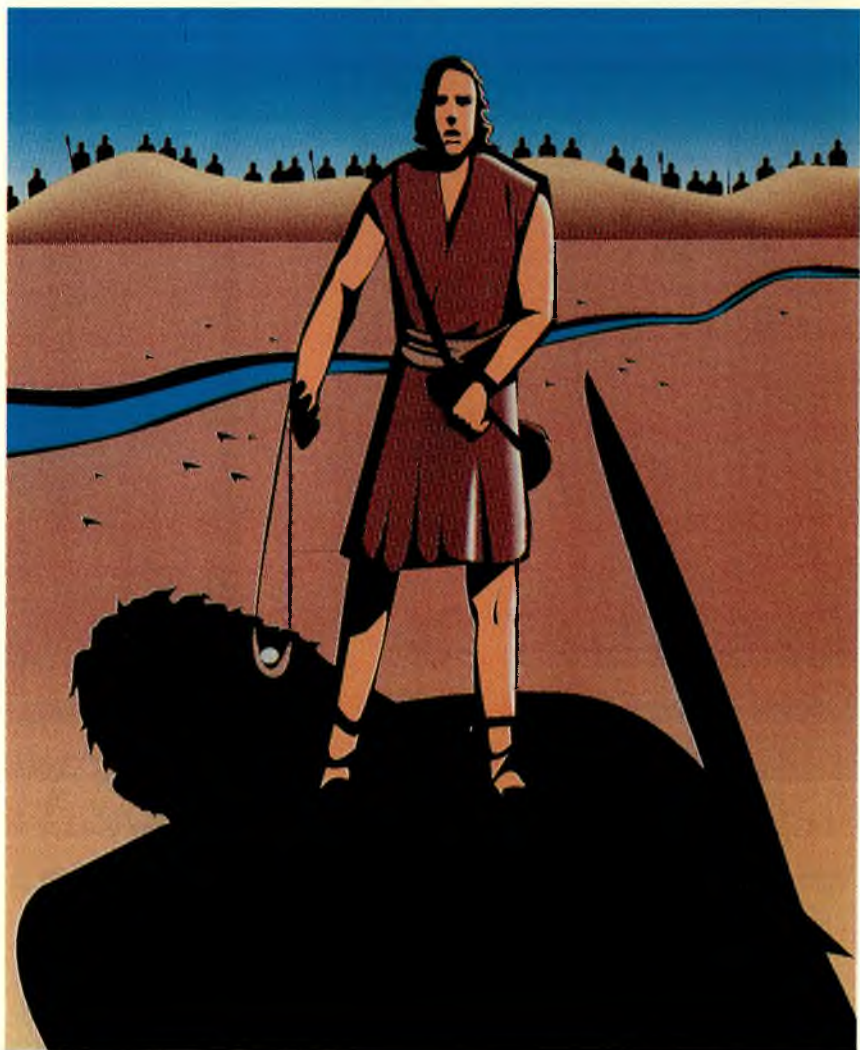


COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

• January - March 1991

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This Quarter's Artist

Our artist for this quarter is Gareth Igarashi, a free-lance illustrator from the San Francisco Bay area. He works primarily with acrylic paint, pen and ink, or pencils. But a number of months ago he took computer lessons and has been hooked ever since.

Gareth has learned to design and paint on both the IBM and Macintosh computers. His favorite software is the Adobe Illustrator 88, which he used to create the 14 pieces of artwork for this issue of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY. He notes that the simple shapes and forms, which are easy to design and manipulate on the screen, help to focus on a single, but important, character for each lesson.

Gareth and his wife, Kathy, make their home in Union City, California. They are members of the Hayward church, where they have been teaching in the primary department for the past two years.

Getting the Most Out of the Collegiate Quarterly

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

How-To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

Opinion (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions, are expressed.

Lesson 1, December 30–January 5

Prayer of Faith



“A good man's prayer is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NEB).

Sunday, December 30

Faith . . . Then What?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 1-3

"He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee" (Isa. 30:19).

What am I going to do now? How am I going to get out of this situation? These were the questions I pondered once I realized the mistake I had made in allowing my friends to go to the top of the mountain without me. I tried to decide whether I should continue the journey to the top, attempt to make the long descent alone, or remain stationary until my friends came back to help. Taking a look down the mountain filled me with terror. If I slipped and fell, there would be no hope.

In desperation I cried out to God. I said: "Lord, if this is the way You want me to die, then Your will be done. If not, please

help me to the top." Before the last word escaped my lips I not only experienced peace but also found the courage and strength to go on. By acting upon the faith I had and the strength God gave, I climbed to the top and experienced the beautiful view my friends were enjoying.

Having faith in God is an individual matter. But we must act upon our faith in Him in order for our relationship with Him to be complete.

Faith encompasses a horizontal as well as a vertical dimension. We relate with our fellow believers. The life and experience of those around us, particularly those who share a belief in our Creator and Lord, are vital in nurturing our faith relationship with God.

This week's lesson focuses on the faith relationship of Hannah, Eli, and Samuel with God and those around them.

by Sandra A. Smith

Sandra A. Smith, a former missionary, is a social-work student at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Giants of Faith

LOGOS

1 Sam. 1-3

Hannah Grieves and Prays

"The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available—dynamic in its working" (James 5:16, AMP).

Hannah ("grace") was married to Elkanah ("God has created"). Peninnah ("pearl") was a second wife. The family lived in Ramathaim-zophim, not far from Jerusalem. Elkanah had sufficient wealth to support a large family. Each year he took his wives and Peninnah's children to Shiloh, the location of the sanctuary, "to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord" (1 Sam. 1:3).

Hannah's husband loved her in spite of her infertility. He showed his love by giving her a "worthy" portion of the sacrificial offering, one for herself and the second as if she had a child (verse 5).

Year after year Hannah "grieved" because she did not have a son (verse 8). Peninnah's derision and her presence with her offspring "provoked" Hannah so much that she "wept, and did not eat" (verses 6, 7). Elkanah, a solicitous husband reaffirming his love, stated that he was better to her than 10 sons (see verse 8).

When not even her husband fully understood her sorrow, Hannah poured out her soul before the Lord, promising that if she were granted a son, he would be

dedicated to God's service (see verses 10, 11). Her "bitterness of soul" and weeping caused the high priest, Eli, who was sitting at the entrance of the sanctuary, to assume that she was intoxicated (see verse 13). He reprimanded her. Hannah responded that she was not drunk; rather, she was imploring Yahweh to remember her (see verse 15).

When we pray fervently, we leave nothing hidden. We talk with God about our inmost secrets. We have confidence that "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Then trusting that He has heard us and will be with us, we, like Hannah, can go our way "no more sad" (1 Sam. 1:18).

What was Eli's attitude toward drinking?

How often have we been like Eli and judged others by outward appearance? What were the results?

Can we understand the grief of others if we have not experienced a similar grief?

Hannah's Praises for a Couple's Blessing

"I asked him to give me this child, and he has given me my request. . . . How I rejoice in the Lord! How he has blessed me! . . . The Lord has solved my problem. How I rejoice!" (1 Sam. 1:27-2:1, TLB).

The name *Samuel* has two

by Ruth E. Pope

Ruth E. Pope is assistant professor of education at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

meanings—"asked of God" and "God heard." Whenever we hear his name mentioned it reminds us of two important characteristics concerning prayer:

1. Ask in faith (see Matt. 7:7; John 14:13).

2. Believe that God has heard (see Matt. 21:22) and have confidence that "all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).

Elkanah honored his wife by supporting her in her decision to place Samuel in Eli's care (see Num. 30:10-16; 1 Sam. 1:22-24). He also provided freewill offerings for the child's consecration service. Although the Bible is unclear about Samuel's age at weaning, many believe he was three to six years of age because he ministered before the Lord while a "child" (2:11, 18). Ellen G. White's comments on 1 Samuel 1:20-28 imply that Samuel was three years old when he was taken to the tabernacle.¹

Hannah rejoiced in her gift of a son. She recognized that God is Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of all and has sovereignty over every aspect of life. She concluded by proclaiming that "the Lord . . . shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (2:10). Because this last statement was made years before Israel had a king, some believe this is a prophetic description of David as Israel's king, and of Jesus, the anointed one (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 572).

Like God, our parent, Hannah never forsook her child. She continued to love and provide for Samuel, though he was away from home and she had additional children. Each year, when the family came to Shiloh, Hannah brought him a "little coat" she had made (verse 19). Hannah no longer regarded Shiloh as a place of despair; instead, it was the site of answered prayer and reflected its name, "place of rest."

If I had been Hannah, would I have kept my vow and given up my only child, especially when the behavior of the priests was not exemplary?

How can we learn to give thanks in all circumstances (see 1 Thess. 5:18)?

Samuel Responds to God's Call

"The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening'" (1 Sam. 3:10, NIV).

Scripture records that, while growing physically, Samuel grew "in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (2:26). Hannah had taught Samuel that he was a gift from God and was dedicated to serve Him. Samuel was willing to obey God's will for his life. Eli nurtured Samuel's sincere desire to serve. Through the faithful performance of little "acts of duty" Samuel was building a "strong, beautiful character."²

Although Samuel had been ministering unto the Lord, his personal religious experience had not taught him to recognize God's voice (see 3:7). Eli's help was needed for Samuel to identify God's call. Like Samuel, we may need other people to help us hear God speaking. When Eli asked Samuel what the Lord had said, Samuel told Eli "every whit, and hid nothing from him" (verse 18).

What types of religious experience had Samuel had?

Do I recognize the Lord's voice? How can I help another hear Him?

Might you have told partial truths to Eli so as not to hurt the elderly man's feelings? Why or why not?

Eli's Sons

"If a man sins against another man, God can defend him; but who can defend a man who sins

against the Lord?" (1 Sam. 2:25, TEV).

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, abused their power and made a mockery of the services at the tabernacle. They participated in sinful practices. Though admonished by their father, these sons continued in their evil ways. Through "a man of God" (verse 27) the Lord pointed out to Eli that he was honoring his sons more than he was honoring God (see verse 29). Because his sons were adults, Eli could not force them to obey. However, he should have exercised his authority and removed them from their priestly office. By choice Hophni and Phinehas cut themselves off from God's mercy and were called by the same name as the devil (see verse 12).

When individuals refuse Christ's atonement, the only choice they give the Lord is to "slay them" (verse 25). Consequently, Eli's sons both died on the same day, and his lineage was removed from the priesthood. Final fulfillment occurred during Solomon's time (see 1 Kings 2:26, 27).

Hannah's Influence

"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about . . .

Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised" (Heb. 11:32, 33, NIV).

Samuel lived during a time when there were few visions (see 1 Sam. 3:1), yet "all Israel" recognized that "Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (verse 20). The word *established* comes from the same Hebrew word as *amen*, meaning "so be it." Through her mothering Hannah shaped Israel's future. Because of his early training, Samuel chose "to maintain his Christian integrity."³

Samuel spent a lifetime ministering to Israel. The writer of Hebrews lists Samuel among the giants of faith, whose example helps us to look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 11:32; 12:2).

What can parents and church members do to help today's children become giants of faith?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 2, p. 1008.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 574.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 2, p. 1008.

Tuesday, January 1

True Faith and Obedience

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: Prov. 22:6; 2 Pet. 1:8

Children are the blessed fruits of a loving relationship between husband and wife. However, not all married couples are fortunate enough to have children. Such was the case of Hannah and Elkanah. Thus Elkanah took a second wife, Peninnah, who bore him children. Peninnah was jealous of Hannah because Elkanah loved her and gave her the greatest portion of his sacrifice.

During the sacrifice, which took place each year, Peninnah taunted Hannah because she had no children. After the sacrifice for another year was made, Hannah poured out her heart to the Lord, asking Him for a son. She, in turn, vowed to give her son to be trained for the services of God. God, hearing Hannah's cry, granted her a son, whom she named Samuel, which means "asked of the Lord."

Hannah's faithfulness continued even after the child's birth and separation from her. "From the earliest dawn of intellect she [Hannah] has taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord's. By every familiar object surrounding him she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother's solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year

she made . . . a robe of service for him. . . . Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but . . . that he might honor God and bless his fellow men."¹

"The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Sam. 2:26). Samuel constantly sought to be like God, even though he was surrounded by the irreverent and vile behavior of Eli's sons. What joy he brought to Eli's troubled heart burdened with the wickedness of his sons!

"His [Samuel's] religion was carried into every duty of life. He regarded himself as God's servant, and his work as God's work. His efforts were accepted, because they were prompted by love to God and a sincere desire to do His will. It was thus that Samuel became a co-worker with the Lord of heaven and earth."²

God was indeed pleased with Samuel, but not with Eli and his sons. This was because Eli had not trained his children after God's principles. He allowed them to have their own way. Thus they respected neither God nor His sacred things, nor had they any regard for Eli. "These unfaithful priests also transgressed God's law and dishonored their sacred office by their vile and degrading practices; yet they continued to pollute by their presence the tabernacle of God."³

by Carolyn Thomas

Carolyn Thomas is an education major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Their irreverent lifestyle caused many Israelites to turn away from the place of worship. "Thus the service which God had ordained was despised and neglected because associated with the sins of wicked men, while those whose hearts were inclined to evil were emboldened in sin. Ungodliness, profligacy, and even idolatry prevailed to a fearful extent."⁴

"Because of Eli's position, his influence was more extended than if he had been an ordinary man. His family life was imitated throughout Israel. The baleful results of his negligent, ease-loving ways were seen in thousands of homes that were molded by his example."⁵

We as Christian leaders of tomorrow need to be careful what we do as we go about our daily ac-

tivities. We are constantly being examined by those around us, and our actions could make a positive or negative difference in the lives of people, especially the youth. Let us regard ourselves as God's servant, as Samuel did, knowing that our work is not our own, but the Lord's.

REACT

1. In the church I attend youth seem to lack interest in church activities. What is the solution to this problem?

2. How do you see the leaders of our church today?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 572.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 573, 574.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 576, 577.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 577.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 579.

Wednesday, January 2

Private Decision, Public Consequence

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Sam. 2:26

It was done alone in quiet grief. She knew that her husband loved her and was supportive, but he could not understand her anguish. She went alone into the sanctuary to plead with God. Her private, individual decision was to ask for a child to enrich her life and ease her pain. Her prayer was answered, but it was more than an answer to an individual prayer. The birth of Samuel was the catalyst that ushered in the new order in Israel with Samuel, the long-desired child, playing a leading role in restoring the community to a relationship with God.

This was a period in Israel's history in which "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg. 21:25, NIV). It was an attitude of "my business is my own." Yet seemingly individual actions and decisions can impact on an entire nation and determine the trend of events as they did in the days of Samuel. Life really is not individualistic; life consists of relationships. The first three chapters of 1 Samuel provide a study in relationships and their impact on the public.

There was Hannah with her family relationships. Hannah was extremely unhappy, even though Elkanah gave her a "double portion because he loved her" (1 Sam. 1:5).

Her childless state was a burden (maybe a reason that Elkanah married another wife). She could not endure the taunts of her rival. She prayed. This may not have been the first time that childless Hannah agonized for a change of status. Her prayer, however, revealed that she had a good relationship with God, for even in her depression she could freely pour out her innermost feelings and make a bargain with God.

Another relationship concerned Eli. He as a priest seemed more ready to chastise sinners than to comfort struggling saints. As a result of his partial knowledge and observation, he mistook Hannah's excruciating pain for drunkenness. Like Eli, Christians today also need to recognize that they can misjudge even when they see clearly. Fortunately Eli was able to accept his mistake and join Hannah in believing that the Lord would grant her request. Apart from misunderstanding Hannah, Eli was powerless to correct his sons, who were causing a disgrace on the sanctuary and on God.

These relationships poignantly remind Christians that personal relations can shake a nation. Samuel not only brought happiness to Hannah but also initiated a turning point in the priesthood, anointed the first king of Israel, and despite the corruption around him maintained his relationship with God.

by Joan Francis

Joan Francis is an associate professor of history at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Thursday, January 3

In God I Trust

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 62:8

We are often confronted with the need for prayer—at church, at work, but mostly in our daily life. Nowadays we need not go to a high priest. Neither do we need to bring burnt offerings. We can now go directly to our High Priest, Jesus, with our requests and petitions (see Heb. 5:1-14).

In my own prayer life I often feel the need to be in closer contact with our High Priest. And sometimes I do feel myself drawn more toward Him, especially when I am in trouble.

From Hannah's example we learn two important points about what brings us closer to God.

Acknowledge Our Burden

Hannah did not just sit down and let sorrow fill her heart. She knew what her rival, Peninnah, wanted, but she turned to no one except the Lord. She poured out her sorrow before the throne of God and told Him her burden. "Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting

their case before Him, just what course to pursue."

Keep Our Vow

After Hannah had conceived she gave thanks to the Lord and did not forget the vow she had made. She knew she had a difficult task lying ahead of her. But she did not waver in her commitment. She reared Samuel until he was old enough to be of service in the sanctuary, and then entrusted him to the care of Eli.

In our life we often make vows to God. For example, we say, "Please, Lord, if only You will help me through college, I will make myself available for Your service." But after we are done with college we sometimes end up doing as we please.

The vows we make to God are sacred, and we need to do everything in our power to keep them. "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it" (Eccles. 5:4, 5, NIV).

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

by Arline Blanker

Arline Blanker is a sophomore dietetics major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Friday, January 4

Questions, Questions, So Many Questions

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 22:6

Whenever we study Bible characters from long ago, from a culture so vastly different from our own, we are faced with challenging, difficult, and, in some cases, troubling questions. Consider some of the following:

What does Hannah's experience with answered prayer suggest about how, when, and why God answers prayer? How are we to distinguish between Hannah's prayer for a son and our sometimes "selfish" prayers? What kind of faith was Hannah exhibiting when she gave her three-year-old to Eli to rear, especially in light of Eli's failure to rear his own sons well? How did Samuel come to be so submissive to his mother's dedication of him to serve God "all the days of his life"? Many parents have taken Proverbs 22:6 to heart only to be disappointed when their children departed from the way. What were Hannah's child-rearing secrets that accomplished in three to six years what most parents hope to accomplish in 16 to 18 years? What was Elkanah's influence on Samuel? In what sense is Samuel's story *only* a mother's

story? What could today's parents do to guarantee the commitment of their children to God?

Which was Eli's greater mistake/sin: not properly training his sons while they were younger or not removing them from their priestly office? Why was Eli able to accomplish with Samuel what he wasn't able to do with his own sons? What does Samuel's story suggest as to how our church leadership should be chosen? What safeguards does our church today have against the abuses of nepotism—the hiring of relatives?

In what way is this story a recommendation for sending children away to boarding school at an early age? Adventist students are constantly involved in religious education, worship, and church and chapel attendance. How likely are they to fall into the trap of becoming overly familiar with the sacred and holy as did Eli's sons? How can teachers, staff, and faculty help guard against the slide toward irreverence?

And, finally, how do our individual actions, lifestyle, and personal decisions (e.g., Samuel's dedication, Elkanah's decision to take a second wife, and Eli's love of ease and distaste for confrontation) affect the church, the school, and the community?

by Rick Trott

Rick Trott is the campus chaplain at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Lesson 2, January 6 - 12

The Ark Taken and Returned



“I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God” (Exod. 29:45, 46, NIV).

Sunday, January 6

God Is No Magic Wand

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 4:1-7:15

The sun was high. The air was warm. The sky was blue. But the envelope was green. And at the sight of this pale-green epistle, the sun seemed to dip, or maybe the clouds began to gather. Or maybe it was mid-November. I didn't know which, and frankly I didn't care. I only knew that the green envelope meant bad news. As a historian in training, I had learned to look for trends, and bad news always came in a green envelope. (Later Nancy—not her parents' designation—told me that she never intended to restrict her bad news to green stationery. But that didn't change the facts.)

My "beloved" and I were trying to carry on a long-distance relationship, which was of great benefit to the U.S. Postal Service, if not to us. We had met on a European study tour.

You can imagine that sharing such romantic locations as Venice, Florence, Rome, Geneva, and Edinburgh, as well as sharing nearly every waking moment for weeks, sparked a relationship—and quite an intense one at that. We must have packed two years' worth of dates into those summer weeks. Thoughts of marriage even began lurking in the corners of my mind.

But now here was that green envelope. Old "Sigmund" Chiomenti didn't miss a trick. And regretfully I was right. This was the "dear Peter" letter I had

been dreading.

What should I do? A ray of hope pierced the gloom. I could turn to the Bible. There were all those stories about the promises and all the help they were in time of need. I felt sure this would qualify as one of those times.

Now, as a matter of fact, I had fallen a little behind on my daily Bible study. But I felt sure God would remember me even if it had been a couple of years since we had had any meaningful communication. Actually, the only promise I remembered was "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." But that didn't seem to apply. I knew the Bible wasn't magic, but I thought that maybe if I picked it up, it would just fall open to the right promise. It occurred to me that this was just about the same as cutting a deck of cards.

A Bible story did occur to me—the one that told of the Israelites' losing the ark when they carried it into battle, hoping that God's words would contain some magical formula for success. My first attempt didn't work, so I thought maybe I ought to try it seven times. Seven seemed to be a lucky number for the Israelites. But apparently luck had nothing to do with it, since my seventh "cut" was no better than the first.

If only I had known where to look. If only I had invested more time in my relationship with God. I learned that God isn't a magic wand we can wave anytime we need to improve our situation.

by Peter Chiomenti

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From Ebenezer to Ebenezer: Relationships and the Community of God

LOGOS

1 Sam. 4:1-7:15

The First Scene at Ebenezer: A Relationship Ignored (read 1 Sam. 4)

"The time came when the Philistines mustered for battle against Israel, and the Israelites, marching out to meet them, encamped near Ebenezer, while the Philistines' camp was at Aphek" (verse 1, REB).

An ark dominates incredible scenes of conflict, anguish, death, and victory in the stories of 1 Samuel 4-7. These scenes portray the crucial importance of relationship for the community of God.

Israel faced fearful prospects. The powerful, highly disciplined soldiers of Philistia, having already conquered the coastal plain, were now poised to strike into the hill country of the Hebrews. The soldiers of Israel, encamped at Ebenezer, were the last defense. Defeat would mean slavery.

An initial engagement went so poorly for Israel that the elders called for the ark of the covenant to be brought from Shiloh. These elders believed a Bible promise that enemies would scatter and flee before the ark (see Num. 10:35, 36). The ark with its cherubim and throne symbolized the omnipresence and authority of

their God, who rode upon celestial cherubs in the heavens. Within the ark were stone tablets—witnesses to the covenant of God to be present with His people.

For a while the magic appeared to work. The shouting battle roar of Israel struck panic to the Philistines. But the Philistines rallied and defeated the Israelite charge. The priests were killed. Eli, the judge in Israel, died from hearing the news. Shortly, the shrine at Shiloh would be in ruins (see Jer. 7:12, 14). No wonder that Eli's daughter-in-law, induced to labor by the shock of it all and dying, would name her infant Ichabod, to declare the departure of glory from Israel.

Not only was the ark gone, long-held beliefs were gone also.

This loss in battle was foreshadowed to the reader in warnings given to Eli regarding the corruption of his sons (see 1 Sam. 2:31-34; 3:13). Why should the entire religious community (including innocent people such as Samuel) suffer because of the corruption of the leaders? Was this fair? Could it happen today?

Did the elders of Israel do the wrong thing in seeking to bring the ark from Shiloh? Why or why not?

When might modern people in-

by Douglas Robertson

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appropriately seek the presence of God, as the Israelites sought the ark?

Does the glory of God really depart from the community of God as the name Ichabod implies?

Between the Scenes of Ebenezer: A Relationship Explored (read 1 Sam. 5; 6)

"The Lord's hand oppressed the people of Ashdod. He threw them into despair; he plagued them with tumours, and their territory swarmed with rats. There was death and destruction all through the city" (5:6, REB).

Ensuing events in Philistia demonstrated that God had not been defeated at Ebenezer like the army of Israel. When the ark was placed as a war trophy in the temple of Dagon, the principal deity of the Philistines, the image of Dagon fell face downward two times in obeisance before Yahweh.

