifies You."

Let me say again, if you have sinned and do not know how to confess your sin, if you need to be restored in your soul and do not know how to bring about that restoration, come to Psalm 51. Let this psalm be your prayer of confession and repentance. You will do a beautiful job of confessing and repenting of your sin if you do.

Chapter 11

Three Facts of Sin and Three Facts of Salvation

I want to have one more chapter on the subject of David's sin. You may think I am emphasizing this too much, but it is because Scripture itself emphasizes David's sin. We should try to discover why God has given so much space in 2 Samuel to David's sin so that we can learn the spiritual lessons God wants us to learn about sin and apply those lessons when we sin.

Additional Lessons About Sin

One of the most important lessons we can take from the story of David's sin is how he dealt with the problem of guilt. I would like to give you an illustration.

The human mind has two dimensions: the conscious and the subconscious. All of us struggle with our conflicting thoughts.

In our conscious mind, we have a good, positive thought like, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and I am not going to worry; I have great faith in my Shepherd." Yet often, in the next thirty seconds, we start worrying. As a result, we get colitis and ulcers. We are not supposed to worry because God is our Shepherd. But we still do. How do we deal with these conflicting thoughts?

We build a wall down the middle of our minds and isolate our conflicting thoughts into two compartments. In one compartment we have faith and say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." When we say that, we do not let ourselves remember that we have ulcers because we are worrying. In the other compartment of our minds, we worry and do not let ourselves remember that we have faith! This leads to logic-tight compartments of "spiritual schizophrenia".

Spiritual schizophrenia is not a serious problem in the conscious mind. But it is in the subconscious mind, because every conscious thought lodges in our subconscious mind and stays there forever. So our conflicts pass into our subconscious minds and build up a reservoir of under-the-surface conflict. This can be a serious problem because the subconscious mind is like a cup. When it is filled with conflict, it sends signals to our bodies, and we begin to suffer physical symptoms.

Scripture tells us not to store conflicts but resolve them. Psychiatrists agree, but they often have a different method of resolution. Their secular solution is to steer people away from the absolute values and morals that are in conflict with their behavior. Scripture, however, teaches us that there is such a thing as right and wrong. If we have an absolute standard of integrity and rightness because we truly believe in moral

absolutes, and our lifestyle is in conflict with that absolute standard of integrity, we are making ourselves sick.

Scripture tells us to resolve our conflicts this way: Since the lamp of the body is the eye, if our outlook, or mind-set is what God wants it to be, and we live up to the way we see things, our whole body can be filled with light. (see Matthew 6:22) In other words, we resolve our conflicts when we *behave* the way we *believe*.

David tells us we solve our guilt problem when we acknowledge God's standard of what is right and what is wrong, even if that standard convinces us that we are sinners and convicts us of our sin. When we confess our sin, God will restore our soul. That is one of the most important applications we can make from the story of David's sin.

Three Facts of Sin

Another application from this sordid chapter in David's life is that sin has terrible consequences. In 2 Samuel 11-18, David had to eat a banquet of bitter consequences. His story actually illustrates three facts of sin and three facts of salvation. Let us consider the sin side first.

Sin Has a Penalty

First, sin has a penalty. Sin always leads to a future penalty and a present penalty. That is why God had to bankrupt heaven and send Jesus Christ into this world. The only way we can remove the future penalty of sin (hell) from our lives is by believing in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (see John 3:16).

However, three-fifths of the time when Scripture uses the word salvation, it does not apply to the future penalty of sin but the removal of the present penalty of sin. For example, we

are saved from the penalty of a wasted life. When Jesus talked about hell, He used the Greek word Gehenna. Gehenna was a large garbage dump outside Jerusalem where the " ... worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:44). When people thought of Gehenna, they thought of waste. Jesus taught that waste was one of the worst realities of hell.