Then a plague (possibly the bubonic plague) broke out among the Philistines with tumors (perhaps swollen lymph glands from the bubonic plague). Swarming rodents ravaged the grain supplies and undoubtedly spread the disease. In the face of this death and destruction the Philistines sent the ark back to Israel on a new, ritually undefiled cart hitched to cows whose calves were kept in their stalls. To the watching Philistine lords this movement of the cows away from their calves indicated that Yahweh had indeed caused the plague. A Philistine offering of five tumors and five rats made out of gold accompanied the ark. Hopefully the pestilence would depart with these symbols.

At Beth-shemesh the people received the ark with joy. But it was quickly sent on to another town after 70 men died as a result of gazing upon it (cf. Num. 4:20). God's presence demanded awe and respect.

Why do you think God responded to the test that the Philistines set up with the new cart and milk cows? (Or did He respond?)

What was there about the cultural situation in Palestine that led to the destructive acts of Yahweh? Does God have different means toward ultimate ends in different settings? How?

In view of what happened at Beth-shemesh, can one feel safe in the presence of a holy God? Why or why not?

The Second Scene at Ebenezer: A Relationship Restored (read 1 Sam. 7)

"There Samuel took a stone and set it up as a monument between Mizpah and Jeshanah, naming it Ebenezer. 'This is a witness,' he said, 'that the Lord has helped us'" (verse 12, REB).

Twenty years later Samuel led out in a revival in the Israelite community. People banished worship symbols of the Canaanite gods. They sought Yahweh with heart and mind. They fasted and confessed their sins in corporate assembly.

When the Philistines heard of this assembly, they attacked Israel. But thunder from Yahweh caused confusion in the Philistine ranks, who then fled Israelite pursuit.

At the place marking the end of their pursuit Samuel set up a stone monument, which he named Ebenezer as a witness that Yahweh had helped them.

And thus the cycle from Ebenezer to Ebenezer was complete. From external religion, apparent defeat, slavery, and corruption at the earlier battles of Ebenezer to heartfelt relationship with God, victory, and freedom at the stone of Ebenezer.

Why do you think that confession and purification were experienced in community?

Parental Disregard Results in Annihilation

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 22:6

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the high priest, who was in charge of the ceremonies of the sanctuary, had to keep order and unity within both the sanctuary and his household. While the book of 1 Samuel describes briefly Eli's failure in his authoritative position with his sons and the sanctuary, Ellen White expounds in detail his error.

"Eli was priest and judge in Israel. He held the highest and most responsible positions among the people of God. As a man divinely chosen for the sacred duties of the priesthood, and set over the land as the highest judicial authority, he was looked up to as an example, and he wielded a great influence over the tribes of Israel. But although he had been appointed to govern the people, he did not rule his own household. Eli was an indulgent father. Loving peace and ease, he did not exercise his authority to correct the evil habits and passions of his children. Rather than contend with them or punish them, he would submit to their will and give them their own way."¹

Eli had become subject to his sons' sacrilegious corruption.

Hophni and Phinehas were prime examples of evil and apostasy.

In failing to correct, discipline, and maintain authority, Eli had allowed his sons to corrupt and dishonor the sanctuary. The lack of parental guidance not only degraded and disgraced the services of the sanctuary but also devastated the Jewish community.

"Many of the people, filled with indignation at the corrupt course of Hophni and Phinehas, ceased to come up to the appointed place of worship. . . . Ungodliness, profanity, and even idolatry prevailed to a fearful extent."²

"This irreverence . . . robbed the service of its holy and solemn significance, and the people 'abhorred the offering of the Lord.' The great antitypical sacrifice to which they were to look forward was no longer recognized. 'Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord.'"³

Whether we are students, administrators, or blue-collar workers, as Christians and representatives of Christ we are responsible for our testimony and example. The actions and decisions we make could well result in someone's disbelief in or rejection of Jesus.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 575.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 577.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 576.

by Thomas L. Silva

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Wednesday, January 9

It's Dangerous to Play Games With God

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Sam. 7:3

The Philistines placed the ark in the temple of Dagon as a trophy of their god's superior power. The fact that they had defeated Israel and captured the sacred object indicated to them that Dagon had triumphed over Yahweh in the invisible struggle that accompanied every military battle.

But events soon indicated that Israel's God was anything but defeated. In fact, the elders of His people had already seen their earlier defeat, not as weakness on Yahweh's part, but as His doing. Thus they had taken the ark into battle as a talisman to force His hand, only to have Him separate the ark from the wicked priests of the Shiloh sanctuary.

First the Philistines found the statue of Dagon face down, bowing in submission to Yahweh. Then it was mutilated. Finally a plague of "tumors" began striking the various Philistine cities.

Plague usually accompanied military activity in the ancient world. Generally it was a race as to which would destroy an army first—disease or enemy soldiers. The ancients believed that the gods used plague in their invisible struggle, and it could be averted only by appeasing the deities. Even Yahweh employed it (see

Hab. 3:5; cf. 2 Sam. 24).

Recognizing the power of Israel's God, the Philistines returned the ark in a manner that was both a test to determine whether Yahweh was behind the plague and a way to provide a guilt offering. Possibly a wordplay was intended, since *opel*, the Hebrew word for "tumor," could also mean "acropolis." Thus each of the five golden images of a tumor would remove the plague devastating each major Philistine fortified city, or acropolis.

The Philistines took Yahweh more seriously than did His own people. When the Israelites received the ark back, they treated it in a forbidden way. They knew that only priests should handle it, but they did not bother to consecrate themselves for the task. Before, they had used it as a talisman. Now they regarded it with a dangerous casualness. To stress the seriousness of their indifference, God slew a number of the men of Beth-shemesh (see 1 Sam. 6:19).

Eventually a reformation swept Israel. The people vowed to worship only Yahweh, and Samuel offered a sacrifice to memorialize their repentance. At that moment the Philistines decided to attack again. But Yahweh, not being manipulated this time, rose up in holy war and defeated them.

by Gerald Wheeler

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The (Almost) Impossible Task

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Sam. 7:2

Spelling out the practical do's and don'ts of religion has never been easy. The truth is that most Christian ethicists have found that the provision of such a *manual of morality* is not only difficult (perhaps even impossible) but also downright dangerous.

It is difficult because in the case of early ancient Israel, the subject of this week's lesson, we are moving from the theocratic worldview (of a less-than-trustworthy people) of God to a postmodern democratic one (in some cases at least) with all its attendant complexities, questions, and concerns, for which there seems to be no easily created consensus, not even among us as born-again believers. And this seems true not only in relation to issues of personal piety or the corporate affairs of the servant community called church, but also in relation to the deceptively simple question of the socio-political role of the church.

The danger with listing the practical do's and don'ts of Christian living and loving is that some of us seem so prone to settle for shortcuts to what it is all about. If left to ourselves, many of us seem to crave pat answers and then to use such answers as excuses for not engaging in hard, committed,

open-minded, humble, Spirit-guided, church-influenced Christian thinking and acting.

Let us consider two questions for our collective reflection:

1. *How does one treat the issue of Elkanah's bigamy in the face of the highly diverse cultural complexion of our worldwide church today?* Do we simply ban bigamy outright wherever it exists? Or should we as a church gradually phase it out?

2. *What about the nature of discipleship?* Is the impression really sound that, as with ancient Israel, God chooses to win our battles, to fight the "Philistines" as long as we are faithful to the covenant? That is, are setbacks, persecutions, economic reversals, and all the ugly rest of this life a clear and unambiguous sign of our covenant *unfaithfulness*?

The uncomfortable upshot of the whole matter, then, is this: our How-To section for this week does not seem to be the regular How-To section at all. I have not given answers and practical steps. Rather, I have posed some provocative questions. But then, isn't posing the right questions a necessary prelude to coming up with appropriate practical answers in the Spirit—a Spirit who still functions as empowerer and enlightener, and who is yet speaking to and through the church? I happen to think so.

by Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke

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Friday, January 11

God Is My Church

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Sam. 4:1-11

The single most important item in our religious life must be our personal relationship with God—a deep abiding faith in Jesus, our total reliance on the Word of God, and our relationship to Him as the sole support of our spiritual life. We must not put our faith in man-made institutions.

We often speak of the church as if it had a life of its own and were capable of independent thought and action. Well, of course, it does not. We are the church. Each individual member, each in his or her own way, is an integral part of the body of the church. Therefore, we can interpret the behavior of each person, his or her words, beliefs, and actions, as representative of the church.

This is why it is so necessary that our individual, personal relationship with God be the foundation of our faith. If we as individuals are living a strong, healthy, vibrant Christian life, then so will our church.

However, it is dangerous to place faith in the institutional

church or to make the doctrines of the church a determinative factor in salvation. The church does not save us; Christ does.

Even some positive aspects of church doctrine and rules, if misused, can be detrimental to our Christian life. As the Israelites put their faith in the ark and not in the Power behind the ark, they lost the battle and the ark. We too must not put our faith in doctrine, rules, or tradition. Our faith must be centered on our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Our personal relationship with Christ should influence, form, and direct the church. When we are right with God, our church is right with God.

I believe that as a church we do indeed have God with us. He is with us, not because we are the remnant church, dutifully follow the commandments (important though this is), keep the Sabbath, or speak the appropriate words at the proper time, but because we as individuals have a personal love relationship with Jesus.

REACT

Are we keeping faith or "church"? Is there a difference? If so, how can we know what it is?

by Joe Kilburn

Joe Kilburn is a theology major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Lesson 3, January 13 - 19

Theocracy or Monarchy?



“The Lord answered Samuel, ‘Listen to the people and all that they are saying; they have not rejected you, it is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king’ ” (1 Sam. 8:7, NEB).

Sunday, January 13

More Than One Way?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 7:15-8:22

"There's more than one way to skin a cat." This saying echoes from my earliest memories. Was it my mother who first said it? Perhaps my grandfather. I didn't know whose cat it was or how it died, and I certainly was unclear about what to do with the skin. But I did understand the meaning. What my mother or grandfather was saying was that persistence, combined with a flexible approach, pays off. If Plan A doesn't work, go to Plan B. And keep Plan C in mind.

As I reviewed the fascinating story of the crowning of Israel's first king described in 1 Samuel, I was reminded once again of the fate of the unknown cat. Perhaps this simple proverb had philosophical implications that had eluded my childish understanding. After all, perhaps God was saying, "Samuel, there's more than one way to skin a cat. If these people want a king, we'll give them a king. And we'll still achieve our goals." Is God teaching us the virtues of pragmatism? What *do* we learn about God and His ways as we review the dramatic story of the selection and coronation of Saul?

On the one hand, the book of Samuel records the fact that God Himself aided in the selection of Saul, directed Samuel to anoint him, and followed up the anoint-

ing with a long series of miraculous signs.

On the other hand, the record reveals God's displeasure when He told Samuel that Israel had essentially rejected Him as king in asking for a human king.

Let's look more closely at this apparent inconsistency and see what pictures of God emerge.

God as Inscrutable

From this perspective the contradictory approaches to Israel's monarchy are not inconsistencies in God's mind, nor are they evidence of God's willingness to adapt His plans to human frailties. Rather, they represent the inability of human beings, including such chosen messengers as Samuel, to understand God's will.

God as in Control

In this view God may appear to be adaptive and even reactive, but He is, in fact, steadily working His will and achieving His plan.

God as Immanent

From this perspective God is right there with His people. He does not govern from afar. His methods do not transcend human inconsistencies. Rather, He works within the situation.

Perhaps each of these views is a caricature. Perhaps the truth is more complex and certainly more profound. But a simple fact remains—there was more than one way.

by Adrian Zytoskee

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The Cry for Change

LOGOS

1 Sam. 7:15-8:2

Conscientious Judge (read 1 Sam. 7:15-17)

"And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life" (verse 15).

The period of the judges embraced approximately 300 years, extending from Israel's settlement in Canaan by Joshua and his peers (see Judg. 2:7) through Samuel's judgeship. Although the era is characterized by repeated apostasies and lawlessness—when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25)—it really didn't lack a system of government.

Israel was a theocracy, a nation directly ruled by God through the religious and civil laws given to Moses at Sinai. The tabernacle-sanctuary, pitched on the West Bank in the heart of the ancient territory of Ephraim, was the rallying point for the 12 tribes. Three times a year all the men of Israel appeared before the Lord at the sanctuary. God protected the land from invasion while they attended these national festivals (see Exod. 34:23, 24). Here the nation renewed its vows and was instructed by the priests in the ways of God.

Each tribe had its rulers at various levels (see 18:25, 26), and the "elders" supervised in the towns and villages (see Ruth 1:1; 4:1, 11). In periods of distress God responded to the appeals of the

people and raised up saviors known as judges. Actually, these people provided spiritual, as well as military and judicial leadership.

The key to the success of such a mild system of governance lay in the spiritual maturity of the people. The yoke of an oppressive form of government is not needed to bind people into a civil working unit if they are truly bonded to God. Supreme love toward God includes dependence upon Him in all the affairs of life, secular as well as sacred. It leads to impartial love toward one's neighbor and to cooperative action for the common good of the community.

"Make Us a King" (read 1 Sam. 8:1-9)

"They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (verse 7).

Change was in the wind. The same spirit that prompted the production of a visible idol in the absence of Moses now desired a visible king in place of the unseen Lord. The low spirituality of the tribes prompted some of their more vocal members to urge Gideon, an earlier judge, to rule over them. But Gideon rejected the proffered crown: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:23).

As Samuel aged and Israel extended her habitable areas, Samuel appointed his two sons, Joel and Abiah, to judge the

by Frank B. Holbrook

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people in the area of Beer-sheba, the southernmost point of the land of Israel. But unfortunately, Samuel's sons did not administer by their father's code of righteousness. Their perversion of justice provided the pretext for Israel's leading elders to appeal to the prophet for a change in the nation's form of government. They were not interested in a change of personnel, but in a radical change in governance. They requested a strong, visible, central government with all the trappings.

Samuel felt rejected. He had served Israel unstintingly from his childhood into old age. In addition to his regular duties as priest and judge, he had founded and was supervising two schools of the prophets, educational units through which he designed to educate the flower of the nation in the ways of God. Although hurt, he said nothing, but placed the matter before God (see 1 Sam. 8:6, 7). Instructed to acquiesce to the demand of the elders, Samuel yielded to God's will.

In some respects the prophet reflects the noble character of the later John the Baptist. Owing to his patient toil, the nation was at its best in years. Now he was to be the intermediary to pass the reins of leadership to a new kind of ruler. He would not subvert the monarchy, but would pray for its success (see 12:20-25). Samuel was God's servant; like John, he would pray, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

"Like All the Nations" (read 1 Sam. 8:10-18)

"Ye shall be his [the king's] servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you" (verses 17, 18).

The Lord assured Samuel that the people had not rejected him. None found fault with his selfless ministry. The trouble lay deeper.

Perhaps they did not themselves understand the full meaning of their discontent. But the Lord explained to Samuel: "They have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (verse 7).

Actually, God had foreseen that Israel would one day demand a king, and He had instructed Moses regarding the nature of that kingship in Israel (see Deut. 17:14-20). The Lord would choose the king and rule through him.

The theocratic nature of the nation did not cease at this point. But God conceded the people a monarch because—in their "hardness" of heart (cf. Matt. 19:8)—they were not spiritually mature enough for His direct governance. Nevertheless, Samuel informed the elders of the changes that a monarchical form of government would bring.

Military conscription and a standing army would replace voluntary citizen troops. The best lands would be taken over by the crown, and both sons and daughters would be drawn into the monarch's service. Taxes would be exacted for the support of the court and the realm. When one man's will is the law, he tends to lose the common touch and become oppressive. "Ye shall cry out in that day because of your king," warned Samuel (1 Sam. 8:18).

How true to history was the prediction! Under Solomon, Israel reached its greatest pinnacle of success as a monarchy. But the leaders and people admitted to his son, Rehoboam: "Thy father made our yoke grievous." And they pleaded: "Make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter" (1 Kings 12:4).

Proud Persistence (read 1 Sam. 8:19-22)

"Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like

all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (verses 19, 20).

The glory of Israel lay in her uniqueness—her difference from the other nations. If the people had continued in the lines of instruction taught by Samuel, they would have prospered. In time, the surrounding nations would have acknowledged that the secret of Israel's success was in

her adherence to the wise commands and statutes of Yahweh (see Deut. 4:6-8). But willful pride is blind. At the crossroads of national destiny, Israel—dazzled by the pomp and splendor of kingship—took the wrong turn. But God did not abandon His people. He had foreseen their choice. He was still ruler, and He would seek to continue His guidance through a representative king on Israel's throne.

Tuesday, January 15

Commitment and Accountability

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Sam. 8:19, 20

In our world today media accounts abound of the growing feelings of cynicism, discontent, and active criticism of political, civil, and spiritual leadership. Rather than zeroing in on the underlying problems of lack of individual commitment and accountability, society often takes the easy solution by deriding or removing the present leadership.

Leaders have always had unreal expectations placed upon them. However, today there seems to be an increasing demand for leaders to be superhuman, even godlike. If those leaders cannot meet our bigger-than-life expectations and demands, it is easier to elect a "better" leader than to require more of ourselves.

This condition was demonstrated at the time of Samuel when the ancient Israelites desired a king to do it all for them—to judge them and go out before them and fight their battles.

"Samuel's life of purity and unselfish devotion was a perpetual rebuke both to self-serving priests and elders and to the proud, sensual congregation of Israel. Although he assumed no pomp and made no display, his labors bore the signet of Heaven. . . . But the people had become weary of his piety and devotion; they

despised his humble authority and rejected him for a man who should rule them as a king."¹

Change is all around us, and we recognize that the church today is in need of making certain changes. Certainly we can learn from the "nations around us," i.e., the business and professional society. However, sometimes we can become so focused and dependent upon systems and policies that we overlook the paramount importance of a right relationship with God. The ancient Israelites were guilty of this when they substituted a monarchical system for dependence upon Jehovah's leadership.

"God desired His people to look to Him alone as their Lawgiver and their Source of strength. Feeling their dependence upon God, they would be constantly drawn nearer to Him. . . . But when a man was placed upon the throne, it would tend to turn the minds of the people from God. They would trust more to human strength, and less to divine power, and the errors of their king would lead them into sin and separate the nation from God."²

Samuel noted the consequences of turning from the ideal pattern with God as ruler and judge, of depending on worldly business practices and systems.

He "was instructed to grant the request of the people, but to warn them of the Lord's disap-

by Margaret Botting

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proval, and also make known what would be the result of their course. . . . Their king would imitate the pomp and luxury of other monarchs, to support which, grievous exactions upon their persons and property would be necessary.¹³

Change always demands a decision. In this case the decision was unwise. We can learn from ancient Israel's example by having individual commitment and accountability to God and by depending upon Him for wisdom when change is necessary, rather than upon institutions.

REACT

1. When changes come about in the church or in my personal life, do I look for the underlying reason?

2. Am I always willing to analyze the results and/or the consequences that change will make?

3. Knowing that a change would be helpful to my church or personal life, why do I hesitate to make a decision?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 607.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 606.

3. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, January 16

The Rise of Kingship

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Kings 3:9

Kingship came late to Israel. The nations around Israel had kings long before the Israelites did. Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Canaan all had kings before the time of Abraham, more than a millennium before the Israelites received their first king. This slow and reticent approach to kingship indicates that God did not originally plan that kings should rule His people. Why not? What was wrong about kings?

For one thing, most of them did not turn out to be very good. As the writer of Kings penned his books or scrolls, he gave a religious evaluation of each king—whether he was good or bad. Some like David, Hezekiah, and Josiah were good kings, but unfortunately the majority of them did not turn out well. The last of them even took their kingdoms down to destruction when wiser rulers could have salvaged the situation.

A major problem was that kingship was hereditary. With the law of heredity in operation one generation might enjoy a good king, but the next generation might be just as likely to get a bad king. This contrasts with the system in operation during the time of the judges, who preceded the kings in Israel. When God needed a person to lead His people out of trouble under the

judges, His Spirit selected that new leader. With the kings the Israelites had to take the hereditary crown prince whether he was good, bad, or indifferent. As we can see from the outcome in the Bible, God's system was far better.

If kingship was not part of God's original plan, how did the Israelites come to get kings? Actually, the people pleaded for them. Read the story in 1 Samuel 8 carefully. The people pleaded for a king because they were in trouble, oppressed by the Philistines. They urged Samuel to give them a king like the nations around them. He could lead their armies and fight their battles and throw off the yoke of the Philistines.

Samuel opposed this plan and at first refused to give them a king. But the people kept on pleading, and God finally relented and let them have a king. Before He did, however, he had Samuel give them a prophetic warning of what life under the kings would be like. They would pay heavy taxes. They would labor in his work battalions. He would take their sons and daughters to serve in his armies and his palace. In spite of the prophetic warning, the people still insisted that they wanted a king, so a king they got. But it was not long before the prophecy Samuel gave was fulfilled. All the conditions he described came to pass by the time of Solomon, two generations after Samuel.

by William H. Shea

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Seeking God's Plan for Me

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Sam. 8:22

At last, the answer for the "me generation": "No matter what I do, God will adapt His plan for me." *No way!* God has an ideal plan for us that will maximize our happiness on this earth. It is based on a personal theocratic relationship with God through Jesus.

Consider a heaven filled with king seekers who want a king because some other group has one. God's rule throughout eternity would be challenged on its form and, as Israel eventually did, on its substance, even though God's rule was and is perfect.

Let's look at this week's scripture passage in the light of the prior days' studies. "When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel" (1 Sam. 8:1, RSV). As we read on, what do we learn about Samuel's children? Verse 3 boldly states that his sons "took bribes and perverted justice" (RSV).

Israel's request for a king wasn't focused on Israel's own "me generation." Rather, Israel, in attempting to deal with the shortcomings of Samuel's sons, asked for another form of direct leadership—a king.

God knew the ultimate impact of their request. He pointed out this rejection of Him as king was

similar to Israel's previous rejections. Samuel himself did not agree with the people's request and took the matter before the Lord for counsel. God's all-knowing character predicted accurately the eventual outcome of implementing their request. Nevertheless, He agreed to it in verse 22: "Hearken to their voice, and make them a king" (RSV).

What does this mean to me? First, God has a plan for my life. This isn't predestination; rather, it is a "best" path for me to walk on this earth. For Israel this was without a king. However, with the failure of Samuel's children to follow His path, God was willing to bless an alternative form of leadership. This gives me hope when sin or its effects alter my personal relationship with God. He still leads!

Second, God provides counsel when He foresees the effects of decisions. In verses 11-18 He warned the Israelites. True to His warnings, the prophecies were fulfilled. God did not threaten the Israelites; He simply wanted them to realize the consequences of their decision. He did not want them to suffer, and He does not want me to suffer either.

Last, God loves *even me*. While all of the things God predicted came true, He desired at all times only peace and happiness for Israel. The same is true today for you and me.

by Terry Burns

Terry Burns is the vice-president for finance of Adventist Health System/West, Roseville, California.

Friday, January 18

God or Caesar?

OPINION

Key Texts: Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-6

Israel's experience in becoming a monarchy, in addition to raising questions about the type of leadership God desires for us, also creates questions about our response to ruling powers.

What should be a Christian's relationship with governmental authorities? How does an individual decide which duties and responsibilities he owes to the state and which duties and responsibilities he owes to God?

Paul writes in Romans 13:1-6 that Christians have several obligations to ruling authorities. Among these duties we should:

1. *Submit to them.* God has established existing authorities. However, does this include submission to unjust laws and repressive rulers?

2. *Obey the laws.* We are to obey not only because of fear of punishment but also because of our own conscience. Is a Christian ever justified in breaking a law?

3. *Pay taxes and revenue that we owe.* Although not explicitly stated, it is implied here and elsewhere that we are required to pay taxes honestly.

4. *Give honor.* How do we

honor a government or its rulers? Is this simple respect or something beyond it?

A review of this list suggests that Paul expected Christians to behave like good citizens within their society. As we know, Paul came into conflict with governing authorities on several occasions and was put to death by Nero. Did Paul violate the principles that he espoused? There seems to be a point at which our relationship with God should take precedence over our duty to the state.

Matthew 22:15-22 records Jesus' answer to a question posed by a group of Pharisees about the payment of Roman taxes. His response was "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (verse 21, NIV).

In this response Jesus sets forth a fundamental principle in regard to a Christian's relationship with the state. Some aspects of our behavior are subject to the control and authority of the nation's leaders, and, in fact, it is our duty to follow them. However, our relationship with God is to take precedence.

REACT

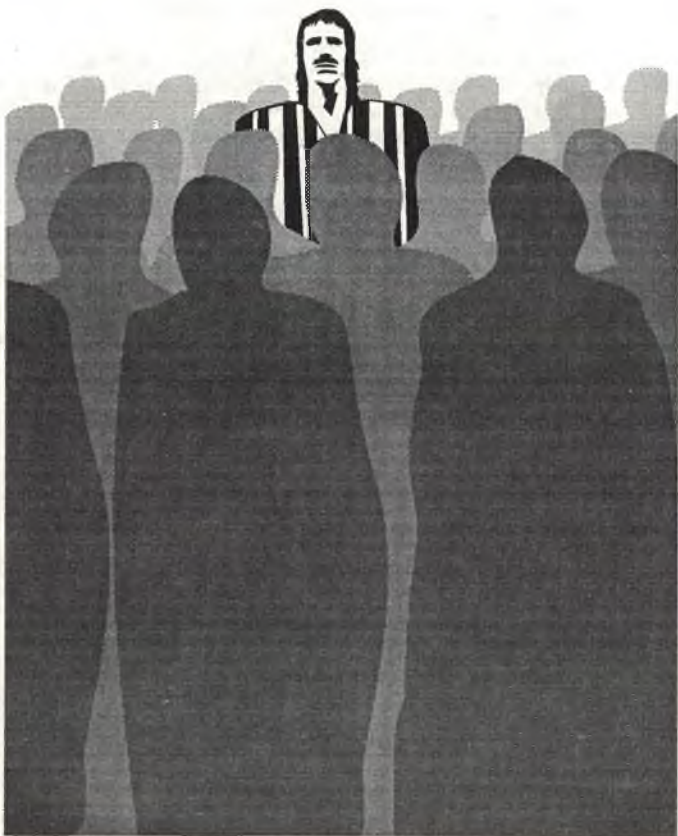
Many responsibilities and duties are inherent in good citizenship. Which of those responsibilities and duties could bring you into conflict with your obligation to God?

by James Brewster

James Brewster is the director of budget/reimbursement for Adventist Health System/West, Roseville, California.

Lesson 4, January 20 - 26

A King Is Chosen



“For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. . . . But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away” (1 Sam. 12:22-25, NIV).

Sunday, January 20

Not-So-Fatal Choices

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 12

Some time ago a friend of mine was in the middle of a divorce, and we were discussing the pros and cons of her decision. As an Adventist pastor, I was sure of God's feelings about her decision to divorce. I knew it was a mistake to divorce her husband. I knew that God did not even want her to separate, and I wanted to let her know.

My friend told me she honestly believed God could work her marriage out if she was willing to wait, but she was pretty sure she didn't have the patience to wait. She told me that no matter what her decision was, she knew God was still right beside her all the time. He was still there to pick her up and carry her through. He was never going to leave her.

My mind reeled with shock at such bold, outright defiance of God's will. Yet as I opened 1 Samuel 9-12 I realized that Israel did the same thing to God. They were told to worship God. They did not need a king. But in outright defiance, they

went ahead with their plans. God told them through Samuel the prophet that they had committed a great sin, but that He would never leave them as long as they served Him.

I guess God works along lines similar to those of my friend Mike. Mike related the story of his son's learning to walk. He remembers watching his son begin to stand up by holding on to a table leg or anything else within reach. Soon Mike's son was standing on his own.

Mike shared with me how one day he stood his son out in the middle of the floor to see whether he could walk on his own. His son stood there, teetering, but not moving. Finally he took a careful step and *plop!* He was on the floor. Mike didn't look at him and yell, "Nice job! Way to go! You really blew it, you stupid kid! Get up and *walk!*" Which is how some Christians handle it when another person falls. Instead, Mike grabbed his son and started him walking again, making sure he didn't run into anything. Mike did not keep his son from falling; he was just there to make sure the fall was not fatal.

by Roger Walter

Roger Walter, assistant pastor of the Tabernacle SDA Church, Portland, Oregon, works primarily with young adults.

The Unknowing King

LOGOS

1 Sam. 9-12

Destined for Royalty (read 1 Sam. 9:1-10, 16)

“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you leader over his inheritance?’” (10:1, NIV).

Having just felt the embers of God’s fiery frustration over Israel’s cries for a king, we see the scene shift in chapter 9. We’re introduced to Saul the Benjamite. He was “an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others” (verse 2, NIV).

As we read the account of Saul’s thrust into royalty, we already know the punch line. We know he became king. But the real element of surprise is to watch the expression on Saul’s face as the plot unfolded. In the twentieth century we’re used to seeing men craving the position of the presidency every four years. We’re tired of the outrageous promises and speeches by the time November rolls around. Saul didn’t want any position of power. All he wanted was to find his father’s lost donkeys.

We see Saul and his servant stalking about the countryside in search of his father’s stray beasts. The twist of events was providential for this simple man. In a desperate attempt to retrieve the animals, they decided to find the

prophet and ask his advice. Saul didn’t know, when he approached Samuel in the town gateway, that God was whispering to the old prophet, “This is the man for the job.”

It is interesting to note that after such bad press for the kingship in chapter 8, it was the Lord who was leading Samuel to find and anoint a king. The reader can almost sense God’s joy in giving Israel a deliverer from the Philistines (see 9:16). While God knew that this wasn’t in the best interest of Israel, He realized that Israel was a “big kid” now and had the right to make its own decisions. While God saw Israel becoming more headstrong, He certainly wanted to maintain His involvement, even in the midst of Israel’s poor decisions.

Samuel anointed Saul in private (see verse 27). Saul was shocked as the oil dripped down his quivering face. But the Spirit came upon Saul and convinced everyone that something extraordinary was transpiring.

However, Saul was still tentative even after Samuel’s blessing. When he bumped into his uncle and was asked to explain what he had been up to, he replied that he had been looking for donkeys. But somehow he failed to mention he had also been anointed as king.

What was it about Saul that made him fit for the kingship?

From this passage are there any signs that the kingship could

by Paul Haffner

Paul Haffner is youth pastor at the Sunnyside SDA Church, Portland, Oregon.

be a source of pain as God had mentioned earlier?

What is it that changes us from our simple beginnings?

Trilogy of Events (read 1 Sam. 10:17-11:15)

"Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship'" (11:14, NIV).

Following the secret anointing that only Samuel and Saul knew about, there were three quick events that led the general population of Israel into the monarchy. First, the king was selected publicly. Second, a battle occurred at Jabesh. And third, the kingship was confirmed.

Although Samuel had already anointed Saul to be king, Samuel acted as if he were naive concerning who it would be. He began his address to the people with a gripe that they wanted a king. It is important to realize that God's man was still uncomfortable with the concept of the monarchy, even though He knew that God was leading in the selection of the king. Samuel discerned that although God saw potential problems, He still wanted to be involved with Israel. Yahweh did not disown His own when they made poor decisions.

The lots were cast, and of all the potential men in Israel, Saul was selected. This made it twice that God had providentially picked Saul. But Saul was jittery. They had to pull him out from the baggage when he was selected.

Upon seeing their new leader the people shouted, "Long live the king!" It was not by accident that the author mentioned this. This praise had previously been reserved only for God. He had been their only king. Immediately Samuel launched into a job description of the king (see 10:25). There ought to be no question

where the king's boundaries lay.

There were concerned brethren who grumbled against Saul as king. Immediately Saul had a chance to prove himself worthy of the position. Saul led his men into victory over the Ammonites at Jabesh.

Euphoria swept through Israel in the wake of the victory. Samuel called the people up to Gilgal and there reaffirmed Saul as their king. The disunited Israelites needed to stand together behind their leader. The gathered people brought Israel to a point of worship.

How did Israel's relationship with God change now that the people had a king?

What kinds of earthly kings are in the church today?

Samuel's Speech (read 1 Sam. 12)

"But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you" (verse 24, NIV).

Samuel knew that much of his own power was now gone. The prophet had to relinquish part of his position. So he shared a few thoughts.

He mentioned the past. He explained his own history, as well as the nation's. He reminded the fickle people of their senseless departures from God's will. Their present deviance from God's plan had brought the thunder and rain during wheat season to remind them that they had acted wrongly. Samuel saw Israel slipping away and gave them counsel.

What steps do you see the church making that might compare with Israel's demand for a king?

How would you go about restoring a right relationship with God?

Choices for Eternity

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: 1 Sam. 12:20, 22, 24, and 25

With the Israelites as an example, we see that God allows us to make our own decisions, but we have to live with the consequences. Ellen White points out how God works to build our character through the choices we make.

“God leads His people on, step by step. He brings them up to different points calculated to manifest what is in the heart. Some endure at one point, but fall off at the next. At every advanced point the heart is tested and tried a little closer. If the professed people of God find their hearts opposed to this straight work, it should convince them that they have a work to do to overcome. . . . Here they have opportunity to see what is in their hearts that shuts out Jesus. . . . Individuals are tested and proved a length of time to see if they will sacrifice their idols and heed the counsel of the True Witness.”¹

By choosing to have a king, Israel failed to have faith in God. God did not cut them off. Through Samuel He showed them their sin and how they could rebuild their relationship.

Ellen White recounts the story: “Before there could be any hope of prosperity for Israel they must be led to repentance before God. In consequence of sin they had lost their faith in God and their dis-

cernment of His power and wisdom to rule the nation. . . . Before they could find true peace, they must be led to see and confess the very sin of which they had been guilty.”²

Repentance was—and is—God’s requirement for a saving relationship with Him. It entails more than glibly asking God to forgive us; it means deep, heartfelt sorrow for sin. David’s prayer in Psalm 51 provides examples: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (verses 2, 3, NIV). “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (verse 10, NIV).

God tells us through Ellen White that David’s experience is “one of the most forcible illustrations given . . . of genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”³ She continues with one of the most reassuring passages. “Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he *shall* make peace with me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto

by Bradley Nunn

Bradley Nunn is a cabinetmaker in Portland, Oregon.

the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will *abundantly* pardon.' Isaiah 55:7.¹

Such a repentance brings about a change in lifestyle. "We often sorrow because our evil deeds bring unpleasant consequences to ourselves; but this is not repentance. Real sorrow for sin is the result of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the ingratitude of the heart that has slighted and grieved the Saviour, and brings us in contrition to the foot of the cross. By every sin Jesus is wounded afresh; and as we look upon Him whom we have pierced, we mourn for the sins that have brought anguish upon Him. Such mourning will lead to the renunciation of sin."²

Through this process God

brings us, step by step, to see our need for total dependency on His grace.

REACT

1. What are the steps in building a saving relationship, and who initiates them?

2. Why does God allow Satan to tempt us over and over at our weakest points?

3. What does total dependency on Christ mean to you? How does total dependency affect your lifestyle?

4. Have you experienced true David-like repentance? How can you tell?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 187.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 614.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 726.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

God's Choice for King of Israel

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Sam. 10:24

God's choice of Saul as king of Israel was not random. As always, God had a well-thought-out plan. One thing is sure: God did not choose Saul because of his importance and high political standing within Israel.

In *The Daily Study Bible Series*, David F. Payne points out that Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, a small tribe that could never have aspired to dominate other, larger tribes. In addition, the tribe of Benjamin was located between two powerful rivals, Ephraim and Judah. "A king from Benjamin could well be expected to reduce rivalries and help unify Israel."

But God had greater uses for a king than quelling disputes between the larger tribes of Israel. For it was through Saul and David that the Philistine menace was forever shattered.

The SDA Bible Commentary suggests several other possible reasons God chose Saul to be king, even though Saul would not obey Him in the future:

1. God does not limit our freedom of choice.
2. In spite of the people's unwise choice, God would restrain the evil influences that came with the monarchy.
3. Israel had to learn by experience that what we sow we must reap.

4. National departure from the path of God's choosing does not prevent individuals within that nation from living in harmony with His will and receiving His blessing.

At first, Saul was mystified at Samuel's treatment of him. "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?" (1 Sam. 9:21, NIV). And not everyone within Israel was ready to accept Saul as king. For after Saul was anointed, and later chosen by drawing lots, "some troublemakers said, 'How can this fellow save us?' They despised him and brought him no gifts" (10:27, NIV).

But despite his lowly background Saul had strengths. In 1 Samuel 10:24 Samuel proclaims: "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people" (NIV).

If Saul's strengths in leadership had not manifest themselves before Saul's appointment as king, they certainly became apparent when the Ammonite attack on Jabesh took place. When Saul heard of the Ammonite threat, "the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger" (11:6, NIV).

Payne points out three qualities of leadership the Lord implanted within Saul upon hearing of the Ammonite threat. First,

by Rob Hensel

Rob Hensel is an electrical engineer at Synektron Corporation, Portland, Oregon.

Saul had a sense of authority that commanded obedience. Second, he commanded unity; and third, he provided military leadership.

Saul had great opportunities and responsibilities ahead of him. In 1 Samuel 12:14, Samuel declares, "If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and

if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, His hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers" (NIV).

*David F. Payne, *The Daily Study Bible Series: 1 and 2 Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 46.

Thursday, January 24

King of Kings

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Sam. 12:20-24

The devil works hard to make us believe that God isn't as good as we think He is and that we need to rely on our own strength to get anywhere in this world. It is so easy in today's fast-paced society to lose our relationship with God. Sometimes I have wondered how it could happen so fast. One day I have a great experience with God. I trust Him completely and know the plan He has for me, and the next day I lose all sight of God's leading. It seems so easy to become distracted and caught up in myself to the point that I, like Israel, become frustrated and go looking for a king.

The Lord has allowed me to have kings in my life, as He did with Israel, but I found, as Israel did, that these so-called kings did not bring the peace and security I had hoped they would. I put my trust in things other than the Lord—like my grades, my appearance, my job performance, or other people's perceptions of me. These were the things I could control, but they did not bring peace; rather, they made me more insecure as they separated me from God. God truly is the only faithful one. It wasn't until I took the advice that God and Samuel gave Israel that I found the peace and security I was looking for.

1. *Worship the Lord and Him only!*

2. *Get rid of false securities, or gods.*

3. *Dwell on God's goodness, remembering how He has led in the past and how He continues to lead in the present* (see 1 Sam. 12:20-24).

It is a struggle to look to God every second of the day and be emptied of self. It is even harder to remember that God's way and His laws are the best. But it is this kind of time spent dwelling on God's greatness and our smallness that keeps our relationship with God intact. I learned from Israel's mistakes—it is having a right relationship with God that accounts for the making of better decisions that bring peace and security in our life.

REACT

1. Do you find security in things other than God? Why or why not?

2. Do you think it is important to spend time with and think positive things about someone else in order to maintain a good relationship with him? Does our relationship with God function the same way?

3. Is it easier to think about God when times are tough? Why or why not?

by Gail Walter

Gail Walter is an illustration major at Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, Oregon.

Friday, January 25

Who's in Control?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Sam. 12:18

When I was young, my family lived on a farm several miles out of town. Most of our entertainment was self-generated. One of the most dreaded, yet exciting, games was the "trunk ride." My older brother would somehow convince my sister and me to get in the dark trunk of our parents' little white Volkswagen "bug." He'd close the trunk, and we'd start off. "We're going almost 50!" he'd yell. "Oh, no! The brakes are out! We're going to hit the barn! Sorry you guys are in front—you'll hit first!" We would scream as we anticipated our certain destruction and then laugh with relief and excitement as the brakes "returned."

I have experienced the same "out of control" feeling in other situations since that time, but usually with more fear or disillusionment than exhilaration. In those times I wonder where God is in all of this.

Often we experience this frustration and loss of control when dealing with those in authority—our supervisors, managers, pastors, professors.

How much control does God exert over those in these positions? Are conference presidents, governors, presidents, and kings chosen as a fulfillment of the will of God?

The Israelites wanted a king.

They rejected Samuel's leadership and asked for a monarchy like all the other nations. Although God instructed Samuel to warn them of His disapproval, He granted their wish for a king. The change from a theocracy to a monarchy would forever alter the direct relationship between divine power and human laws.

While Saul was anointed under divine authority, he was God's choice for a form of government that may not have been the best choice for the Israelites.

Perhaps the issue is not whether or not our leaders are chosen by God or whether their appointment is a fulfillment of His will. Maybe we should focus on the fact that God is in control. If we choose to know Him and understand His will in our lives, He has a power beyond our understanding that allows Him to use any person, position, or situation for His purpose. That is not to say that we do not have to live with the consequences of poor or selfish decisions. But God has the power to work within the situation we have created for ourselves and bring us back into His will.

REACT

1. Do I allow God to redirect me after an unwise decision? Or do I try to fix it myself?

2. How can I become more focused in my decision-making and make decisions that reflect the will of God?

by Deana Altman

Deana Altman is an intake counselor for the eating-disorders unit at Portland Adventist Medical Center, Portland, Oregon.

Lesson 5, January 27–February 2

The Road to Rebellion



“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22, NIV).

Sunday, January 27

“Samuel Grieved Over Saul”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 13-15

Jeff Lampurt ran for ASB president during our junior year of high school. He wasn't one of the most popular people on campus. Not that he was a jerk or anything like that. People just didn't know who he was.

He was a good friend of mine, so I offered to help him get votes. We stayed up late nights making campaign posters, stickers, and buttons, and writing his speech for assembly. We filled the speech with promises of beach vespers, banquets, and senior privileges. We had fun thinking up slogans and trying to draw catchy pictures. I thought it helped to bond our friendship. It also got him noticed. He won the election by a landslide.

Unfortunately, our friendship began sliding with it. Suddenly the popular kids on campus knew who he was and wanted to be around him. Girls began asking him out. He spent more and more time with the other ASB officers, as well as his new-found friends.

I tried to keep in touch with him, but he always said he was too busy with official duties or his new friends. He sometimes apologized and said we'd get together later. I figured he meant it but just had trouble carrying out the promise. When his brother died I again tried to reach him, but he

never returned my calls. I began to think he was avoiding me, but I couldn't figure out why.

One day by accident we ran into each other in the hallway between classes.

“Jeff, hi! Remember me?”

“Oh, yes, hi. How are you?” His eyes shifted uncomfortably around the hallway. He looked embarrassed and impatient.

“I need to go,” he said.

“Yes,” I replied sadly. “I'm sure you have a meeting to go to or something, don't you?”

His ears turned red, but his gaze hardened.

“Look,” he finally said. “I really appreciate what you did for me in the past. We used to be good friends.” He shrugged. “But our lives are so different now. You really don't fit into mine anymore. I'm sorry.”

He walked away and left me standing in the hall, holding back the tears. What had happened? How could a relationship so promising go so wrong?

I slipped quietly into my Bible class and tried to concentrate on the lecture. A student was reading from 1 Samuel 15:35: “For Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel” (NASB).

The text hit home. I had an idea what God was going through when Saul turned his back on Him. I vowed not to do the same. I knew the pain would be too great . . . for both of us.

by Sherrie Stevens

Sherrie Stevens is a senior communication major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Saul, the Monarch, Tested

LOGOS

1 Sam. 15:22

When the Israelites were organized, they did not have a king as did the surrounding nations. This made them strikingly different. When the Amalekites and the Philistines had a visible leader to rally around, Israel did not. This is not to say Israel had no leaders. They had prophets who spoke for God, delivering the “word of the Lord,” and they had judges who made decisions and ruled territories on the basis of divine moral law. These leaders carried out the work of the theocracy, a government with God as king.

As time went on, the Israelites saw what they considered to be advantages in having a tangible, visible king like other nations, and their insistence finally led to divine approval, provided God made the choice. The story of Samuel the prophet and Saul’s appointment as Israel’s first king is well known. But now the question arose, How would a king function differently from a prophet or judge? And how would he relate to the priests?

The monarchy differed from the judge/prophet rule in that it rested on military prowess and dynastic rule. Secular life and religious life, being the same in the theocracy, began to diverge in the monarchy. The relationship between Israel and God may not

have changed a great deal on a day-to-day basis, but it changed fundamentally and philosophically a great deal with the inception of the monarchy. Never again would it be as close.

Saul’s First Mistake (read 1 Sam. 13:1-15)

“I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time. . . . So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering” (verses 11, 12, NIV).

We cannot be clear on how long Saul had been king when the attack at Geba occurred. The Hebrew text omits the time references (see verse 1) so the English versions differ (NIV—Saul had reigned for 42 years; NEB—22 years; NASB—32 years; RSV—“. . . and two years”; KJV—two years; AMP—two years; and Douay—two years). The extensive variance shows the speculative nature of the translators’ work, plus the possibility of an accidental deletion in the text.

However, the time factor is not of particular significance. Kings, prophets, and priests each had important functions even in the monarchy. But Saul either decided that these distinctions were no longer important, or that as king he need not follow the rules. Even though he was a Benjamite, he decided to try his hand at the priesthood, offering up burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (see verse 9). Instead of waiting for a word from the Lord through His

by Edwin Zackrison

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prophet, Saul decides to get his own word from the Lord directly. This proved to be a serious mistake.

There was no reason that Saul could not have had a simple season of prayer and implored God to bring peace of mind, courage for battle, and strength for victory. Such an approach would always be appropriate and acceptable. But because he overstepped his authority, the word that came from the Lord was "You acted foolishly. . . . Now your kingdom will not endure" (verses 13, 14, NIV). The end had begun.

We should not think that making a mistake decides our destiny. Saul's problem resided not in *making* the mistake, but in his *handling* of the mistake. Rather than confessing his disobedience and repenting of it, Saul justified himself, shifting the blame to Samuel (see verse 12) and by implication to God, who had appointed Samuel. So the issue was trust. In not obeying God's instructions through His spokesmen of old, Saul demonstrated that he really did not trust God.

What do you do when God seems to be giving you the "silent treatment"?

Does shifting the blame for our problems (to circumstances, parents, friends, authority figures, etc.) actually enhance our reputation as a strong, intelligent person?

What do you think of people who always make excuses for their problems?

Saul's Foolish Command (read 1 Sam. 13:16-14:46)

"Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies" (14:24, NIV).

It was no mean challenge to fight the Philistines with rakes when they had all the swords. At

this time the Philistines held the monopoly on iron (see 13:19-23). In spite of that, Jonathan let God fight for his army, and he routed the Philistines soundly. The combination of Jonathan's creative approach to warfare (a result of his daring trust in God) and God's earthquake intervention led the Philistines into total disorientation. In their confusion they turned their one advantage, namely their swords, on one another and did the work Jonathan could not do alone (see 14:21).

Meanwhile back at headquarters, Saul, acting from fear, issues the self-defeating command that no one in his army will eat food until he (Saul) is avenged (see verse 24). But Jonathan, who had been at war, unknowingly breaks the command, and even when he is informed of it declares that if men are hungry they would do a better job as soldiers if they were fed. We can see the profile developing: maybe Saul is not so wise. In fact, some (even in his own family) think he makes dumb rules.

When Saul prays for guidance and perceives no answer from God, he impetuously concludes that the silence is the result of some soldier's disobedience. So he begins the search to discover whoever is to blame (again!). The lot falls on his own household, i.e., his own son Jonathan (by now a national hero), but Saul cannot carry out the order because of his own army's intervention (see verses 42-45).

Saul looks like a bumbler. He shifts blame, he is indecisive, he oversteps authority, he makes stupid declarations, he tries unsuccessfully to cover his tracks. Such capriciousness is dangerous for the nation. But the drama is not over yet.

Should Saul have carried out

the declaration that the guilty party be executed whether his son was guilty or someone else?

What does Saul's declaration reveal about his character?

Is "casting lots" a good way to know God's will for your life? Why or why not?

Piety or Rebellion? (read 1 Sam. 14:47–15:35)

"Go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys" (15:3, NIV).

Even after the death-knell of his kingdom had been sounded, Saul won impressive victories and continued to function as king. But it was inevitable that his character flaws would eventually lead to his undoing. The Amalekite incident magnifies Saul's character and vindicates God's evaluation: "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. . . . Your kingdom will not endure" (13:13, 14, NIV).

Ordered to annihilate the Amalekites and completely dispose of their goods, Saul displays selective and creative obedience, picking and choosing what seems to fit his fancy. He brings the Amalekite king back alive. He brings back the best of the flocks ("to offer as sacrifice to the Lord"). At first he denies that he disobeyed; then he begins giving reasons that his ideas were better than God's.

Saul represents all who insist they can improve on God's revelation. "I do keep the Sabbath; I just keep it on Sunday." "I don't fornicate; I love the girl." "I didn't steal this; I just borrowed it for a while." "I'm just watching this sex and violence; I'm not meditating on it." "I'm not committing adultery; my marriage just didn't work, and it would be a sin to live

with my husband when I don't love him anymore."