Another present penalty of sin is bondage. People do not do what they want to do; people do what they must do, what they are compelled to do. People are controlled by compulsions and habits the Bible labels sin. Salvation sets people free from their bondage of sin. (see John 8:30-35; also Matthew 1:21)

The Power of Sin

Second, sin has great power. I believe the whole story of David is telling us what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:12: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." In the next verse, Paul writes that temptation is "common to man." If a man like David could be brought down by the power of sin, who are we to think that we can withstand it? Never underestimate the power of sin.

The Price Tag of Sin

Third, sin has a very high price tag. Paul tells us that, "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Paul meant not only literal death but also that banquet of consequences - those bitter herbs the sinner always has to eat eventually. Sin has its scars and its stains, and some of those stains and scars of sin are irreversible and irrevocable.

The Three Facts of Salvation

Like the black velvet background against which a jeweler displays his diamonds, sin's dark penalty, power, and price tag make the three facts of salvation shine all the brighter.

Jesus Has Removed the Penalty of Sin

First, Jesus Christ has removed the penalty of sin. The Scripture calls this "the Gospel" or "Good News". As Jesus told Nicodemus in so many words, "I am God's only Son, I am God's only solution, and I am God's only Savior. The Father does not have another solution or another Savior." (see John 3:14-18) When you really hear what Jesus said, you will realize that He made a dead-end street out of all other religions. You either believe in Jesus or you do not. This is one of the most dogmatic statements Jesus ever made.

The Holy Spirit Can Conquer the Power of Sin

Second, the Holy Spirit can keep the power of sin in check in your life and mine. The Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:4, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." Next to God's power, there is no power in the world greater than the power of sin, of evil, and of Satan. But the good news is that God's power is greater than the power of Satan, evil, and sin! The Apostle Paul says that when we appropriate the grace of God, we can be super-conquerors over the power of sin in our lives (compare Romans 8:37-39).

Justification Removes Our Sin from His Sight

The third fact of salvation is a little more complicated, because it relates to sin's stains, scars, and price tag. In the sight of God, even the stains of sin are washed away by forgiveness. As David wrote in another of his psalms: "As far

as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12; see also Micah 7:19) The word justified is one of the most beautiful words in the Bible. It means that when we confess and repent of our sin, as far as God is concerned, our sin never happened! Our sin is not only pardoned; our sin is not only forgiven; our sin is not simply removed; it is gone. It is just-as-if-I'd never sinned.

However, justification comes in two dimensions. Sometimes sin's stains and scars are irreversible on the human level. If a person commits murder and later believes in Jesus Christ, in God's sight, it is just as if he or she had never sinned or committed that murder. But does their faith in Christ mean they can go free? No. There are still consequences to pay.

I was once called to the home of a man who was eighty-three years old. He had been converted at age eighty-two, which is very unusual. After his conversion, which was genuine, his wife called me and said, "You must come talk to my husband. All he does is sit and cry, and he will not talk about it." So I went to see him. When he was finally able to control his emotions, he said, "My children! My children! My children!" I asked, "What about your children?" Then he told me the awful way he had treated them. Two of them were in mental hospitals, and in his opinion, he was responsible for wrecking their lives. This father had been soundly converted and in God's sight had no stains, penalties, or scars. But his children's scars and stains were still very real.

There are some things we cannot undo. (We cannot unscramble, scrambled eggs.) Sin's price tag is costly, and the scars are irreversible. This is why the Apostle John writes in his first epistle: "I write this to you so that you will not sin." (1 John 2:1)

It is a theological monstrosity to give young people the impression that there is ever anything good or even funny about sin. There is nothing good about sin or its consequences! Yes, God can highlight His grace and mercy if we respond to sin's consequences the way David did. God can even heal a lot of the scars. But some stains and scars are irrevocable and irreversible. That is why the Scriptures say it is better not to sin. "I do not condemn you," Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery; but He also said, because He loved that woman, "From now on sin no more." (John 8:11) Never let anyone give your children the impression that there is anything good about living in sin and then being saved out of a life of sin. It is better not to sin.

There is epidemic sin among the people who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ today. God wants all of us, through the story of David's sin, to hear those words of Jesus today: "Go and sin no more."