Samuel's answer to Saul's self-deception became the battle cry of the prophets: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (15:22, NIV). Refusing to live in harmony with God's judgments and instructions, Saul acts out a sham, tacking on religion where it seems expedient, saying what should be said when it appears advantageous. Knowing that his position could be jeopardized, Saul cosmetically treats his character flaws and then ironically ends up jeopardizing his position. He is a type of Pilate, who washed his hands of Jesus' death in order to save his own skin, only to be driven out of office later because of his incompetence in solving problems. History extravagantly demonstrates that it is better to die for a cause than to live a sham.

A picture doesn't become religious art because it has a Bible verse as a caption. And so a life does not become a committed life because it adheres to the cultures of a religious tradition. Saul represents to us the shallowness of the uncommitted life that irrationally seeks to hang on to God but to do it in one's own way. Such attempts result in foolish decisions—both personally and corporately. The result is weak leadership, intrigue, and finally personal/national/organizational disaster. By contrast, David, Saul's successor, made many of the same mistakes as Saul, yet his repentant attitude, his contrite pliability, and his humble obedience won him the distinction "a man after God's own heart."

If obedience is better than sacrifice, does that mean that obedience is more than following a set of rules? How do you know when you are obeying?

Tuesday, January 29

Aslan Is Not a Tame Lion

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Sam. 10:6

"When Saul departed, early next morning, the prophet went forth with him. Having passed through the town, he directed the servant to go forward. Then he bade Saul stand still to receive a message sent him from God. 'Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because Jehovah hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?' . . . 'The Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee,' said the prophet, and thou 'shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.' . . .

"At Gibeah, his own city, a band of prophets returning from 'the high place' were singing the praise of God to the music of the pipe and the harp, the psaltery and the tabret. As Saul approached them the Spirit of the Lord came upon him also, and he joined in their song of praise, and prophesied with them. He spoke with so great fluency and wisdom, and joined so earnestly in the service, that those who had known him exclaimed in astonishment, 'What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'"

"As Saul united with the prophets in their worship, a great

change was wrought in him by the Holy Spirit. The light of divine purity and holiness shone in upon the darkness of the natural heart. He saw himself as he was before God. He saw the beauty of holiness. He was now called to begin the warfare against sin and Satan, and he was made to feel that in this conflict his strength must come wholly from God."

It is worth noting that the Spirit of God came upon Saul with power, and Saul became a "new man," a changed person. His heart and mind were transformed as he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The people marveled at his prophetic pronouncements and manifestations. But this same Saul, this chosen and anointed king, would soon choose his own will over God's will. He would disobey the prophet's explicit instructions and do his own thing.

Through this tragic experience Saul was shown that God prizes humility above leadership skills and abilities. God prizes obedience above human initiative and industry. Even one who has been mightily anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit cannot afford to rely on his own wisdom and judgment. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a guarantee of superior spiritual performance. If we are to surrender ourselves to God, then we must let God be in control.

**Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 610, 611.*

by Steve Daily

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The Hall of Shame

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 12:2

King Saul was an enigma. He had so much going for him, yet he ended up in the Scripture Hall of Shame.

There are a number of people with him. Cain was the first to be inducted. Perhaps the next real notables were Esau and then Pharaoh. We could list a precious few kings of Judah and Israel who really qualify as "very bad guys." Perhaps Ahab achieved this status. In the New Testament only Judas truly achieved such infamy, though Paul was on his way until he turned around. Other members of the Hall of Shame would certainly include Pilate, Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, and Caiaphas.

There is also a Scripture Hall of Fame. The list there is longer because the Bible is salvation history and is trying to show how to aim at a good destination. These people have become household words: Abel, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samson, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, John, Paul, and the list goes on. I can remember in church school learning the Israelite kings on the basis of the good guys and the bad guys, and seriously wondering: What turned them bad?

The Hall of Shame inductees shared one trait—they let circum-

stances mold them into a particular shape that left them useless to God, society, or themselves. A profile of their life would make a fearful biographical work. Starting with great potential, they allowed themselves to believe that their natural abilities were somehow a credit to them. Inheriting intelligence is out of our control. How intelligence is used is very much within it. The positions went to their heads. They became the prima donnas of Scripture and allowed themselves to indulge the illegitimacy of thinking they were special.

A particularly evil person is a person with spectacular potential for good. C. S. Lewis, in his book *A Case for Christianity*, addresses the question of how a good God could make a bad devil, by reasoning that in creating a person with magnificent potential for good, God also opened up the possibility of frightful evil. A cow with little potential for mischief also has little hope of offering anything but meat, milk, or calves. But a dog with its superior intelligence (as compared to a cow) has a greater capacity for troublemaking. We take dogs into our homes to live and show affection. We teach them tricks; we housebreak them. Can you imagine having a holstein cow residing in your living room? Some people adopt dogs and find their reciprocal affection quite satisfactory. But you don't hear of people doing that with a guernsey.

by Edwin Zackrison

Edwin Zackrison is associate professor of theology and ministry at Loma Linda University School of Religion, Riverside, California.

So it is not impossible that very capable people will turn out to be very evil, but it is still curious and enigmatic. Here is Saul, "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others," initially thoughtful of others' feelings, humble, handsome, spiritual, and handpicked by God to lead His people (see 1 Sam. 9). And in the more than 300 scriptural references to him we watch him literally deteriorate before our eyes.

Saul habitually modified God's instructions. He constantly sought to improve on God's ideas. Rationalization, selfish adjustment, shifting the blame, self-justification, and impetuous self-seeking coalesce in Saul's experience and become easier to indulge until finally jealousy, envy, and pride, clamoring to exert authority for its own sake, become *not temptations but lifestyle* for Saul. Realizing that he is getting consistent silence from God, he blames his

soldiers. Jealous that David is more popular, he seeks to kill him. When one is king, he has options he doesn't have as a peasant subject of a kingdom. Saul succumbs consistently to the temptation to exert those prerogatives for his own gain. He lets the circumstances decide his character.

People do not start out in life in the Hall of Shame. They work at it. Cain allowed circumstances to make him bitter. Pharaoh allowed the plagues to turn him into a tower of obstinacy. Judas let greed turn him into a traitor. Pilate became a world-class example of the futility of self-serving in political office.

Paul offers this advice for the potential Sauls of today: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable to him and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, Phillips).

Thursday, January 31

Developing a Trusting, Obedient Relationship With God

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Sam. 14:6, NIV

Trust and obedience go hand in hand in a true relationship with God. We will not obey God without trusting Him. If we trust God, we will obey Him without question. Saul didn't have trust in God or His servant Samuel. He directly disobeyed God's orders. Saul thought he could get away with bending the rules. As a result he lost God's blessing, and he lost his position as king of Israel.

Our relationship with God is supposed to be a model for our relationships with others. Without a balanced personal relationship with God, we lose sight of what a "healthy" relationship is supposed to involve.

We can learn several things from Saul's disobedience to and distrust of God, in contrast to Jonathan's trust and willingness to obey.

1. *God doesn't make a promise unless He is going to fulfill it.* Because Samuel didn't show up the minute he was supposed to, Saul took things into his own hands. He directly disobeyed God's command and offered the burnt offering himself. It never occurred to

Saul that if God wanted him to offer the burnt offering He would have asked him. Often when we don't see an end in sight we look for our own ways to solve our problems, often doing things we know are wrong, and we always come up short.

2. *If we are committed to obeying God, He will bless us.* God sometimes blesses us more than we imagined He would. Jonathan was committed to obeying God's will. He asked God's guidance in fighting the Philistines, and he won. If Jonathan had stopped to consider the odds, he would undoubtedly have lost. God rewarded his obedience and trust.

3. *God wants only our complete trust and obedience.* Saul found out the hard way. He thought he could get away with not killing the king of the Amalekites and keeping the best of the sheep and cattle—and everything that was good (see 1 Sam. 15:10-23). Saul thought partial obedience was as good as complete obedience. God rejected Saul as king over Israel (see verse 26).

With trust and obedience as an essential part of our relationship with God, we will have no problem believing His promises.

by April Dulan

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Friday, February 1

Is Doing Good, Good Enough?

OPINION

Key Texts: 1 Sam. 15:20-22; Mic. 6:8

How many times have you agreed to do something that at face value was a worthy endeavor when, in reality, you were doing it for the wrong reasons? For instance, you agree to go on a mission trip to Mexico to help build an orphanage for homeless street children. However, you decided to go because it would look good on a résumé and give you a compassionate and world-conscience view that is certain to appeal to future employers.

This raises an interesting question: If you do something good for a bad reason, does that make what you did bad? No, in that an orphanage was built for homeless children who otherwise would be left destitute in the streets. Yes, in that your motivation was self-centered, and you missed the point of the whole exercise. But more important, you missed the opportunity of allowing God to lead in your life and the subsequent development of your relationship with Him. It seems to be that, far too often, too many Christians follow Saul's lead in doing good things, but for the wrong reasons.

Saul had an opportunity to follow the Lord's command and successfully pass his last opportunity to prove his worthiness as

king of Israel. But Saul could not comprehend God's clear message, because he had for so long ignored God's leading and relied on his own judgment. That's why in 1 Samuel 15:20 Saul pleads his case with Samuel, exclaiming, "But I did obey the Lord" (NIV), even though it was quite obvious he had not. He had brought King Agag and the best of the livestock back as "trophy for the Lord."

It is amazing how easy it is to be so wrong that we actually think that we are right. Such was the case with Saul. He had deluded himself into believing that his way was actually better than God's way. Saul piously hid behind a spiritual guise by excusing his actions through a supposed desire to sacrifice the animals to God for His honor and glory. Samuel explained to Saul that God prefers obedience—doing for the right reasons—as opposed to insincere sacrifice or form religion—doing right but for wrong reasons.

Saul became accustomed to the praise he received through doing good things, so much so that he soon forgot God and continued going through the motions of religion without the presence of God. Micah 6:8 indicates God's requirements for obedience and subsequently true religion: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (NIV).

by Gregory Madson

Gregory Madson is the director of recruitment for Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 6, February 3 - 9

David Anointed



“David shouted in reply, ‘You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of the armies of heaven and of Israel—the very God whom you have defied’ ” (1 Sam. 17:45, TLB).

Sunday, February 3

Closer Than a Brother

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 16-20; 23:16-18

True friends are a rare blessing. Human relationships of any kind are difficult to maintain, but one good one is worth more than a fortune.

David and Jonathan had one of the most beautiful friendships in history. Even though they had to separate when David became a fugitive, their bond endured.

My best friend lives 3,000 miles away on the East Coast. We've known each other practically since birth and fought only once when we were both about five. My family moved to the West Coast when I was 10. At first we wrote back and forth quite a bit. But as we grew older and responsibilities increased, our communication grew sporadic. And yet the lack of correspondence has never lessened our friendship, because the base is solid; the friendship is true.

We still call each other when we're down, when we're excited, or just to talk sometimes. Other times we can go for months without contact. It just works that way, and it's no less special. A few weeks ago she called to ask me to be a bridesmaid in her wedding. After screaming in excitement, I

gladly said yes, and we began discussing colors, dress styles, and basically catching up from where we'd left off a few months ago. Even though I don't talk to her every day, I know she would do anything for me, and I'd do the same for her. Our doors are always open to each other, but more important, so are our hearts.

That's sort of how I imagine it was for David and Jonathan. Their souls were knit together, and they loved each other as brothers. It was Jonathan who warned David that Saul indeed was looking to kill him. Jonathan covered for David when Saul asked about his absence from the palace. And while David was a fugitive, Jonathan managed to sneak in a visit. Years later, long after Jonathan was dead, David remembered their friendship and took in and cared for Jonathan's son. There was a friendship that spanned time and distance and serves as a model for us today.

The prayer they spoke in parting as David began his long run from Saul is loved and remembered even by those who pay little attention to the Bible: "The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever" (1 Sam. 20:42). David and Jonathan were closer than brothers. They were friends.

by Sherrie Stevens

Sherrie Stevens is a senior communication major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

From Acceptance to Assurance

LOGOS

1 Sam. 16-20; 23:16-18

Accepting God's Favor (read 1 Sam. 16)

"The Spirit of Yahweh seized on David and stayed with him from that day on" (verse 13, Jerusalem).

Each of us starts at the same place. At the beginning of intentional Christianity is a realization of God's love. It is not just for musical reasons that Christian children learn "Jesus Loves Me" before they learn "A Mighty Fortress" or the "Hallelujah Chorus."

David's story begins with that same realization. Out of all the children in the family, the prophet is guided to the youngest son. Samuel singles out David and conveys the ordination of special favor. God chooses David before the young man accomplishes anything of merit, and in his so doing we all are reminded that our own election is based on God's favor, not on our accomplishments (see Ps. 89:1-8).

Recall a time when you felt the anointing favor of God, when you were overwhelmed by God's love for you. What gave you that sense of being chosen?

What factors lead us at times to refuse God's favor?

Feeling God's Power (read 1 Sam. 17)

"It is not by sword or by spear that Yahweh gives the victory, for Yahweh is lord of the battle and he will deliver you into our power" (verse 47, Jerusalem).

There are high points in our Christian experience when we are so sure of what's right that we exhibit what seems to be a natural, sanctified boldness. Moments when we fearlessly march into the middle of conflict confident of a victorious outcome. We approach these times eager to "put on the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:10-17, NIV), remembering David's victory over the Philistines (see 1 Sam. 14), and Jehoshaphat's victory over the Moabites and Ammonites (see 1 Chron. 20).

How essential it is when our Goliaths lie vanquished not to stop after declaring, "I can do all things." Our victories, just as surely as our calling, depend on abiding in "Christ who strengthens [us]" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

C. S. Lewis wisely reminded himself, "If I may trust my personal experience, no doctrine is, for the moment, dimmer to the eye of faith than that which a man has just successfully defended."

What have been the Goliaths in your life?

What were the five smooth stones God put in your sling to defeat those giants?

Enduring God's Silence (read

by Stuart Tyner

Stuart Tyner is director of marketing at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

1 Sam. 18:6-11; 19:1-17)

"Be on your guard tomorrow morning; hide away in some secret place" (19:2, Jerusalem).

Someone has said that the Christian life is a succession of mountaintops and valleys. If we're in the valley, there's a mountaintop just ahead. But if we're on the summit, we should watch out for the valley below.

David frequently descended into valleys shortly after the Goliath peak. Where was the God of the five smooth stones when Saul was hurling the javelin? How did God's anointing favor so quickly become overwhelmed by Saul's royal displeasure? In the Goliath passage, David constantly advances toward his enemy. Now notice how often David is running away, staying out of sight, hiding, escaping through windows, being saved only by his wife's quick thinking and deception. Where was God now? Why had God become silent?

Of course God was still there, and that was the lesson David had to learn. God was just as present in the still, small voice as He was in the explosive revelations to Moses on Mount Sinai and Elijah on Mount Carmel. David had to discover how to feel God's nearness even when God seemed to be quiet (see Ps. 89:46-52).

Remember a time in your life

when God seemed to be silent. What were the temptations that came your way during that period? How did you finally discover God's nearness?

Sensing God's Purpose (read 1 Sam. 20)

"Never withdraw your own kindness from my House" (verse 15, Jerusalem).

From the love at the beginning, through the exhilaration of the victories, and the challenges of the silent times, to the dawning of understanding, David suddenly emerges with a confident purpose. Listen to the positive tone of this chapter: "Show your servant faithful love." "When the Lord has exterminated every enemy of David." "May the Lord be with you." "The Lord Himself will be sending you away." "Go in peace."

David has sensed the direction of his service to God. Have we come to that place, as well? Has our church fully realized why we are here? Have we individually come to that understanding?

What are the "arrows" ahead of us?

To what are they directing us?

What do they direct us away from?

*James T. Como, ed., *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985), p. 139.

Tuesday, February 5

A Jealous Heart

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Sam. 18:6-9

King Saul had fallen from the grace of God because of his blatant disobedience and lack of true repentance. According to common practices, Jonathan was the rightful heir to his father's throne. But God had a different person in mind for that position.

David, the son of Jesse, was the youngest of eight sons. He was not even brought before Samuel during the prophet's visit, since he was not considered worthy by his father. God did not agree. Upon Samuel's request, David left the flocks and presented himself before Samuel. This young boy was to be the next king of Israel, not Jonathan. "As Samuel beheld with pleasure the handsome, manly, modest shepherd boy, the voice of the Lord spoke to the prophet, saying, 'Arise, anoint him: for this is he.'"¹

It is curious to note that David was not made king after being anointed king. God had much yet planned for David to teach him the lessons he would need to learn to be an effective shepherd of God's flock. "David, in the beauty and vigor of his young manhood, was preparing to take a high position with the noblest of the earth."²

David's ability to play sweet music when "an evil spirit from the

Lord tormented him [Saul]" (1 Sam. 16:14, NIV) won David a place in Saul's court and in his heart. After David defeated Goliath and the Philistines, something happened that forever changed Saul's feelings toward David.

Upon returning from battle, Saul heard the women of Jerusalem praise David more than himself. This made Saul jealous of David—a true sign of what was happening in his heart. "The demon of jealousy entered the heart of the king. He was angry because David was exalted above himself in the song of the women of Israel. . . . His standard of right and wrong was the low standard of popular applause. No man is safe who lives that he may please men, and does not seek first for the approbation of God. . . . Saul opened his heart to the spirit of jealousy by which his soul was poisoned."³

This spirit of jealousy soured the final years of Saul's life, yet out of this experience God was able to teach a young king many of the valuable lessons he would need in order to rule wisely. A true sign of what was in David's heart was his feeling toward Saul, even though Saul hated him. David loved Saul so much that he wept when he heard of his death.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 641.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 642.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

by John Blanchard

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Wednesday, February 6

Searching in the Silence

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 8:28-39

When does God speak to us? And when does He choose to be silent?

In Samuel's life and in David's, especially at the beginning of their experience, God is so present, so audible, so tangible. He calls, He directs, He shows His favor. But you don't have to read far to realize that Samuel and David also endured long periods of apparent silence.

And isn't that true in our experiences, as well? The times of silence that follow times of presence are in many ways the most dangerous times for the Christian.

In his book *Disappointment With God*, Philip Yancey openly examines three questions about God's silent times: Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? "If you read Genesis in one sitting," observes Yancey, "you cannot help noticing a change in how God related to his people. At first he stayed close by, walking in the garden with them, punishing their individual sins, speaking to them directly, intervening constantly. Even in Abraham's day he sent extraterrestrial messengers on house calls. By Jacob's time, however, the messages were far more ambiguous: . . . Genesis slows down when it gets to Joseph, and it shows God working mostly behind the scenes."¹

"The esteemed matriarchs of

the covenant—Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—all spent their best childbearing years slender and in despair. They too experienced the blaze of revelation, followed by dark and lonely times of waiting that nothing but faith would fill."²

Yancey points out the 400-year gap of silence between Genesis and Exodus. He reminds us of how the prophets "deal with the very same themes that hang like a cloud over our century: the silence of God, the seeming sovereignty of evil, the unrelieved suffering in the world."³ He calls attention to the four centuries that separate Malachi from Matthew, marking "an era bordered by disappointment with God. Did God care? Was he even alive?"⁴ Not even the New Testament, in the physical presence of Jesus, is exempted from this doubt. Consider John the Baptist's haunting question, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Then Yancey reaches this conclusion: "Saints become saints by somehow hanging on to the stubborn conviction that things are not as they appear, and that the unseen world is as solid and trustworthy as the visible world around them."⁵

1. Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 67.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

by Stuart Tyner

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Thursday, February 7

Loyalty Arrives Through Service

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Sam. 18:5

Loyalty is one of the key ingredients of the Christian life. Everyone manifests loyalty to someone or something, most of the time to our friends. It makes sense. A relationship with a friend calls for a little trust, right? But that's easy. Being steadfast and faithful to an enemy is the real test. So the question is "How can I, as a Christian, be loyal and true to those who *do not* share my beliefs or standards? And should I temporarily sacrifice my own pattern of thinking and submit to another's in order to fulfill his request?"

Looking at this week's lesson, we see Jonathan, David, Saul, Michal, and Samuel all struggling with questions of loyalty. In Saul's case, God took away his crown because he failed to obey God's command (see 1 Sam. 15:11). Even though Saul's intentions were good, selfish motives obscured his loyalty.

On the other hand, David remained loyal to Saul even after he learned of Saul's jealous hatred toward him (see 19:9). By

putting his loyalty first, David projected his loving nature, thus overriding his displeasure at tending to Saul's wishes.

The next time you are faced with a difficult question of loyalty, you may find these steps useful:

1. *Acknowledge yourself as the servant.* Jesus tells us to live for others no matter what the cost. "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Ask God to bless those who say bad things to you. Pray for those who are cruel to you. If anyone slaps you on your cheek, let him slap the other cheek too. If someone takes your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt. Give to everyone who asks you. When a person takes something that is yours, don't ask for it back. Do for other people what you want them to do for you" (Luke 6:27-31, EB).

2. *Be assured that loyalty to others is essentially the same as loyalty to God.* Jesus compared serving others with serving God. "Truly I tell you: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however insignificant, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40, REB).

by Steven Gutekunst

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Friday, February 8

How Will You Respond?

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 22:61

To whom are we loyal? Many people must wonder.

I remember the first time I ever read the story about Peter's denying Christ: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times" (Luke 22:61, NIV). I thought that Peter was an utter fool! If I had been he, I *never* would have denied Christ. I would have stood my ground to be a true witness.

Have you ever thought like that?

A few years ago I suddenly realized a sobering fact: Every time we have been less than kind to others, each time we did not tell

the truth, each time we have hotly and viciously criticized, we have denied Christ. Others know we are Christians by our claims, but do our actions bear proof of our relationships to Christ?

We as Christians come in the name of the Lord. We are given full authority by God to do His work as witnesses here on earth. Yet do we deny God by our actions? It is a difficult question to ask, and even more difficult to answer. But if we are to be loyal to God, we must follow the directive He has offered: "By your deeds ye shall be known." God is calling to those of us who will live out His calling and love through our actions. The call and its challenge are there. How will you respond?

by Michael Kinnen

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Lesson 7, February 10 - 16

David Flees Saul



“When I am afraid, I will trust you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” (Ps. 56:3, 4, NIV).

Sunday, February 10

The Way to a Man's Heart

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 21-23; 25

Women weren't important in Bible times. They didn't often get the chance to prove their equality to men. But when they did, they did it in a big way.

Take Abigail, for instance, and try putting yourself in her place. Her husband was a jerk, but she had to be loyal to him. Yet his latest stupidity was just too much. After all, David had been protecting Nabal's shepherds. He didn't ask for much in return, just a bite to eat for himself and his men. Nabal's reply just went to prove what an idiot he was.

At this point in his life David did not trust God completely. When he heard Nabal's reply to his request, he saw red. He decided to get his own revenge and show Nabal what happens when someone repays good with evil.

A servant informed Abigail of what had taken place. She wasted no time. She got together a feast for David and his men and headed out on a donkey to meet him in the wilderness. Now, it would be extraordinary enough in these days for a beautiful, wealthy woman to intervene in this way with a band of rough

men that she knows are out for blood. But to realize that this happened in a day when women were not to be seen or heard makes her feat even more incredible.

When she reached David's angry group of men, she got off the donkey, fell at his feet, and started speaking before David could get a word in edgewise. In her speech she even managed to slip in a rebuke to David for trying to avenge himself. She realized Nabal's foolhardiness and took the blame for that, but she also admonished David for not letting the Lord deal with the problem in His own way. She reminded him in a gentle way where his true loyalty should be, and that he would not want the grief later in life from having shed innocent blood. What a brave woman!

She impressed David. He accepted her chastisement and admired her speed and bravery in handling the situation. In fact, David was so impressed with Abigail that when Nabal died, David asked her to become his wife. She accepted his offer, but from there on the Bible doesn't tell us much of her life with David. I'm sure she kept her spunky attitude though. And her example to women is there for all time.

by Sherrie Stevens

Sherrie Stevens is a senior communication major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Don't Let Your Victories Become Your Defeats

LOGOS

1 Sam. 21-23; 25

"He [Saul] said to David, 'You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil' " (1 Sam. 24:17, RSV).

The study of Saul and David is a sorry one for at least three reasons. First, it began so well with young King Saul, the tall handsome man from the tribe of Benjamin, but it ended in deception, intrigue, and murder.

Second, the story continues with the young boy-king David, the musician from Bethlehem, the Philistine-killer, and everyone's favorite, but soon his life became mired down in family squabbles, greed, and power struggles.

Third, it is a story of Israel's brand-new kingdom, inaugurated by Samuel with such high hopes of success and idealistic expectations, but before long that same kingdom degenerated into a mere reflection of every other kingdom around it. Israel was divided, and its people were taken into captivity. How did things go so wrong?

As for Saul, he began to concern himself more about his own hold on the throne than about the welfare of the kingdom. Later he attempted to assassinate young

David, his son-in-law, because he felt threatened by him. He treated the innocent priests in Nob harshly over the objections of his own security guard. Finally he took his own life in despair.

As for David, he seemed born to be king. Notice how easily he moved from being a shepherd into the king's garrison. How he became an expert Philistine-killer using just a slingshot. How popular he became. How he married a princess and moved into line for the throne. But success is difficult to bear gracefully, and David felt that burden keenly in his personal life, his family relations, and with his friends.

As for the kingdom, its ideals of freedom, individual rights, justice, spiritual vibrancy, and moral values were severely strained by the royal striving for success through the exercise of power. But thanks to God, embedded deeply in the heart of Israel's kingdom lay buried the principles of God's kingdom. And these principles germinated and grew, straight through the hard soil of royal ambition and political power, into a new kingdom, the kingdom of love and mercy, the kingdom of God. That is the kingdom about which David sang in Psalms 23, 110, and many others.

by Niels-Erik Andreasen

Niels-Erik Andreasen is the president of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Tuesday, February 12

David's Gang

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Sam. 22:2

It is no accident that Jesus was born in a manger, lived without worldly status, education, or wealth, and was surrounded by criminals, the poor, and social outcasts. God is more often found among the poor than the prosperous, among the weak than the strong, and among the dispossessed than the privileged. So it was with David and his gang in the wilderness.

When those who are honestly seeking God perceive that leadership is pursuing its own course rather than following the direction of the Holy Spirit, discontentment will result. Saul lost the respect of the masses in Israel by turning his back on God's will and demonstrating a hateful spirit of jealousy against his servant David, who was obviously blessed and favored by the Lord.

When Saul was first chosen to be king, he was humbled by God's call and felt unworthy of it. In this state God used him powerfully. But as his kingdom grew, his power increased and his position of leadership was taken for granted, and he became a stench in God's nostrils. Ellen White contrasts the proud self-exalting king with the hunted David and his band of humble fugitives in these words:

"It was not long before David's company was joined by others

who desired to escape the exactions of the king. There were many who had lost confidence in the ruler of Israel, for they could see that he was no longer guided by the Spirit of the Lord. 'And everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented,' resorted to David, 'and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.' Here David had a little kingdom of his own, and in it order and discipline prevailed. But even in his retreat in the mountains he was far from feeling secure, for he received continual evidence that the king had not relinquished his murderous purpose.

"He found a refuge for his parents with the king of Moab, and then, at a warning of danger from a prophet of the Lord, he fled from his hiding place to the forest of Hareth. The experience through which David was passing was not unnecessary or fruitless. God was giving him a course of discipline to fit him to become a wise general as well as a just and merciful king. With his band of fugitives he was gaining a preparation to take up the work that Saul, because of his murderous passion and blind indiscretion, was becoming wholly unfitted to do. Men cannot depart from the counsel of God and still retain that calmness and wisdom which will enable them to act with justice and discretion. There is no in-

by Steve Daily

Steve Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

sanity so dreadful, so hopeless, as that of following human wisdom, unguided by the wisdom of God.”*

REACT

1. To what degree do you believe that our pioneer Advent leaders were directly guided by, and in submission to, the Spirit of God in the earliest years of our movement?

2. Do you believe that the General Conference in session has the authority of God's voice on earth today? Why or why not?

3. List the five most important qualities of church leadership, as you see them, from a biblical perspective.

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 658.

Wednesday, February 13

Whatever Will Be, Will Be?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Gal. 6:7, NIV

Why did God choose Saul to be king in the first place? a student once asked. Saul did not come from Judah's tribe. He seemed doomed to failure from the very beginning. He nearly destroyed David, his designated successor. He nearly lost the entire kingdom to Israel's foes, the Philistines, for whose defeat he had been elected to begin with. And finally, he died a shameful death. Why did God let all this happen?

Evidently the truth is that none of this had to happen. Saul did not have to be envious of David to the point of seeking his life. David did not have to be driven to desperation by Saul, thereby allowing himself to do

some very stupid things, completely out of character.

The brand new concept of Israel's kingdom could have succeeded, giving God's people a stable government, while preserving individual rights, freedom, and dignity for all its subjects. The failures were not ordained in advance. Success was nearly at hand. Indeed, the transition from success to failure happened almost imperceptibly, so that suddenly all seemed lost, like the proverbial defeat snatched from the jaws of victory. How could that be?

It all began with a simple attitude or two: jealousy and mistrust, power and pride—that is all it takes to ruin a good king or a good kingdom, or a good family, or a good church, or a good university, or a good . . .

by Niels-Erik Andreasen

Niels-Erik Andreasen is the president of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Trial by Teenagers

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 56:3, 4

I have yet to figure out a way to avoid it, short of quitting altogether. Almost every week it happens. I have collected resources and saved back issues. I have special “tricks” that I save up for those extra tough times when everything seems to have gone wrong. And I keep resolving that each week I am going to start on Monday instead of Friday and avoid most of the stress, but I never do. I’m talking about Sabbath School—youth Sabbath School.

Mind you, it isn’t that I don’t enjoy working with teenagers. In fact, I would rather tackle a group of 50 teenagers with all their energy than a dozen of the “saints” on a church board. But when I call up adults to ask them to speak to our group, I often hear muffled exclamations of “lions’ den” and “brood of vipers”! There is something daunting about looking out on those faces and seeing . . . nothing.

At first I was petrified. These kids aren’t the least bit afraid to get up and walk out if they get bored. I’m not a musician, so at first our time together consisted of nothing but activities and my attempts at discussion. I could get through five pages of material in 30 minutes, with 20 minutes left to spare. I sweated and mumbled

a lot and often got discouraged. I thought I was getting nowhere.

Some Sabbath mornings I arrived at my office with absolutely nothing prepared and no idea where to even begin. And I had nowhere to hide. It was my job, and no one else was willing to do it, so I had to.

I slowly discovered an interesting development in those Friday-night blues and Sabbath School jitters. On the days that I was lowest, I would find that something would happen to change my attitude. Maybe some teenager would show up at Sabbath School who hadn’t attended in months, or someone would contribute to the discussion who had never spoken before. Whatever the reason, I discovered that the darker the situation and the more discouraged I was, on those lowest days I saw God working with those kids. When all the best-laid plans fizzled or my self-confidence had run dry, then the Holy Spirit would be moving despite me and my attitudes.

David wrote in Psalm 56:3 that “when I am afraid, I will trust in you” (NIV). To me “afraid” is more than just “concerned” or even “worried.” “Afraid” rates right up there with “terrified” and “nowhere left to turn.” And it is in those times of deepest internal turmoil that God is present and willing to help. God can deal with fear, no matter what the size, and I need that.

by Delwin Finch

Delwin Finch is youth pastor at the La Sierra Collegiate church, Riverside, California.

Friday, February 15

Survival of the Fittest

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 56:3, 4

Charles Darwin, author of *Origin of Species*, inadvertently contributed to more than just evolutionary thought. His "survival of the fittest" is one of the most important facets of committed Christian lives.

What is spiritual fitness? It is utter dependence upon, and complete faith in, God. In the end-time it is faith, and faith alone, which will provide survival for the fittest.

As modern science continues to achieve continuously earth-shattering and frontier-bashing discoveries, it logically follows that we are becoming more and more dependent upon ourselves. We have faith in our own abilities to discover and to conquer. How sad that the very opportunities we are given to make these captivating discoveries also turn us farther from faith in God and deeper into faith in ourselves.

"When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Ps. 56:3, 4, NIV). The survival of the fittest hinges upon faith. An active faith that depends upon God. He has promised to pro-

vide for and sustain us when we pray. That's like having a heavenly credit card that has no spending limit. "Whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will I do" (John 14:13). How many of us actually pray that God will actively work and provide for us? In the quest to work for God it seems that so few truly depend upon Him to do what He has promised—to work for and through us.

The faith of David allowed him to accept Abigail's chastisement, and it spared many lives. Yet more so, the faith that Jesus demonstrated illustrates the implicit trust of the Fittest. He was not so caught up in His eschatology that He missed the meaning of His current existence. Rather, that for which He hoped became that for which He worked.

Jesus *believed* in His heavenly Father, and great were the results: blind eyes saw the power of God for the first time, and the lame walked. Because of Jesus' faith, His life and actions prepared many more for heaven. And that same faith gave Him the ultimate victory—over death.

Just as Jesus' survival depended upon faith and trust in God, so does ours. Faith is not lip service; it is *heart service*. It is that important facet for the *survival of the fittest*.

by Michael Kinnen

Michael Kinnen is a senior accounting major and graduate student in medieval literature at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 8, February 17 - 23

Saul's Final Failure



“May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you” (1 Sam. 24:12, 13, NIV).

Sunday, February 17

Revenge

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Sam. 24; 26–2 Sam. 1

Jerry had time to think. A *lot* of time. How did it start? How did it get out of hand? He had it made. He had achieved the North American dream. At 29 he was a successful businessman. He had his lovely wife, Lisa, 2.5 children (Lisa was expecting), a home of his own, a secure position with his company, and he was even pricing white picket fences. Why did everything have to fall apart?

The night of the burglary started off like any other. Lisa had tucked the kids in and was trying to get comfortable, not easy considering her condition. It was quiet. Jerry was in that twilight zone of sleep when he heard the thump downstairs. Lisa stirred, even though Jerry tried to get out of bed quietly.

"What's wrong?" she said sleepily.

"Nothing," he whispered. "I just need to check on something." He tried to sound nonchalant.

The rest was still a bit of a blur in Jerry's mind. The struggle with the man at the bottom of the stairs. The glimpse of the cruel face. The thundering fist to the side of his head. Lisa's screams as she plunged, fainting, down the stairs. The blood. The shriek of the ambulance. The cry of his

children. The floating in and out of consciousness. The strobe of the lights on the police cars. The soothing white lights of the emergency room. The doctor's words: "She's had a miscarriage and is paralyzed from the waist down." The tears. The hatred for the monster who had ruined his life.

The police seemed to take their time tracking down the burglar, but they did. He had committed several offenses in the area, but no one had been able to identify him until now. The police arrested him, but he was out on bail within 24 hours. Jerry had followed the investigation closely. The man's name was John, and Jerry knew where to find him. His hatred knew no bounds. He would get even. For a brief instant he thought, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay." But he brushed it off. This was *his* battle. The hatred grew until there was nothing left but the desire for revenge that consumed every waking hour and haunted his dreams.

He was standing outside the tenement where John lived. The gas can was still in his hand when the police arrived. As he watched the flames lick at the building and heard the screams of the people dying, he felt his hatred mock him. And now Jerry had time to think. He had *lots* of time to think. John was in the next cell. Jerry had gotten even!

by Patricia Wynne

Patricia Wynne is a graduate student in the marriage and family therapy program at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.

David's Rise to Power

LOGOS

1 Sam. 24; 26-2 Sam. 1

David Was Not the Sort of Person Who Would Become a King

"There is still the youngest, . . . but he is tending the sheep"
(1 Sam. 16:11, NIV).

David's rise to kingly power was fraught with difficulties. Yes, the old prophet Samuel had anointed him to be king when he was a boy, but Samuel was dead, and Saul did not want to give up his dynastic ambitions. Nor had the Israelites witnessed David's anointing. From their point of view, it was only hearsay that God wanted him to be king.

How, then, was David to become king after he was anointed. Should he just sit back and wait? Would people recognize him as having kingly qualities when he did nothing? Should he let the rumors of his anointing crystallize into fact? *Would* they crystallize into fact?

David did not campaign like a modern politician, but he orchestrated his rise to power with integrity, prudence, and even cleverness.

But David had a long way to go. He was the youngest of eight sons in a minor family of the tribe of Judah. He was not a member of a family that hobnobbed in royal circles. He had no network of influential supporters. Moreover, because his family was so large, his father could afford to

give only the eldest sons parcels of land as an inheritance. David would get nothing. He was what the Bible calls a *na'ar*, often translated "young man," but which really means a man with no property upon which to base a living (most Israelites were farmers).

How David Did It (read 1 Sam. 24-27)

"You are more righteous than I. . . . You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly" (24:17, NIV).

There were many landless men, like David, in Israel at the time. They flocked around him, much as the Sherwood Forest outlaws flocked around Robin Hood. David now had a band of footloose men who had no loyalties but to himself.

So David made a name for himself. Killing Goliath was the first step. Here begins the ironic story of the fall of Saul and the rise of David. It should have been Saul, Israel's giant, head and shoulders taller than everyone else, who fought the Philistine giant.

In other heroic deeds David incurred the wrath of Saul, who correctly feared David was a usurper, and, afraid of a coup d'etat, tried to put him out of the way. But why didn't David use the knowledge that God wanted him to be king and kill Saul when he had the opportunity? This is where David's wisdom and integrity enter the story. He knew that, if he were to kill Saul, he would lose credibility

by Larry G. Herr

Larry G. Herr is professor of archaeology and religious studies at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.

among the Israelites. God may have wanted David to be king, but He didn't put a sign up in the sky telling all Israel this was His desire. David had to show Israel this fact himself.

By refraining twice from killing Saul, once in the cave and again in the night camp, he demonstrated his respect for kingship, while also emphasizing his integrity (see 24; 26). Killing Saul would have cheapened his position in the eyes of the people. If the Lord's anointed could be killed by any pretender to the throne, what security would David himself have after he became king?

David also married to good advantage. Marrying Saul's daughter, Michal, gave him a direct connection to the royal family (see 18). Beautiful Abigail gave him much more than beauty. Her husband, Nabal, whose name means "fool" (probably a nickname), had been a large landholder before he died, and when David became Abigail's husband, he received Nabal's lands. Becoming a landholder gave David prestige among the highest social levels of Israel. He was no longer a landless *na'ar*.

Meanwhile, Saul's obsession with David was bringing him to the brink of psychological instability, making him unpredictable. David decided to flee (see 27) to his old friend, Achish of Gath. Here we have our first of several ironies. What strange bedfellows! The celebrated killer of Goliath of Gath becomes the ally of the king of Gath!

While David's Star Rises, Saul's Star Falls (read 1 Sam. 28-31)

"God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams" (28:15, NIV).

Saul's animosity toward David,

plus his impotence to do anything about it, was driving him away from God. This is the second irony. While David's star was rising, Saul's was falling. The nadir of Saul's career was reached when he prepared for the final battle. By consulting the witch of Endor he totally broke with the law of God, which, again ironically, he had avidly enforced until then (see verse 9).

And so the last battle took shape. Saul was about to meet his end as the witch had told him; the Philistines were about to be victorious; and, fortunately, David was let off from joining his allies, the Philistines, because, as an Israelite, he was a potential fifth columnist in the Philistine army.

In the end, a final irony takes place. Long before, Saul had been ordered to wipe out the Amalekites (see 15), but he had only partially completed the task, earning Samuel's rebuke. While David was left back in Ziklag, he was the one who destroyed the Amalekites (see 30).

But the irony involving the Amalekites doesn't stop there. When Saul was mortally wounded in the Battle of Gilboa, his armor-bearer refuses to kill him as requested. So Saul takes his own life (see 31). Not until the next chapter (see 2 Sam. 1) do we learn in the climactic irony of the story that an Amalekite brings David proof of Saul's death. The evidence is the king's crown and the bracelet. These had fallen into the hands of this Amalekite who now brings them to David as the rightful owner. Long live the king! Surely David would reward him greatly for bringing this news.

But David's integrity was too great to rejoice in the news. He orders the Amalekite killed, not because he was an Amalekite, but because with his own mouth he said, "I killed the Lord's anointed" (verse 16, NIV).

Nice Guys Do Finish First

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 16:9

Patience is a virtue, yet how many of us can include it in our character description? One of the times we seem to express impatience the most is when we are waiting for an answer to prayer. While waiting on God for a reply, some of us have developed an incredible ability to read into our affairs the absolute will of God. I am not suggesting that we stay in our closets until we see fireworks, nor am I saying that God does not reveal His will through everyday activities. What I am saying is that sometimes our minds are not open enough to listen to God. We pray and use prayer as a confirmation of our desires, even though we know our wishes may differ from God's ideal for us.

David, however, did not succumb to this type of reasoning. Time and time again Saul was placed in David's power, but David, although desiring the kingship, spared Saul's life. He refused to act as judge and jury. Instead, he was patient and did not act in a course that might be opposed to God's will.

"The course of David made it manifest that he had a Ruler whom he obeyed. He could not permit his natural passions to gain the victory over him; for he knew that he that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he who

taketh a city. If he had been led and controlled by human feelings, he would have reasoned that the Lord had brought his enemy under his power in order that he might slay him, and take the government of Israel upon himself. Saul's mind was in such a condition that his authority was not respected, and the people were becoming irreligious and demoralized. Yet the fact that Saul had been divinely chosen king of Israel kept him in safety, for David conscientiously served God, and he would not in any wise harm the anointed of the Lord."¹

"God permits men to be placed in positions of responsibility. When they err, He has power to correct or to remove them. We should be careful not to take into our hands the work of judging that belongs to God."²

REACT

1. Do leaders chosen by God deserve respect even after they reject Him? Why or why not?

2. How does knowing that a church leader is not true to God affect your relationship with God? How should such knowledge affect your relationship with God?

3. How much of our own destiny do we control?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 2, p. 1021.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 484.

by Marino Romito

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Wednesday, February 20

Saul's Tragic Flaw

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Sam. 15:17

Saul is one of the Old Testament's most notable tragic figures, a noble character who falls to murky depths through his own tragic flaw. He is bereft of comfort at the end of his life because the God whom he has rejected will no longer answer him. In contrast, David is called a man after God's own heart. Comparing the two men makes us wonder why. Saul's offenses—offering sacrifices so his army can get on with defending the nation in perilous times when the prophet is tardy, or saving some of the livestock gotten as spoils of war—seem minor. On the other hand, David murders one of his most loyal soldiers to hide the results of a one-night stand with the man's wife.

Saul's tragic flaw goes deeper than simply disobedience. In a penetrating psychological observation Edwin Good pinpoints the tragic flaw when Samuel catches Saul redhanded with the animals gained from the war with the Amalekites. "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel" (1 Sam. 15:17).

From his hiding in the wagons of his own coronation to his last insincere apology to David, Saul shows his inferiority complex. Consequently, he continually tries to bolster his image in

front of the people. When Samuel fails to appear on time, Saul offers the sacrifices to boost the morale of an army likely to desert him after a week of waiting. To show his army the strength of their leader, Saul decrees death to anyone who eats until evening on the day of the battle. The plan backfires when Jonathan eats some honey, and the people swear that Saul will not harm the crown prince.

Saul's inferiority complex is most obvious in his hatred of David. Individuals little in their own eyes cannot tolerate anyone appearing larger than themselves.

The tragic flaw leads to its logical end. With all his props knocked from under him, Saul trudges in darkness to the medium's lonely cave dwelling. Now he does indeed appear small.

In contrast, David valued divine judgment of him over opinion polls. He found security in God's protection instead of shifting political popularity. When he sinned, regaining inner purity was more important to him than maintaining appearances. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

Saul lost everything in trying to gain the right image. David sought the right spirit and gained a place in God's heart and in His kingdom.

*Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1981).

by Sheila Clark

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Thursday, February 21

Taming Tension

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 12:19, RSV

This week's lesson witnesses to a power struggle between Saul and David. Tensions rise, straining relationships between them as Saul's leadership is challenged by David's growing influence among the people. David, though not impeccable in his behavior, is able to survive the conflict and ultimately fulfill God's will. However, Saul deteriorates spiritually, actually consulting a witch rather than God.

Yet both jeopardize relationships to each other and to God as they respond to stress. Obviously, solutions to problems were not easily determined, for both were tempted to compromise principle to secure personal gain and position. The behavior of Saul and David reminds us of counsel that, if heeded, will allow us to tame tension as we make decisions and interact with others.

1. *Remember that God's "grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9, RSV).* Life is precious and needs to be respected. David could have taken Saul's life twice, but he chose not to harm the "Lord's anointed." Like David, we can rest within the knowledge of God's plan for us. More than this,

we can interact with others, believing that God will assist us as we practice the principles of His kingdom.

2. *Remember that success in life is to be achieved "not by might, nor by power, but by [God's] Spirit" (Zech. 4:6, RSV).* David seemed to be aware of God's presence and recognized that his ascension to power must glorify God. Sensitive to God's ability to bring to completion the good work He initiates in each of His believers (see Phil. 1:6, RSV), David did not violate principle.

3. *Remember that God's will must be supreme (see Matt. 26:39, RSV).* True success in life is the result of obedience to the revealed will of God. Even though David's men were quick to remind him of God's promise to deliver his enemies into his hands, he was not absolutely certain that this promise included Saul. Rather than succumbing to short-term expedient thinking, David remained careful to do God's will and "erred" on the side of mercy.

REACT

1. What can we do to lessen life stressors?
2. What principles should guide our behavior as we strive for personal goals?

by Ron Nelson

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Friday, February 22

Beyond David

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:44

In refusing to kill Saul in the cave at Engedi, in sparing his foe again on the hill of Hachilah, David conferred upon himself great honor. More than displays of political tact, David's acts of mercy illustrate the essence of the biblical code as it is confirmed in the words of Jesus Christ: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, RSV).

Jesus Christ, in His rebuke of empty tradition and in His pragmatic living code of tolerance, kindness, and forgiveness, unveiled a new testament for mankind. David at his best, despite his lifetime of follies and foibles, provides a powerful biblical role model.

Both David and his incarnate Lord saw beyond the mere method and limited forms of prevailing religious systems; both recognized a middle way, a unique and sacred path to be walked in balance. By this route God gently leads His flock from the spent, arid fields of formality to greener pastures where true religion is nurtured by the river of life.

The similarity between Christ and David, however, is limited by a critical difference—a difference that should invite us to think creatively. Although David showed diplomatic and compassionate mercy toward Saul, he demonstrated little tolerance toward those outside his own people. He

slaughtered the "heathen" as he would kill a lion or bear preying upon his father's flock. Christ, in contrast, ministered gently to the Gentiles, to the Roman oppressor, and to the outcast.

Today we who might be described as the "incast" find ourselves living in an age of openness, an age of unparalleled freedom. Despite this welcome respite from age upon age of tyranny, we continue to manifest fears of an invasion of our personal or collective religious identity.

From this fear we are tempted to construct shallow walls of defense, and redundant towers of offense in an attempt to protect the contents of what we perceive to be "our" spiritual Jerusalem. This may be a normal reaction from a timorous Christian minority; it is not the way of Christ. His is the holy city; His is the invitation to enter.

In the otherwise repulsive walls of religiosity that encapsulated His church Christ became the gate through which an invitation of kindness, understanding, and forgiveness flowed out, and through which those who chose to respond to Him were welcomed in.

Can we welcome the invitation to advance beyond the mediocre role model of David to the ultimate paragon of Jesus Christ? Dare we transcend the mere method of our religion, and then, in His strength and in His way, exercise and strengthen His identity as an open gate, a portal of welcome in the city wall?

by Richard Till

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Lesson 9, February 24–March 2

The Monarchy's Second Chance



“Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day” (Ps. 25:4, 5, NKJV).

Sunday, February 24

The Prince and the Pauper

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Sam. 2-5; 6:16-23; 8-10

King David is seated on his throne. You might think that statement banal if you didn't know how it came about. Like images in a kaleidoscope, incidents swirl, blur, merge: a Philistine warlord clutching at his forehead, soldier talk around smoldering campfires, a snippet of Saul's royal robe impaled on a razor-sharp sword, a forlorn crown and bracelet.

Three times the anointing oil has designated David to be God's candidate for kingship. Ammonites, Moabites, and Philistines have been forced to accept servitude. Now, in a tranquil moment, David queries, almost wistfully: "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. 9:1, NIV).

At the affirmative answer

David is overjoyed. Jonathan's son! What matter that his name, Mephibosheth, means "he who scatters shame"? That he is crippled? He is Jonathan's son; he is "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

Summoned precipitately from Lo-debar, Mephibosheth bows before King David. Suspicious, chary, he voices what some of the royal attendants may have been thinking: "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" (2 Sam. 9:8).

David does not hesitate. Jonathan's son is to inherit Saul's entire estate. He is placed on a par with the king's own sons. He is assured of a place in the palace in perpetuity.

Various, in the roles of prophet, priest, and king, David foreshadows the Messiah. What he did for Mephibosheth is a cameo of the plan of salvation: the lost is restored, the fallen is reinstated, the prodigal is welcomed home, the pauper becomes a prince.

by Alice Cronjé

Alice Cronjé is a secretary at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

What Made David Different?

LOGOS

2 Sam. 2-5; 6:16-23; 8-10

David's Relationship With God

"In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. 'Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?' he asked. The Lord said, 'Go up'" (2 Sam. 2:1, NIV; cf. 5:19).

What made David different from his predecessor, Saul? Did he have any less bloodstain on his hands? Did he have fewer problems with women? What made David different?

Our text says, "David inquired of the Lord." What does this action indicate about David's relationship with God? How did it differ from Saul's (see 1 Sam. 13; 15:10, 11)?

To ask counsel from someone implies that you regard him as an authority. To take and follow counsel from someone implies that you have placed yourself under his authority. Saul did the first, but not the second. David did both. Frustrated by failure and forced by his own self-seeking pride, Saul made desperate efforts at survival, which eventually led him to inquire of another "authority"—the witch of Endor (see 28). To ask counsel implies curiosity; to choose to follow it implies commitment.

Does your lifestyle indicate that you merely have a high regard for God and the church, or are you committed to follow their counsel?

Does it really matter?

How did God respond to David's relationship of trust and dependence on Him? "The Lord gave David victory wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:6, 14, NIV). David was victorious over the house of Saul (see 3:1), over the Jebusites (see 5:6, 7), over the Philistines (see verse 25; 8:1), over the Moabites (see verse 2), over the king of Zobah and the Arameans (see verses 5, 6), and over the Edomites, Ammonites, and Amalekites (see verse 12).

How would you respond to so much success? Does an overabundance of power and success make you feel glad, sad, mad, or scared?

Do you find it easy to pay tithes? And regarding offerings, when last did you give God a raise?

David's Relationship With People

"David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people" (2 Sam. 8:15, NIV).

As a soldier, David was a pro. From the time he killed Goliath, his path seemed to be filled with war and bloodshed. Yet David had an uncanny attitude toward even his enemies. To the men who buried his archenemy, Saul, he says, "The Lord bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master. . . . I too will show you the same favor because you have done this" (2:5, 6, NIV). And after Abner, the general of Saul's

by Jerry Joubert

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army, was killed, David “wept aloud at Abner’s tomb” (3:32, NIV). Instead of commending the murderers of Ish-Bosheth, Saul’s son, David sentences them to death for their cowardly deed (see 4:11, 12). David’s actions seemed to reflect something of what Jesus meant when He said more than a millennium later, “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44, NIV).

Do we have to be ruthless and hard in order to reach the top? Are power and coercion the only way to success in our competitive world that seems to know no other language?

In 2 Samuel 5:2 David’s rulership is compared to that of a shepherd. Yet he is often pictured as a fearless warrior. Can these two concepts be harmonized? David seemed to be a loyal and relentless defender of Israel. Is a shepherd always harmless, meek, and mild? It appears as though David defended his nation with as much vigor as he had his flock of sheep.

What does God expect of us today? How should we respond to attacks upon His church? Should we respond differently to attacks upon our country?

“David asked, ‘Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ ” (9:1, NIV).

Perhaps the most outstanding and moving example of David’s relationships with people was his kindness shown to Mephibosheth. Here he shows kindness not only to his enemies, but also to his

friends. Here is an example of true friendship. David did not forget a true friend, even when he was no longer in favor.

How do you think you would feel if your best friends left you once you fell into disfavor in the church, at work, at college, or in your social group? What are some of the reasons that cause people to forget a friend?

A further quality of David was that he was not prejudiced against the underdog or outcast of society. Mephibosheth indicated that he had low self-esteem when he asked David, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” (verse 8, NIV). Obviously his society had given him a clear message: “You are a cripple receiving your due reward as punishment for your sin. You are no longer a member of royalty and have been demoted to a lower status, even lower than the common man, because of your disability.”

What did David’s restitutive action do for Mephibosheth? It gave him back his dignity and self-worth. It changed his whole life. Someone said, “The best way to conquer an enemy is to make him your friend.” This was David’s policy of leadership, a model worthy to follow as we deal with people.

Who are my enemies? Who are those in a different class or status that I would be reluctant to be friend? Would my attitude change toward another young person who joined my social group if I discovered that he or she was handicapped?

The King Who Cared

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Sam. 8:15

When we compare David's reign with that of Saul, we see that many things account for God's approval of David as a man after His own heart, and for David's great success as ruler of Israel. Of the many, I wish to focus your attention on one characteristic of King David.

David never had any formal education. He did not attend school and college as we do today. The only education he received was on the subject of how to look after sheep. It was in the fields that he received an education that was to prepare him to rule over Israel, to lead in "victory everywhere he went" (verse 14); and in all his doings to be "just and right for all his people" (verse 15). Ellen White tells us that David was a king who cared.

"David in his youth was intimately associated with Saul, and his stay at court and his connection with the king's household gave him an insight into the cares and sorrows and perplexities concealed by the glitter and pomp of royalty. He saw of how little worth is human glory to bring peace to the soul. And it was with relief and gladness that he returned from the king's court to the sheepfolds and the flocks.

"When by the jealousy of Saul

driven a fugitive into the wilderness, David, cut off from human support, leaned more heavily upon God. . . . The character of the men who gathered to him there—'every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented'— . . . rendered the more essential a stern self-discipline. These experiences aroused and developed power to deal with men, sympathy for the oppressed, and hatred of injustice. Through years of waiting and peril, David learned to find in God his comfort, his support, his life. He learned that only by God's power could he come to the throne; only in His wisdom could he rule wisely. It was through the training in the school of hardship and sorrow that David was able to make the record . . . that he 'executed judgment and justice unto all his people.' "

REACT

1. When we reach a position of influence and power, do we tend to forget God and the people who helped and supported us in the search for our goals? Why?

2. What are some of the unjust things we do toward colleagues, family, friends, etc.? How could we become more caring?

*Education, p. 152.

by André Richards

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Wednesday, February 27

David, Ancestor and Type of Jesus Christ

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 1:32, 33

The New Testament, especially the Gospels, emphasizes the connection between David, king of all Israel, and Jesus Christ, the Son of David. The two blind men, for example, call out to Jesus: "Have mercy on us, Son of David" (Matt. 9:27, NIV). During Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem the branch-waving crowds shout: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (21:9, NIV). Luke records the message of the angel Gabriel to Mary: "The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32, 33, NIV; cf. also the Messianic promises in Jer. 23:5, 6; Isa. 6, 7, 11:1).

While David's monarchy was far from perfect, it can serve as a fitting type of the reign of Christ, the ultimate king of Israel, because instead of thinking of how to serve himself, he set the Lord always before him (see Ps. 16:8, NIV). At times David manifested the same weaknesses as the conniving opportunist Abner or the cold and calculating Joab. But with David, the spontaneous, heartfelt worship of God always remained the dominant motivation of his life: "As the deer pants

for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (42:1, 2, NIV). Like David, the overriding desire in the heart of Jesus was to do the will of God (see Heb. 10:7-9; Ps. 40:6-8), even though that will meant experiencing the agony of Calvary (see Matt. 26:39).

After being accepted by the northern tribes as their king (see 2 Sam. 5:1-5, NIV), David decided to move his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. This would be a diplomatic and strategic move. Lying on the borders of Benjamin and Judah, it would be viewed as a neutral capital, in fact a capital belonging to the dynasty of David.

There was also a religious reason for acquiring Jerusalem as capital of the united monarchy. According to tradition this was the place where Melchizedek, priest of the most high God, served the Lord (see Gen. 14:18-20; cf. Ps. 76:2; Heb. 7:1), as well as the place where Abraham came to sacrifice his son Isaac (see Gen. 22:2). While the original, third-millennium-B.C. name of Jerusalem could have meant the foundation of the Canaanite deity Shalem, later on the name was associated with the place where God gave "peace" (Hebrew *salem*).

by Johan A. Japp

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Royal Virtues: Justice and Compassion

HOW-TO

Key Text: Mic. 6:6-8

Gleaming through the turbulence and carnage of David's early reign are the gems of fairness, compassion, kindness, mercy, and empathy. He did what was just and right, says the historian (see 2 Sam. 8:15), thereby endearing himself to the people (see 3:36). God also blessed and prospered him (see 5:10; 8:6). By contrast, David's predecessor, Saul, seemed more concerned with offering the right sacrifices than he was with right living (see 1 Sam. 13, 15). Israel, in later years, seemed to have followed the example of Saul rather than that of David.

Repeated calls to the essentials of true religion were made (see Ezek. 45:9; Jer. 22:3; Amos 5:24; and Hos. 6:6). Micah's winsome plea stands like an Everest among the later prophets: "Shall I come before him with burnt offerings? . . . Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? . . . Shall I give my first-born? . . . What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:6-8, RSV).

Micah's appeal, along with David's practical example of respect and love for friend and enemy alike, rings out across the centuries to our own violent, hate-

filled, destitute times. It is not the size of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering nor the amount of time we spend serving the church that is most important. Fairness, kindness, and love are still the greatest needs in our plastic world of microchip technology and macro-insensitivity. And these admirable qualities are still the deepest measures of our knowledge of God. But how can we share David's high sense of justice and mercy and tender love? Here are some suggestions:

1. *Ask for a new sensitivity.* Ask God to sensitize you through His Spirit to the needs of the lonely, discouraged, sorrowing, and destitute people surrounding you. A new sensitivity of not only ears and eyes and hands is needed, but also of the heart—to those quiet promptings of God instructing us in new adventures as *His* justice, kindness, and love flow through us to meet these needs.

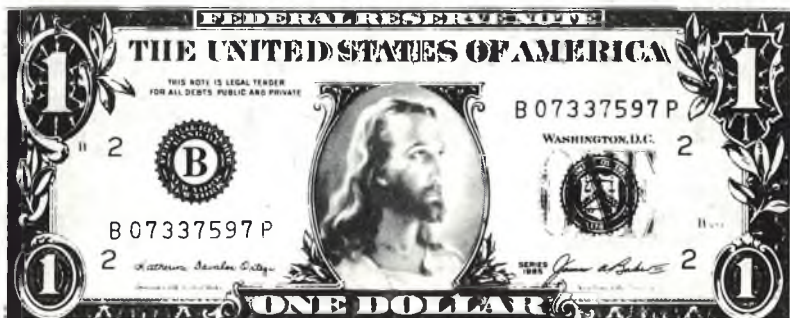
2. *Study the actions of Jesus.* Watch carefully His patience and tenderness with the scheming Judas; His respect and kindness toward Simon the Pharisee; His graciousness toward His captors and with Pilate; His tenderness with the outcasts of society. Each incident brilliantly illuminates for us how to "do justice, and to love kindness" (Mic. 6:8, RSV).

by Neville Webster

Neville Webster is a lecturer in business economics at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

3. *Personalize Christ's love and tender patience.* Don't stop with just watching how God personally meets other men and women. Put yourself into the place of the Samaritan woman or Judas or Pilate or Mary Magdalene. Receive His respect for you as an individual, His forgiveness and acceptance,

His compassion and tenderness toward you as rebel and traitor. It will change your life, your attitudes, and your values as nothing else will. You then can't help treating others with the same fairness, tenderness, compassion, and love that you have received and experienced.



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How Willing Must I Be?

OPINION

Key Texts: Rom. 12:6; 2 Cor. 12:27

Just the other day I was sitting in a religion class. I can still remember the prayer I prayed that morning, asking God for the money I so desperately needed to pay for my studies. The lecturer notified the class that he had just received an emergency telephone call. It was from the pastor of a nearby church who would not be able to meet his preaching appointment that coming Sabbath, and would someone be able to take the divine service in his place?

No one responded, myself included. It was September, and Due Performance Day was coming closer, fast. Besides, it was already Thursday, and to have a sermon ready at such short notice was cutting it fine. I thought, *Don't do it; you have enough on your plate as it is*, and I did. My study load amounted to 18 credits, and the going was tough. I had several assignments needing attention. Then there were tests, also. The student council, of which I was president, proved to be demanding. There was no way I would be able to make it. Suddenly a thought occurred to me, and my response was automatic—“OK, I'll do it.”

Almost immediately I regretted my decision, chastising myself for overloading my stress level, but it soon passed as I became engrossed in the lecture.

As I had feared, my sermon

did not seem to go down too well that Sabbath. I was unusually nervous, spoke for too long, and felt disorganized. Cathy, my wife, confirmed my fears—“Not so good,” she reported. I was depressed during the drive home after church, my thoughts going back to Thursday, when I had consented. Surely I had done the right thing. After all, I was convinced that I had been called to be a preacher, and a preacher preaches, not so? Somehow an earlier commitment that I had made to the Lord did not seem so successful anymore. I had decided that, within reason, I would not decline an invitation to spread God's Word.

Then it happened. The following day I received a phone call from a perfect stranger who had attended the church where I had preached. He introduced himself and complimented me on what he thought was a good sermon; and if that were not enough, he admitted to hearing that I needed financial help, and would I mind if he helped? I was speechless, my mind racing at top speed. What a miracle!

With hindsight now I am convinced that in His mysterious way my Father had blessed my willingness, and somehow I believe that is what this lesson is all about—willingness.

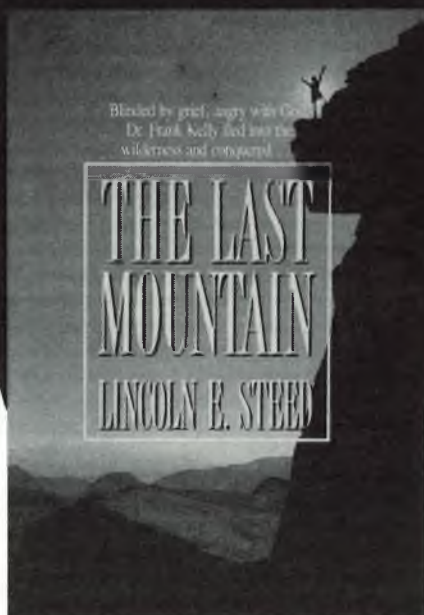
REACT

Do I play a part in presenting Christ to the world? If so, can it be as small as a smile?

by Michél van den Bergh

Michél van den Bergh is a senior religion major at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

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Lesson 10, March 3 - 9

The Man After God's Heart



“I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: ‘Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations’ ” (Ps. 89:3, 4, NIV).

Sunday, March 3

Don't Touch the Ark

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Sam. 6; 7

Just breathing left little vapor trails as students gathered, vigorously rubbing gloved hands, to keep warm. Rick's ready repartee kept chuckles rippling through the group. "As they say," he quipped, "many are cold, but few are frozen." He turned suddenly when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Mr. Pearson's eyes were kind, but his voice held a special urgency as he said quietly, "Rick, don't touch the ark."

I often think of this incident whenever people deal carelessly with sacred things.

Picture what happened near Nachon's threshing floor (see 2 Sam. 6:1-8). An impressive retinue of 30,000 dignitaries came by invitation to participate in the procession taking the sacred ark of the covenant to David's capital, Jerusalem. There were a band, a choir, and probably hundreds of children scurrying around to get a close look at everything. Ahio and Uzzah walked importantly near the cart bearing the ark that had stood in their home for so many years. A cart? Yes, but a brand-new one. Near the threshing floor the ox stumbled. To steady the jostled ark, Uzzah rashly reached over to touch it.

Was there a blinding flash of light? A crackle as at the touch of a high-tension cable? A cry? Then silence . . . "Be still, and know that I am God; . . . I will be exalted in the earth" (Ps. 46:10, NIV).

Stunned, everyone went home asking "Why?" In one terrible moment, God had shown them the danger of being lax in their obedience to His commandments.

Both king and people learned the lesson well. Within three months a second procession escorted the ark to Jerusalem. Once again there was a band, a choir. This time there was a holy joy, a confidence that they were doing things God's way, that erupted in song and dance.

Did this new appreciation of God's holiness inspire the "Ode to God's Law" recorded in Psalm 119? "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (verse 72, NIV). "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (verse 97, NIV). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (verse 105, NIV).

King David often "sat before the Lord" (2 Sam. 7:18, NIV), finding in His presence "fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). Jehovah is a God inspiring reverence and obedience, but above all love, and fullness of joy.

by Alice Cronjé

Alice Cronjé is a secretary at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

The Man After God's Heart

LOGOS

2 Sam. 6; 7

The Ark Comes Home

"And David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, 'How can the ark of the Lord come to me?' " (2 Sam. 6:9, RSV).

David's zeal for bringing the ark home is commendable. But after 20 years nobody had come up with any new ideas for the ark's removal except . . . that a new cart was used. David brought 30,000 men to the house of Abinadab for the occasion, but all the pomp and ceremony could not prevent the tragedy of Uzzah.

It has often occurred to me that, without deprecating the moral law of Ten Commandments, God often acted more severely when the "types of salvation" were violated than at any other time. There were Moses at the rock, the sons of Aaron with strange fire, Uzzah, and a host of others. Like the roads to the cities of refuge, the way to Christ, our salvation, has to be kept clear of human intervention.

Are God's instructions clear in your mind for the reception of His salvation and blessing, or does human devising obscure them? Are God's instructions clear in these latter days for the lifting up of His law and grace in the remnant church, or do vain philosophies obscure the return of His blessings?

The King Comes Home

"And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts" (2 Sam. 6:18, RSV).

When the instructions of the Lord were complied with (see verse 13), things went smoothly, and the ark found its resting place in a tent pitched for the occasion.

The homecoming of David was marred by one event. After blessing the people, he turned to his own household. On his front doorstep he was met by an irritated wife. Michal did not mince her words. She made David to understand how foolish he had made himself before the people. "Michal formed her judgment without reason, and meddled with that which she did not understand. We should be careful how we attribute actions, the reasons of which we cannot comprehend, to motives which may appear to us unjustifiable or absurd."*

Michal had been in love with David once, the hero of a thousand virgins in Israel. She had married her hero, but after David's flight she had been given to "another man." After 20 years the vicissitudes of dynastic struggle restored her to David as wife. Was it a glad reunion? We do not know. David's antics seemed to be a last straw (see verse 20).

No doubt a large part of Michal's displeasure had been occa-

by Izak J. van Zyl

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sioned by the fact that David had put off the royal robe and dressed himself in the ephod of the ordinary priest. The king of Israel had put himself on a level with his people in his adoration of God. David is often referred to as a man after God's heart. He was always sensitive to the requirements of God, quick to admit his mistakes (and they were often serious), and willing to accept rebuke. But it was his humility that endeared him to God. Unlike Saul, the kingship of David was what God meant it to be—an illustration of the kingship of Christ.

Christ's first homecoming (first advent) was rejected by those of His own household (see John 1:11), by those who expected Him to come in royal robes. He had "no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2). His reception in the city for bringing the ark "home," i.e., fulfilling the provisions of the everlasting covenant on Calvary, brought great joy. The hosannas on Palm Sunday and the angelic choirs in heaven at His ascension repeated the joy of David's entry into Jerusalem while choirs sang (see Ps. 24:7-10).

The Saints Come Home

"For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever, and thou Lord, art become their God"
(2 Sam. 7:24).

Although the economy of Israel made provision for the separate roles of prophet, priest, and king, David often functioned typically in all three in a Messianic role. David's desire and request to build a house for the Lord was Messianically turned into the house that God would build—Israel—the true household of God. The "he" and "house" are again one of those glorious typical prophecies running through Solomon to Christ, the Son who would establish the kingdom and the throne forever.

After David ended the sacrifice, he dealt to the people the corn and the wine, symbols of the abundance of the kingdom, the blessings of the covenant. In the tabernacle service the completion of the work of atonement was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles, in anticipation of the final triumph in the kingdom. When Christ takes off His high priestly robe to put on His royal robe, He will gather His people, to be His forever. And He will be their God.

"And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. . . . Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands"
(Isa. 65:21, 22).

*Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible: A Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 2 (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), p. 323.

The Lord Almighty, Who May Stand in His Holy Place?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 24:7-10

When one reads the story of how Uzzah was struck down by God for his irreverent act, it is almost natural to object with King David to God's judgment as excessive, especially since Uzzah's intentions seemed to be good.

Of this incident and similar ones in the Old Testament, Ellen White gives the following insights: "Let men of today take warning from the fate of those who in ancient times presumed to make free with that which God had declared sacred. . . . Consider the judgment that fell upon Uzzah. . . . For presuming to touch the symbol of God's presence, he was smitten with instant death."¹

The question triggered in our mind is why Uzzah was so severely punished. From the writings of Ellen White we gather that Israel was to learn two valuable lessons from these happenings. First, "God can accept no partial obedience, no lax way of treating His commandments. By the judgment upon Uzzah He designed to impress upon all Israel the importance of giving strict

heed to His requirements. Thus the death of that one man, by leading the people to repentance, might prevent the necessity of inflicting judgments upon thousands."²

David's fear for the ark caused him to place it in the care of Obed-Edom, the Gittite, and because of the presence of the ark "the Lord blessed him and his entire household" (2 Sam. 6:11, NIV). From this verse comes God's second lesson to Israel: "God would teach his people that, while his ark was a terror and death to those who transgressed his commandments contained in it, it was also a blessing and strength to those who were obedient to his commandments."³

REACT

1. Mention some ways in which Christians could be irreverent in their worship of God, i.e., the Sabbath, the Bible, their attitude in church, etc.

2. What do you think of the church's "judgment" on some of its members who have sinned?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 283, 284.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 706.

3. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, pp. 111, 112.

by André Richards

André Richards is a final-year theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Wednesday, March 6

The Triumphal Procession of Salvation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 132:8

After David had united all of Israel under one crown, and had made Jerusalem the capital of the monarchy, he decided it was time to move the ark (the focal point of Israel's religious life) to Jerusalem. For the past 20 years it had rested at the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim.

For Israel, the ark was the most holy symbol of the ancient covenant God made with Israel at Sinai. It was a witness and pledge of the divine, redemptive presence of God (see Exod. 25:22; 27:21, NIV). It was the depository of the law of God, which provided not only the stipulations of the covenant but also a transcript of God's character (see verse 16; Num. 10:33, NIV).

It also symbolized, with the Shekinah glory between the cherubim above the mercy seat (Hebrew *kapporet*), the divine enthronement of God as king of the theocracy of Israel (see 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15, NIV). And last, it was the place where atonement was made for the sins of Israel (see Lev. 16:15, 16, 30, NIV).

No wonder God was so strict about the handling of the ark. According to Exodus 25:12-14 and Numbers 4:5, 6, and 15, it had to be covered with the shielding cur-

tain, hides of sea cows, and a cloth of solid blue (NIV). Only the priests were to carry it. After its return from the Philistines, who in their ignorance sent it back on a new cart drawn by two cows, 70 men of Beth-shemesh looked into the ark and paid the ultimate price for their disrespect (see 1 Sam. 6:19; Num. 4:20). The tragedy at the threshing floor of Nachon, when God struck down Uzzah for touching the ark, could have been avoided.

David's disconcerted question in 2 Samuel 6:9, "How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?" (NIV), was more than just a question of transportation. It touched on the essence of humanity's relationship to Yahweh: "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" (1 Sam. 6:20, NIV).

The account of 2 Samuel 6:12-22 indicates how a person must begin to answer this timeless question. Whereas the holy presence of God demands strict obedience to the requirements of Israel's religion (notice how the people carry the ark in verse 13), the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance by God should move one to a spontaneous and joyful response. "David . . . danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets" (verses 14, 15, NIV).

by Johan A. Japp

Johan A. Japp is chairman of the Department of Religion at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Christians who accept the solemn truth about the heavenly sanctuary and the pre-advent judgment should be careful not to forget that unless the message of the intercessory work of Christ, as well as the final judgment, evokes both awe and joyous assurance, one can become guilty of the sterile snobbery of Michal (see verses 16, 20).

When Jesus, riding on a donkey, entered Jerusalem amid

the shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Matt. 21:9, NIV), He became the visible presence of God among people, and through His shed blood He brought about reconciliation between God and humanity. This fact moved all the unfallen angels to shout with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12, NIV).

Thursday, March 7

Humility, a Heavenly Trait

HOW-TO

Key Text: Isa. 57:15

In David's world, as in ours, pomp and pride, power and prestige, were the expected norms in ruling circles. Perhaps being a man after God's heart had more to do with David's humility than with any other feature of his life.

Learning lessons may not be humanity's strong point, but it seems that David was able to analyze his actions humbly and then make the needed changes. He could accept counsel from God that was sometimes contrary to his own plans, and be happy about it.

A humble and contrite David also accepted reproof in times of deliberate sin. The prophet tells us that He who dwells "in the high and holy place" also loves to dwell "with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. 57:15, RSV).

Indeed, perhaps the most powerfully appealing trait of our heavenly King is His humility in coming to this earth, "taking the form of a servant. . . . And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:7, 8, RSV). In such a King *any* humble and contrite sinner finds a special empathy, a special place in His heart, just as David did.

How can we develop the humility of David? Its basis is an underlying sense of security and accep-

tance. David had no doubt about God's best intentions for his life. As a young shepherd he had proved God on the hills of Bethlehem. As a fugitive from Saul he had discovered God's care and friendship. He had found during his reign that he could always trust God's counsel. Secure in the knowledge of his Father's love, David accepted his own limitations and relied humbly on strength and direction from above. Ellen White notes for our benefit that humility is an active principle growing out of a consciousness of God's love.¹

Today we have an advantage over David. In addition to tracing God's ways in nature, we can study the life of Jesus. Beholding Christ and His character leads to humility.²

As the realization sinks deeper and deeper into our minds that Christ, as well as His Father, loves us unconditionally, our frantic efforts toward self-achievement, our coverup denials of wrongs, and our façade of pride melt away and are replaced by a quiet, humble realization of our real weaknesses, but, above all, of His trustworthy strength. In a sense, the greater our experience of worship and admiration for God, the deeper will be our experience of security and humility.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1139.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 159, 160; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 68.

by Neville Webster

Neville Webster is a lecturer in business economics at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Does David Really Qualify?

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 32:5-7

David's understanding of his Father was remarkable. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24, NIV). What rapport to have with the King of the universe!

Do not believe that it was quite that simple. Let's face it; the major stress load we carry, the daily pressures we encounter, are self-induced 99 percent of the time. That's just the way it is, the way it has always been. Ask Adam. Ask David, the man after God's own heart.

Which brings us to the question we are asking this week. Just what made David so special? Not only did he lie blatantly, but also he committed adultery and was responsible for murder—and all this while in high office. Sounds like politics. Besides, it was made public and broadcast nationwide. How humiliating, how sad, especially if the saga had ended there, but it did not, and that is precisely the point.

David came to himself. He realized his shameful part in the great controversy and admitted taking the wrong side. So he repented, and guess what happened? He was forgiven, and that is what makes David a man after God's own heart. Not because he could write beautiful psalms, not because of his expert defense policy, not because of his superb statesmanship, and not because he unified and enlarged Israel, but because he came to himself.

David realized his mistakes and, looking back over his life, was genuinely sorry. After that he responded by confession and was delighted to find his Saviour eager to forgive and forget. Following that, he became willing to learn and quick to praise.

I would like to suggest that the hero of today's part of this week's lesson is not David, but God. It's obvious. Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellowmen than ever before. That makes *me* a man after God's own heart. What more could I want? After all, I have a God after my own heart.

by Michél van den Bergh

Michél van den Bergh is a senior religion major at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

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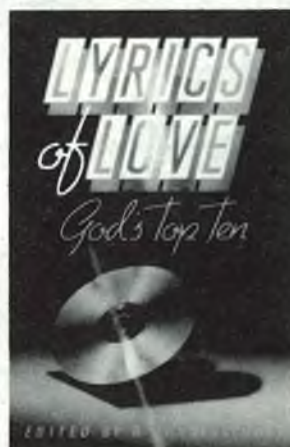
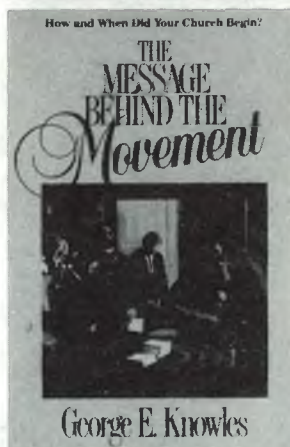
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Lesson 11, March 10 - 16

Sin and Consequences



“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Ps. 130:3, 4, NKJV).

Sunday, March 10

A Small Nail

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rev. 2:26

Awakened by a rude alarm during the early morning darkness, I rolled over, hoping that this was all an eerie nightmare. Falling to the hard floor, I tried to find something that resembled a towel, and headed for the shower. When I turned on the water, the realization hit me that there was no hot water. To add to the fun, the towel that I had grabbed was actually the nasty sweatshirt I had worn playing basketball last night.

As I headed toward the room I realized that I had nothing clean to wear because I hadn't done my pyramid of laundry in four weeks. A quick glance at the clock showed me that I was already late for class, and in the rush I put on Listerine as cologne. As I hurried out of the room, I glanced toward my dusty Bible, which I used to call friend. *Oh, I will read the Bible tonight.*

That evening I had a Waterloo of homework, and my friends invited me to a yuppie birthday party, plus my adorable fish tank broke, and the room became a wading pool for the rest of the night. As my head hit the pillow, a remembrance of the still-dustier Bible came to view, but all I could manage before I closed my eyes

was "Dear Lord, thank You for helping me through another . . ."

This typical story is just a day in college life. Usually school activities keep one so busy that a personal devotional life is lost in the haste. What does it matter? Who cares if a quiet moment is not spent with the Lord? What will be gained or lost by such a small matter as spending time with God? Or is it a small matter?

For want of a nail the shoe was
lost,
For want of a shoe the horse
was lost,
For want of a horse the rider
was lost,
For want of a rider the battle
was lost,
For want of a battle the king-
dom was lost,
And all for the want of a horse-
shoe nail.

This poem illustrates that it is important to have daily contact with our Lord and Saviour. You and I are the nails; you and I are here to make the difference. Keeping in personal touch with Christ affects not only everyday life but also friends, church, community, and, most important, our eternal life.

*Little Boy Blue and Other Favorites, Mother Goose Series (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), p. 47.

by Jeannie Bradley

Jeannie Bradley is a sophomore education major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Perils of Power

LOGOS

2 Sam. 11:1-14:24

David's Treachery (read 2 Sam. 11)

"So David sent messengers, and took her." "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (verses 4, 27, RSV).

Not as young as he once was, David decides to sit out the spring campaign against the Ammonites. The narrator doesn't give us direct information on David's psychological state. Was it midlife crisis, the need for a fling to prove his virility, since he wasn't out there on the battlefield, that prompted his affair with Bathsheba? Or was it complacency born of a string of uninterrupted successes in building his empire that made him conclude that the rules didn't apply to him?

At any rate, what David wanted, he took (see verses 1-4). Bathsheba's resultant pregnancy complicated matters. What to do with Uriah, away at the Ammonite front during the illicit affair? Though he is called "the Hittite," it is probably incorrect to think of Uriah as a foreigner or mercenary. The Hittites were a Semitic people whose power had been great in the Near East, but had diminished about 200 years before the time of David. Uriah was probably part of a small remnant of Hittites who became incorporated into Israel. Both his

name, which means "Yahweh is my light,"¹ and his conduct indicate deep devotion to the God of Israel.

David tries finesse first—a scheme to make Uriah think he is the child's father. But Uriah's fidelity both frustrates David's coverup attempt and provides an ironic contrast to the king's behavior. Uriah refuses to indulge in the pleasures of home while Israel is in battle.

Moreover, Uriah cites concern for the ark of the covenant (see verse 11). He could not break his commitment to Israel's holy mission, a mission as yet uncompleted because the ark did not yet have a proper dwelling place. Psalm 132 extols *David* as the one who will not rest until the ark reaches its rightful home. But in our story principle has become secondary for him while a common soldier becomes its champion.

The familiar maxim "one sin leads to another" is then given graphic validation. Plan A having failed, David now finds it necessary to exterminate Uriah, sending the faithful warrior's death warrant with him back to the battlefield.

With remarkable candor the author has related the treachery of Israel's greatest hero. Because Israel is centered on the covenant with Yahweh rather than on human kings, its historians judge the conduct of the kings in the light of that covenant, rather than just rehearsing their

by Douglas Morgan

Douglas Morgan is assistant professor of history at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

glorious deeds. No one, no matter how powerful, is exempt from critical scrutiny.

Is it disrespectful to criticize leaders in society and the church? Why or why not?

God's Judgment and David's Response (read 2 Sam. 12)

"David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die' " (verse 13, RSV).

With courage and consummate skill, Nathan the prophet confronts the monarch with his sin. Rather than blustering in with a "thus saith the Lord," Nathan tells a story that elicits from David a verdict against gross injustice. The words "you are the man" bring home his guilt with irrefutable force; he has already pronounced judgment against himself.

The essence of David as a man after God's own heart is perhaps nowhere revealed more clearly than in his response to the prophetic message. First, he readily and fully acknowledged his sin. Though he could sin on a grand scale, David never closed his heart to God. He remained open, responsive, and connected, and that made renewal possible.

Moreover, we see in David an attitude toward injustice and suffering that parallels God's. In Nathan's story, the rich man's crime wasn't merely the theft of an animal. Such a case would probably not have been a matter for the king's attention. Rather, it was a case of a wealthy man abusing a poor man, a powerful man taking away what little a powerless man had. And it was a particular duty of the king to take the side of the powerless (see Ps. 72:2, 4, 12-14), which David did.

Because David's heart was in tune with God's, he shared God's

passion for justice. And it was that passion which, under Nathan's shrewd guidance, led him to the point of accepting his own guilt and opened the possibility of beginning anew.

Nathan declared that God had "put away" David's sin (see 2 Sam. 12:13). But the fact remained that by his deed David had "utterly scorned the Lord" (see verse 14), and that by it he had set in motion a cycle of violence and treachery that would mar the rest of his reign (see verse 10). As David had pronounced fourfold restitution against the rich man (see verse 6) in accordance with Mosaic law (see Exod. 22:1), so four times death would strike his sons—the first son Bathsheba bore him (see 2 Sam. 12:19), Amnon (see 13:28, 29), Absalom (see 18:14), and Adonijah (see 1 Kings 2:24, 25).

Does the attention given to Solomon's birth seem out of place at this point in the narrative (see 2 Sam. 12:24, 25)?

Royal Consequences (read 2 Sam. 13; 14)

"And David mourned for his son day after day" (13:37, RSV).

The influential eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant declared it a basic moral duty to treat every human being as an end in himself, and never as a mere means. That is, people should be treated with the dignity appropriate to their intrinsic value, and not used as objects for someone else's purposes. David treated Uriah as a mere means to be manipulated and then destroyed when it became necessary. That set the moral tone for Amnon's use of his half-sister Tamar as an object for gratification, to be discarded once soiled (see verses 15-17). The chain of consequences continues: Absalom, to avenge the rape of his sister

Tamar, has Amnon assassinated; that results in a strained and awkward relationship between Absalom and David, which in turn paves the way for Absalom's rebellion and civil war in Israel (see 15-19).

David displays a striking indecisiveness and impotence in dealing with Absalom. He longs for reconciliation (see 13:39), but it takes a scheme carefully orchestrated by Joab to get him to let Absalom return to Jerusalem (see 14:1-14). Even then, Absalom is kept from the king's presence for two years (see verses 28-33). David seems unable to punish firmly or bring about the full reconciliation he desires. Perhaps it was "memory of his own guilt" that made David "listless and irresolute."² At any rate, the matter was handled in such a way that it gave Absalom both reason to nurse resentments and opportu-

nity to build a power base in opposition to his father.

Adultery, murder, treachery, rape, incest, revenge, intrigue—couldn't we have gotten all this just as well by watching a couple episodes of "Knot's Landing"? No, because our lesson isn't just about sinful people doing rotten things to one another; it's about sinful people interacting with a God who judges and redeems. We are invited to see ourselves in the story and, like David, seek from this God clean hearts and right spirits (see Ps. 51:10).

Could David, despite his sin, have taken decisive action regarding Amnon and Absalom and thus exhibited the transforming power of God's grace?

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1. Thomas Ellis Katen, *Doing Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 258.
 2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 665.

Tuesday, March 12

Lost Dependence

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Phil. 4:13

With the end of 1989 came the beginning of the fall of Communism. While most Eastern-bloc countries found peaceful reforms, only Romania's government held strongly to its hard-line Communism. Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania's iron-fisted ruler, would not give in to the people, and the country found itself in a revolution. Ceausescu was captured, tried, and executed for crimes against the people. He used his power to make himself rich while starving the people. It was his abuse of power that developed the people's hatred toward him.

King "David was surrounded by the fruits of victory and the honors of his wise and able rule. It was now, while he was at ease and unguarded, that the tempter seized the opportunity to occupy his mind. . . . [When] he let go his hold upon God, David yielded to Satan and brought upon his soul the stain of guilt. He, the Heaven-appointed leader of the nation, chosen by God to execute His law, himself trampled upon its precepts. He who should have been a terror to evildoers, by his own act strengthened their hands."¹

Both these rulers, even though different in many aspects, had one downfall, and it came through misuse of power. Ellen White

points out that "it was a spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation that prepared the way for David's fall. Flattery and the subtle allurements of power and luxury were not without effect upon him."²

Most of us need not worry, since probably we will not hold positions of power. However, we don't have to have political power like David or Ceausescu; all we need is the power of self-confidence to lead us to our fall. It is not necessarily the power that corrupts, but the self-confidence that power brings about. Ellen White goes as far as to say that "all the lessons of Bible history teach . . . [that] it is a perilous thing to praise or exalt men; for if one comes to lose sight of his entire dependence on God, and to trust to his own strength, he is sure to fall."³

The story of David teaches us that if we and our church depend on our ability, we will fail. For only in Christ can we do all things (see Phil. 4:13).

"It is impossible for us in our own strength to maintain the conflict; and whatever diverts the mind from God, whatever leads to self-exaltation or to self-dependence, is surely preparing the way for our overthrow."⁴

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 718.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 717.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

by Ed Santana

Ed Santana is assistant chaplain at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Why?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Sam. 12:15-18

In all the stories of the Bible many questions remain unanswered, such as "Why do innocent children die for someone else's mistakes?" The answer may be based in causality—because that person made a certain mistake, this group of people, including infants, must suffer. War often creates such situations, but in such cases those of us who are not involved tend to distance ourselves from the reality of such death and accept it as a "necessary evil."

It seems to be much more difficult for us to accept this death when we are forced to deal with a single, personal case. This happens to me whenever I read the story of David and Bathsheba. My parents read to me the Bible stories, and King David was always on my list of favorite Bible characters. My childish imagination found it easy to identify with him. I rejoiced in his triumph. I honored his nobility, and I loved his courage. So the death of this child of his, this child for whom he fasted and prayed seven days, touches me personally. And it causes me to face the question "Why didn't this child have a chance to live?"

Of course, there are the common clichés: Had the child lived, it would have been reared with

his other children and might well have become as corrupt as Amnon and Absalom. God always knows best. The nation (and David) had to see how dreadful this sin was. Yet I do not feel satisfied. This baby, newly born, as innocent as any of us may ever be, was terminated after one week of pain and suffering. Something does not seem fair.

Certainly there are things to learn from this minute detail of this terrible story. Perhaps I am clinging too tightly to the concept of life's being good, being desirable, being something that every youngster has a right to try. But while no answer has yet satisfied me completely, an insight from the resignation of Eastern thought comes as close as anything to quieting my questions.

In Zen Buddhism the word *MU*, when given as the answer to a question, *un-asks* the question. Might it be that God, by not answering my questions, is telling me that some of my questions need to be unasked? My concern seems to be about a factor that is not vital to my salvation. I can hope to find the answer when I reach that state of enlightenment that we all may reach after many years in heaven and on the earth made new. But until then, perhaps I not only do *not need* to know but also may need *not to know*. I need to accept the concept that God's wisdom is perfect, His care complete.

by J. Daniel Ashton

J. Daniel Ashton is a senior computer science major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Thursday, March 14

Living the Victorious Life

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 51:17

David's story illustrates the truth that knowledge and responsibility go together. He rose from being a country person, aware of the differences between right and wrong, to being the monarch of Israel. In this position David was the moral and religious leader of the nation.

Unfortunately David allowed his freedom of choice to be his downfall. He decided to have and to do whatever he wanted. And he did. He coveted, stole, committed adultery, and finally murdered. But he also repented. In Psalm 51 David proclaims: "My sacrifice is a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart" (verse 17, TEV).

And David was forgiven. But he did not escape the consequences of his sin. David experienced tremendous heartache during the remainder of his life as his family and Israel bore the results of his sin.

This brings us to an important question. If I suffer consequences for my wrong actions, does that indicate that God has not forgiven me? If we repent, God can forgive us, but sin is not without its consequences. God is a forgiving God, but this does not mean that He erases the results of sin. If there were no price to pay for our mistakes, then it would be easy to fall back into a sinful lifestyle.

Perhaps we have fallen into sin as David did and thereafter come to Christ in repentance, but still find the results of sin a heavy burden. How can we sustain our relationship with God while still living with the consequences of sin? Let's look at four steps:

1. *Respond to God in repentance—God cannot forgive us for unconfessed sins.* Facing the consequences may scare us, but the first step to peace of mind is repentance.

2. *Ask God to help us rise above inherent weaknesses.* In order to sustain a relationship with God after forgiveness, we need His strength to overcome our weaknesses.

3. *Allow God to progressively control our life.* We need to continually renew our covenant with God each day. We need to allow Him to take control of our life.

4. *Reach out to others.* By reaching out to others who are themselves struggling with sin, we become stronger in resisting temptations.

REACT

As a result of David's sin his family and his nation suffered. In what ways are we responsible for our actions and the influence they have on our family and others around us?

by Jo-Anne E. Stevenson

Jo-Anne E. Stevenson is a senior psychology major and a journalism minor at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Friday, March 15

Earplugs, Handcuffs, and Mirrors

OPINION

Key Texts: Matt. 13:9; Ps. 85:8

While walking my way through life, I saw Mr. World posting fliers, painting signs, lighting billboards, and hanging banners across the sky.

This is odd, I thought to myself. The messages on his signs were peculiar and curious. "Free! No obligation." "All the taste, none of the calories." "No identification required." "Risk-free offer!" I watched Mr. World feverishly work to publicize what, I suppose, was a personal cause of his.

Pausing from his work, Mr. World spotted me walking through life and dashed over to meet me. Although a little out of breath, he greeted me with a smile—the type of smirky, sly smile that made me curious and cautious at the same time.

"What do you think? Be honest. Give me your opinion," he energetically inquired.

"It's a bit overwhelming," I replied.

"Good!"

"I don't understand."

"It's all very simple."

"What does it all mean?"

We bantered back and forth like Chinese table tennis for the longest time. His short comment, my short question, his short comment, my short question . . .

This was tedious, and I was

just about to leave when Mr. World asked, "Who said you can't have it all?"

I tried to remember, but I just couldn't recall who it was. I tried to concentrate, but Mr. World distracted me. He turned on his tube and showed me ice cream without the calories, relationships without the commitment, oranges without the seeds, and tans without the sun. Mr. World opened his wallet to show me that:

1. If I can't afford it, I can charge it.

2. There's a price tag to everything.

3. The one with the most toys wins.

"You can have your cake and eat it, too," he chided. "You can have the best of both worlds. You don't have to save, sacrifice, or safeguard."

I thought about it. It would be nice to have everything I want, whenever I want, wherever I want. I paced as I considered Mr. World's proposal. I looked at his bold signs, fliers, and billboards.

As I passed one of the elaborate billboards, I noticed a person just like me, hidden behind the neon fixtures. He was handcuffed to his sports car, his boat, and his condo.

I ran to the next sign, tearing it from the side of a boxlike building. Again I found another person just like me. She was imprisoned by mirrors that formed a cell to

by A. Allan Martin

A. Allen Martin is the student director for the Destiny Drama Company, a Christian collegiate repertory theater troupe from Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

contain her. Her beauty could not disguise her sorrow.

I tore signs, posters, fliers, and banners down to find prisoner after prisoner. Each person just like me.

Mr. World's question rang in my ears as he exclaimed again, "Who says you can't have it all?"

His prisoners echoed their an-

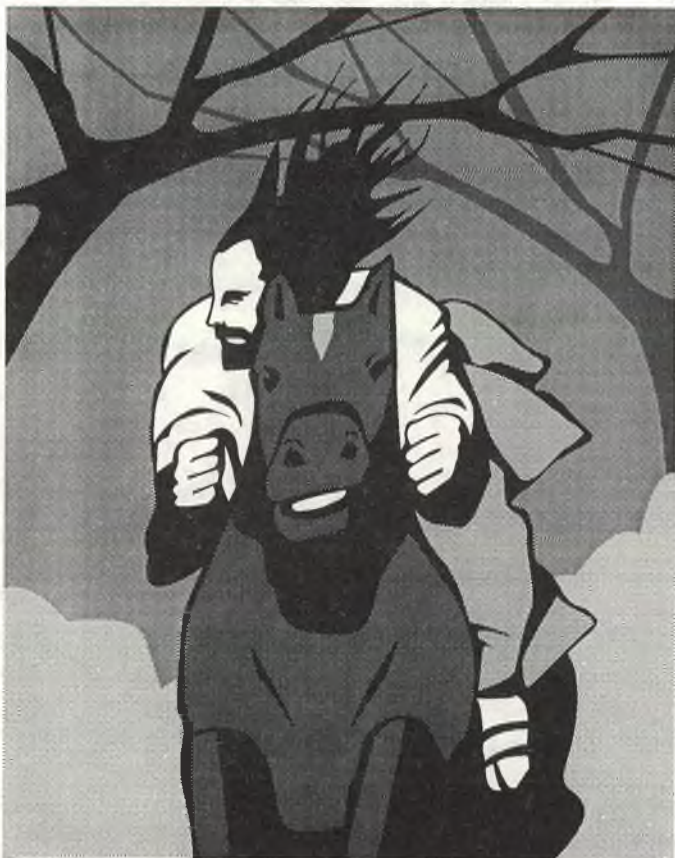
swer in unison, "I will not hear anyone say I can't have it all. I refuse to hear. I refuse to hear."

I turned to Mr. World and answered his question with a question: "Would I have it all, or would it all have me?"

He casually replied as he turned back to his work, "I'm sorry; I didn't hear you."

Lesson 12, March 17 - 23

Monarchy in Crisis



“O Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him.’ But you are a shield around me, O Lord, my Glorious One, who lifts up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill” (Ps. 3:1-4, NIV).

Sunday, March 17

Making Music: "Of David Also"

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Heb. 11:32-34

Let me go where'er I will,
I hear a sky-born music still:
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young,
From all that's fair, from all
that's foul,
Peals out a cheerful song.

It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow
glows,
Nor in the song of woman
heard,
But in the darkest, meanest
things
There always, always something
sings.

'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cup of budding
flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow
tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in
showers,
But in the mud and scum of
things
There always, always something
sings.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

True or False: David is included in Hebrews 11, the faith chapter. Answer: True. But what did David accomplish through faith? We think he made music—the kind of

music Emerson's poem is about.

As the saga of David unfolds we learn of David's lust and adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and his responsibility for the death of her husband. We learn of some of the consequences of David's sin: the son born to Bathsheba dies. David's eldest son, Amnon, rapes his half-sister Tamar. Morally incapacitated, King David does nothing to bring Amnon to justice. Absalom, another of David's sons, and Tamar's full brother, plots and brings about Amnon's murder. David again does nothing. When prompted by Joab, his general, he finally acts, but too late. Absalom has turned traitor to his father, and with the beauty, personality, and skill of Lucifer beguiles the nation into rebellion.

Then something wonderful happens. David makes a full surrender to God and rises to his greatest, though saddest, hour. He does some of the most compassionate, unselfish, and thoughtful acts of his life. In a story, the type that a Christian would not normally read, something sings. When we are in harmony with God, even "in the mud and scum of things there always, always something sings."

"Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Music," in *American Authors*, ed. Lessie Lee Culpepper and Mildred McClary Tymeson, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1942), p. 58.

by R. Lynn and Helen E. Sauls

R. Lynn Sauls is professor of journalism and chairman of the Journalism Department; Helen E. Sauls is associate professor of education at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

The Cry of the Victor and the Vanquished

LOGOS

2 Sam. 22

A Song of Victory (read 2 Sam. 22)

“David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul” (verse 1, NIV).

David’s triumph over the feared Ammonites caused this celebration song. The victory was crucial because the existence of Israel was at stake. Do you remember the battle from 2 Samuel 8 and 10 (cf. 1 Chron. 19)? Nahash, king of the Ammonites, died. David’s men came to Hanun, the son and successor of Nahash. These men brought him David’s condolences. But Ammonite nobles persuaded the new king that these men were really spies. So Hanun had their beards shaved and then cut off a section of their garments around the middle of their buttocks (see 1 Chron. 19:4). Such humiliation of royal ambassadors was bound to have serious repercussions!

So the new Ammonite king sent a thousand talents of silver to hire troops and weapons. “They hired thirty-two thousand chariots and charioteers, as well as the king of Maacah with his troops, who came and camped near Medeba, while the Ammonites were mustered from their towns

and moved out for battle” (verse 7, NIV). Joab, the general of David’s troops, discovered that the enemy forces surrounded the approaching army of Israel. They stared defeat in the face. Joab cried out to his men, “Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight” (verse 13, NIV). And He did. The enemy was routed. But they called for reinforcements.

Enter David and his men. They crossed the Jordan, confronted the enemy, and killed 7,000 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers (see verses 17, 18, NIV). So devastating was the enemies’ defeat that they never rose up again against David while he lived.

No wonder David had something to sing about! Note the focus of his praise. He celebrates the mighty acts of God, not merely those of men. For it was God who “parted the heavens and came down” (2 Sam. 22:10, NIV). “He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me” (verses 17, 18, NIV). “It is God who arms me with strength” (verse 33, NIV). “You stoop down to make me great” (verse 36, NIV). He concludes the song with triumphant testimony: “He gives his king great victories; he shows

by Norman R. Gulley

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unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever" (verse 51, NIV).

David's song is a ringing declaration—"The Lord lives!" (verse 47, NIV). He had experienced God. He knew Him as his rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, stronghold, support, and Saviour. These words, in this song, echo the shepherd's love of the mountains, which to him were symbols of the Almighty.

How can we know God?

Has God given you victories in your life that are worth singing about? Worth celebrating? Why?

Can you say, from personal victories, "My God lives"?

The Song of Moses and the Lamb (read Rev. 13:1-5)

"And they sang a new song before the throne" (14:3, NIV).

Celebration songs follow great victories. One example is the Song of Deborah, which praises God for routing Israel's enemy at Megiddo (see Judg. 4, 5). This is the first mention of a battle of Armageddon (type) in Scripture. The Song of Moses and the Lamb (see Rev. 14) is the song that translated saints will sing after going through the final battle of Armageddon. It is a song of their experience that they alone can sing (see verse 3). It is a song that each of us will sing if we live to see Jesus come.

Not just the Ammonites, but the entire world will surround God's end-time people (see 13:3). "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered" (Dan. 12:1). Daniel says that Michael will deliver His people from that pending annihilation. Once again He will part the heavens and come down (see 2 Sam. 22:10).

It is Christ who leads the army

of heaven—all pictured as riding upon white horses (see Rev. 19:11-21). He will reach down from on high and take hold of His people (see 2 Sam. 22:17). He will be our rock, shield, stronghold, support, and strength. He will be our deliverer—our Saviour.

When this transpires, David's mighty deliverance will be repeated on a global scale. Remember, Michael has never lost a battle. It is the name given to Jesus when He is in the business of delivering His people. It was Michael who threw Satan and his angels out of heaven (see Rev. 12:7-9) and who resurrected Moses over Satan's objections (see Jude 9).

If God is able to deliver us from the final Armageddon confrontation (physical deliverance), then surely He can provide spiritual deliverance today. How does He do that?

David's Greatest Victory (read 2 Sam. 24:14-25)

"David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing'" (verse 10, NIV).

Though proud of its national greatness, Israel was dissatisfied with the greatly extended compulsory military service.

"The proposed enrollment caused much dissatisfaction; consequently it was thought necessary to employ the military officers in place of the priests and magistrates, who had formerly taken the census. The object of the undertaking was directly contrary to the principles of a theocracy."³

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Saul offered sacrifices, acting in place of

a priest (see 1 Sam. 13:7-14). Now David used military men to function in place of the priests. How quickly people take charge and do things their way—contrary to God's way. But the difference between Saul and David lay ultimately in genuine confession: Saul did not confess, whereas David did. After David's affair with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan said, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7, NIV). Now, after David's numbering Israel, the prophet Gad came to give him three choices—should God send seven years of famine, three months of flight from his enemies, or three days of plague (see 24:13)? All of these were designed to remind David, and the nation, that God provided their food, their victories, and their well-being. They had forgotten God, looking to human plans and numbers.

David was brought to his senses. The Holy Spirit brought conviction. He saw the enormity of his sin. He realized that he was enamored of his own success, forgetting that apart from God he would not have had any. He saw now that he had taken credit that belonged only to God. He cried out, "I am in deep distress. Let us

fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men" (verse 14, NIV). Good response, David! For you did not choose among the three options. You let God take charge once more. This is the sign of true conversion, true sorrow for mistakes. It puts God back in the driver's seat, where He belongs.

*Is God in charge of your life?
Or are you?*

Do you seek His will and follow Him? Or do you say, "Lord, bless what I have decided to do, or want to do"?

When David was given a great victory against the Ammonites-Arameans, he sang praise to God, but when he thought human might had made him great, he was vanquished. Yet his greatest victory was not over foreign enemies, but over his greatest enemy—self.

Are you truly a victor? Or are you vanquished? Does not the difference lie in one's focus—on God or on self?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 747.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 710.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 747.

Tuesday, March 19

A Letter to King David

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Tim. 3:4, 5

Dear Brother D:

I have observed a lack of godly influence in your household. You have failed to exercise authority over your children; your sons fail to give you either respect or discipline. You have indulged their selfish ways and have failed to punish or rebuke them for their wrongdoing.

"There is no greater curse upon households than to allow the youth to have their own way. When parents regard every wish of their children and indulge them in what they know is not for their good, the children soon lose all respect for their parents, all regard for the authority of God or man, and are led captive at the will of Satan. The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments. . . . But great as are the evils of parental unfaithfulness under any circumstances, they are tenfold greater when they exist in the families of those appointed as teachers of the people. When these fail to control their own households, they are, by their wrong example, misleading many. Their guilt is as much greater than that of others as their position is more responsible."¹

"Your children are the younger

members of the Lord's family—brothers and sisters entrusted to your care by your heavenly Father for you to train and educate for heaven."²

"God designs that the families of earth shall be a symbol of the family in heaven. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are among His most effective agencies for the formation of Christian character and for the advancement of His work." "Oh, that parents would look prayerfully and carefully after their children's eternal welfare!"³

"Constant effort is required, constant watchfulness and earnest, fervent prayer. Keep the mind in a praying mood, uplifted to God." "God will work for these dear children in union with the wisely directed efforts of their parents and will bring them to become learners in the school of Christ."⁴

"A light will shine from such homes which will reveal itself in behalf of the ignorant, leading them to the source of all knowledge. An influence will be exerted that will be a power for God and for His truth."⁵

Your humble servant,
Ellen G. White

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 579.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 259.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 429, 430.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 700, 701.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 430.

by Jennifer Wenzel

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Whose Side Are You On?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 8:28

After David fled from Jerusalem, he sent back Hushai as an undercover agent with instructions to lie to Absalom, claiming that he would be a loyal servant of the rebel. Hushai gained Absalom's confidence and used this deceitfully gained trust to thwart Ahithophel's wise strategy that would have secured victory for Absalom in battle against David. Hushai claimed that Ahithophel's advice was not good, and then he led Absalom to believe that *his* strategy would be more advantageous for conquering David.

"And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.' For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom" (2 Sam. 17:14, RSV).

Does "bring evil upon" mean that God intended to harm or destroy Absalom? I think not. Chapter 18 shows clearly that it was not even *David's*—much less God's—intention to harm him. God simply wanted to restore David to the throne, and that necessitated the defeat of Absalom. And with his all-consuming obses-

sion to be king, Absalom certainly would be inclined to consider it "evil" for him to be thwarted and conquered, even though we can see through hindsight that it was a good thing. Furthermore, he would lose out sooner or later without God on his side, because the way of sin leads to destruction just as naturally as the Florida Turnpike leads to Miami (see Prov. 1:29-31; Gal. 6:7; Rom. 6:23).

Did God sanction Hushai's underhanded tactic (albeit with a good motive behind it)? Certainly not. God could have defeated Ahithophel's advice some other way. God did not inspire Hushai to trick Absalom. Rather, He simply allowed him to believe blindly that Hushai's strategy was better than Ahithophel's.

Sure, David prayed that God would confound Ahithophel's shrewd counsel, but he took matters into his own hands by sending Hushai instead of trusting God to accomplish His will in His own way and in His own time. Although "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom. 8:28, RSV), it would be better if we didn't get in the way by unsoundly taking matters into our own hands. Even though God allows the sinner to reap the disastrous results of his own choices, He is actively working for the good of all who love Him.

by Randy Burks

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Thursday, March 21

No Forced Allegiance

HOW-TO

Key Text: Exod. 34:6, 7

The great controversy between Christ and Satan, which has lasted for nearly 6,000 years, originated because Satan chose to pervert the freedom of the will that Christ offers. Misery loves company, and Lucifer knows the end of time brings ultimate and lasting destruction. Since being expelled from heaven for seeking to overthrow the government of God, Satan has attempted to inspire the same spirit of rebellion in people on earth as he aroused in the heavenly courts.

In our study of the mini-great controversy between David and Absalom, we find that Satan employed many of the same techniques to persuade Absalom to rebel against his father that motivated him to revolt in heaven. Satan continues to use many of these snares to entangle Christians today; by examining them we can become aware of the devil's deceptions and recognize our need of the Lord.

1. *Pride*. "Little by little, Lucifer came to indulge a desire for self-exaltation. . . . Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of His creatures, it was Lucifer's endeavor to win their service and homage to himself. And coveting the honor which the infinite Father had bestowed upon His Son, this prince of

angels aspired to power which it was the prerogative of Christ alone to wield."¹ In 2 Samuel 15, Absalom undertook a power struggle similar to the one Satan had waged many years previously. Not content with a position of any less authority than that of king, Absalom let his pride and arrogance take control. Contrast this position with the attitude of Christ in Matthew 18:1-5.

2. *Deception and secrecy*. "And to sustain his charge of God's injustice toward him, he resorted to misrepresentation of the words and acts of the Creator. It was his policy to perplex the angels with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah."² "Satan had at first concealed his work under a specious profession of loyalty to God. He claimed to be seeking to promote the honor of God, the stability of His government, and the good of all the inhabitants of heaven. While instilling discontent into the minds of the angels under him, he had artfully made it appear that he was seeking to remove dissatisfaction."³

Absalom also conspired in secret and plotted against a king. Second Samuel 15:2-6 describes some of the techniques he used to secure the hearts of the men of Israel: preparing chariots and horses to impress the people that

by Craig L. Lastine

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he was the heir apparent, insinuating that the king was careless and indifferent about the administration of justice (see verse 3), and creating a general discontent among the people about David's government.

Absalom's payment for his leadership in the rebellion was death, as will be Lucifer's. But God, like King David, requires no forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of the will, that we may surrender to Him our total voluntary service.

REACT

1. What other parallels can be drawn with the story of David and Absalom?

2. Is it impossible to give an origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence?

3. Why was it necessary to allow Satan to carry forward his work until it turned into active revolt?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 494.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 497.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 497, 498.

Friday, March 22

Reproof and Retribution

OPINION

Key Text: Mic. 7:8, 9

Looking back, I can remember times when God specifically pointed out sin in my life, and I deliberately turned my back on His divine guidance. Sometimes as Christians we become so preoccupied with ourselves and all the things we must do, that we completely ignore God and the lessons He is trying to teach us. And it is only when we are in the depths of despair that we begin to turn to God for help. All because, as humans, we think we know what is best for us.

In the story of King David and his son Absalom, what really amazed me the most was David's penitence and humility. "How few would bear reproof and retribution with the patience and fortitude that he manifested."¹

"But he [David] saw in his own sin the cause of his trouble. The words of the prophet Micah breathe the spirit that inspired David's heart. 'When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.' Micah 7:8, 9. . . . This chapter in his experience, when, under cruelest wrong and insult, he shows himself to be humble, unselfish, generous, and

submissive, is one of the noblest in his whole experience. Never was the ruler of Israel more truly great in the sight of heaven than at this hour of his deepest outward humiliation."²

Although there are times in our lives when we become wrapped up in our own little world, and our sins overwhelm us, God is there to keep us straight. We need only to submit our entire life to Him. If we will step back and let Him guide every aspect of our life, He will show us our mistakes. And as we grow closer and closer to Him each day, His light will shine in us and through us. The closer we are to the light, the more darkness we can see in our own lives. This will lead us to come before Him in true repentance and humility for our sins.

Through David's experience the Lord shows that He cannot tolerate or excuse sin. And David's history enables us to see also the great ends that God has in view in His dealings with sin; it enables us to trace, even through darkest judgments, the working out of His purposes of mercy and beneficence.

REACT

What things are blocking you from true repentance?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 737.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 738.

by Terri Lynch

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Lesson 13, March 24 - 30

Relationship Restored



“The Spirit of the Lord spoke to me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: ‘He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God’ ” (2 Sam. 23:2, 3, NKJV).

Sunday, March 24

The Sermon of a Dying Saint

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Sam. 20-24

While I was caught in disbelief about the announcement of our church member's death, our elder reiterated the last message he sent to the church: "Hold fast. Strifes may blow, tossing the church to and fro, but Jesus is coming soon to take us home." Powerful preachers have said these words before, but never have the words made a deeper impression or been such an encouragement to strive for heaven as when I heard them from that dying Christian.

Last words of dying honorable men often leave a lasting impact on their fellow citizens or followers even in generations to come. Growing up in a society that emphasizes tribal identity, I was always troubled—like most of our Zulu tribal people—by what Shaka, the king of the Zulus, had said before his death. After he had built the tribe to a strong, feared nation and made it a refuge for those who fled their own tribes, jealousy possessed his brothers, driving them callously to murder him. But before they killed him, he strongly warned them that they would never rule the nation. In fulfillment of his prediction, the nation experienced discontentment, dissension, division, and invasion. His death marked the weakening of our strength down through the history of our existence. "If they

could only heed his voice" is the cry often heard from most Zulus today.

Rich in guidance, warnings, and instructions are the words of dying Bible saints. Jacob, Joshua, Moses, Paul, and others were moved by the Spirit for our instruction. Paul charged the saints to preach the Word; told of his hope in death, a hope of receiving a crown of righteousness together with those who will love God's appearance. Moses, in his last address to the Israelites, encouraged them to have faith in the God who gave them security, peace, and the good things of life.

David, the king with a history of uncommon vicissitudes and hazardous experiences, expresses the assurance of forgiveness, refuge, and guidance he found in the Lord. His life also taught him the value of nobler virtues as one in authority. Thus, in his final years, he was led to declare that he "who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3, NKJV).

Like David's dying words, those of good men are weighty in comparison with others. In their calmness, free from worldly contaminated minds, dying people give a matured expression of their long experience and accomplishments. From a concerned heart they pronounce words of instruction to prepare the living for heaven. If we could listen to them, surely our lives would be influenced. Dying saints are powerful preachers.

by Caleb Musa Radebe

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The Returning Wave of Human Actions

LOGOS

2 Sam. 20-24

God communicates with humanity at different times and through different methods. God reveals His will through visions, dreams, direct discourses, and also through miraculous events. The writers of the Old Testament chose from the chronicles of the lives of Israel's leaders certain events that illustrated the principles of proper divine-human interaction. When reading the last four chapters of the book of Samuel, we should look for moral lessons that in principle have universal application and consequently are relevant for us today.

The Returning Wave of Human Actions

This seems to be the principal lesson for us today. The phrase *returning wave* is taken from an observation of what happens when one throws a stone into a pond. The stone produces waves at first small and then larger and larger. Then when the waves reach the edge of the pond, a returning wave is produced that comes back to the original spot of the stone's entry. The same principle is often described by the sayings: "What we sow, we shall reap," "He who fights with the sword will die by the sword," etc.

The first story to be discussed in this lesson recounts the rebellion

and death of Sheba, the son of Bichri. Sheba's rebellion appears to be the last in a series of reactions to the sins of David. After David murdered Uriah, the Hittite, in order to take his wife, Bathsheba, to be his own wife, he seems to have lost the ability or willingness to deal properly with other people's overt criminal actions. This in spite of the fact that it was David's duty, as the chief administrator of justice in Israel, to dispense such corrective discipline. Neither Amnon's outrage against his sister Tamar nor Absalom's murder of Amnon was properly dealt with by David. The rebellions of Absalom and Sheba were the returning waves that avenged the death of Uriah by bringing death to David's own family and much suffering to the whole nation.

The second story, in 2 Samuel 21, tells of the death of King Saul's two sons and five grandsons. King Saul apparently tried to exterminate the Gibeonites, whose safety among Israel was protected by an oath taken by Joshua and the elders. It may be that Saul was trying to cover up before the people his own disobedience to God's direct command to execute the Amalekites, which was God's earlier command to Joshua. The primary lesson from this story is that we should not try to cover up our own sins by reproving other sinners or conducting a campaign to remove the

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church's "Gibeonites."

The second part of the story shows King David asking God for help in determining the cause of national disaster, but relying on his own wisdom in solving the problem. The cruel wishes of the revenge-seeking Gibeonites became the basis for David's judicial and administrative decision.

The lesson for us is that even "righteous" leaders should be careful in solving the church's problems. It may happen that a just leader, by relying on his own wisdom and listening to the lobbying and endangered "Gibeonites," may authorize gruesome "executions" of apparently innocent members of the people of God, whose sole guilt may be an association with a "Saul."

David's numbering of his army in Israel and Judah was another sin with grievous consequences (see 2 Sam. 24). David's sin was his sense of pride in bringing security, prosperity, and fame to the kingdom. The king and the people trusted in their own abilities and accomplishments rather than in God. The order to count the army was only the visible part of the invisible sin of pride.

Two questions are commonly asked after reading this story. The first one asks why such an "inconsequential" sin as numbering Israel should bring about such a severe punishment. The second

question asks why 70,000 Israelites died when it was David's sin that was being punished. The search for answers to these two questions reveals two important lessons we need to learn today.

The human system of justice punishes only those whose criminal acts are seen or discovered. God, however, deals not only with the visible sinful acts but also with the invisible sins of the mind and heart. David's sin of numbering Israel was the proverbial "tip of the iceberg" of the widespread sinful condition of the whole nation. David's sin merely precipitated divine punishment that fell upon all Israel.

The second question is equally challenging to our own sense of justice. For whose sin do we suffer? We all agree that suffering is caused by evildoers. When we sin, we suffer the consequences resulting from it. This process teaches us the real nature of sin. Sin is always destructive. On the other hand, the results of sin frequently affect innocent bystanders. Very often, when we know what question to ask, we find the answer we seek. Therefore, we should not ask why 70,000 Israelites had to die for David's sin, but rather why God protected for so long a nation that cherished sinful sentiments of pride and complacency.

Poet, Prophet, and King

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Sam. 23:2

If someone asked me to describe David, my first inclination would be to say, "He was a king who wrote beautiful poetry."

David, however, was more than a king and a poet—he was also a prophet. His prophecies are intermingled with his poems throughout the book of Psalms.

Our key text for this week begins with David's assertion that "the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). This says plainly what the first verse of the same chapter had already implied in Hebrew with a word ambiguously translated as "said." The original word is *ne'um*, meaning a "divine utterance either directly by God or through His prophets. . . . [It is] not used to designate ordinary speech."¹ David clearly designated his psalm in 2 Samuel 23 as a divine utterance and not his own.

David did not, however, always come right out and say, "This is a prophecy." In the New Testament Jesus affirmed the prophetic nature of David's Messianic poetry. Ellen White wrote of at least one instance when Jesus quoted

David, and she referred to David's words as prophecy.

"Looking with pity upon them, the Saviour continued, 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.'

"This prophecy the Jews had often repeated in the synagogues, applying it to the coming Messiah."²

If someone asked me to describe David, I would do well to answer that David was a king, a poet, and a prophet.

REACT

1. What similarities are there between David's writings and the works of Ellen White?

2. How can we distinguish which of a prophet's words are spoken by God and which originate from the individual?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 706.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 597.

by Anissa Housley

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Wednesday, March 27

Ultimate Victory

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Sam. 22:29-31

During the latter years of the American Revolution a British officer named Patrick Ferguson sent a message to the frontiersmen of North Carolina and Tennessee demanding that they lay down their arms immediately, lest he “march over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay waste their country with fire and sword.”¹ This ultimatum only served to rally these patriots, and on October 7, 1780, a hurriedly mustered, ragtag army of Tennessee, Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia backwoodsmen completely surrounded and defeated Ferguson’s force at King’s Mountain, South Carolina. This short engagement (about one hour long) began a series of events leading to the final defeat of the British and the end of the war.

Ferguson did not take these “rebels” seriously, considering them substantially inferior to himself. But these men, while appearing to be no match for a superpower such as Britain, were expert marksmen and brave fighters.

David, like these “mountain boys,” was a force to be reckoned with in battle. In 2 Samuel 22, a song of praise, we discover some of the secrets of his success.

1. *David let God direct.* When in trouble, he sought God’s guidance. “In my distress I called to the Lord” (verse 7, NIV).

David, a man of tremendous strength, vitality, and cunning, realized his need of God. This allowed him to submit to God’s guidance and not trust his own judgment. Likewise, a surrender of our lives to the Lord opens the way for victory. “[He] trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle” (Ps. 144:1, NIV; cf. 2 Sam. 22:35-46).

2. *David acted.* After accepting God’s guidance, David moved forward in faith. This chapter is crammed with action words—*advance, crush, pursue, pound, trample, scale*, etc. David accepted God’s power as supreme and acted on it, confident that He would deliver.

Too often we do nothing, expecting God to unleash the heavenly legions to do what we could accomplish ourselves.

3. *David praised God.* He begins and ends this psalm with praise. “For this [his deliverance] I will extol thee, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to thy name” (verse 50, RSV). “The secret of David’s deep religious experience lay in the fact that he constantly kept in mind the mercies he had received from God and never ceased thanking the Lord for them.”²

1. Henry Lumpkin, *From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South* (New York: Paragon House, 1981), p. 96.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 704.

by Richard Moody

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Can God Make the Right Decision for Us?

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Sam. 24:1-15

Looking back at the events of our life can be pretty scary. At one time or another all of us have done or said the wrong thing. We have the ability to make decisions, but the outcome of those decisions is based on our relationship with God. Few would venture into an important business decision, such as buying a house or investing money in the stock market, without some advice from a professional businessperson. Yet we often neglect to consult our heavenly Father, who is willing to give us all the advice we need for life's circumstances.

Are we afraid that God will not know how to handle our troubles? "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."

It's amazing how we can struggle through some of our busy days, when a simple prayer for guidance would have made all the difference in the world. I guess it goes to show how much compassion God has for each of us. A compassion that passes all understanding.

By studying the text for this week's lesson dealing with the lat-

ter part of David's life, we learn that, while the process of decision-making may be within our power, the power to make the right decision rests in the hands of God.

Overconfidence

When things seem to go well, there is no need to worry. So why not give ourselves a pat on the back? After all, our ability to cope successfully with the problems of our life has left us feeling pretty good. We have everything under control. Right? Wrong! This is the trap into which David fell. To allow Satan to push thoughts of independence from God into our head is the surest way to set ourselves up for a big fall.

Humility

Throughout David's life we find that he did many things that he wasn't proud of, but he found peace in his heart that comes from being forgiven. David knew what it really meant to be sorry, not just because he got caught, but because he felt in his heart that he had sinned against God. He humbled himself and asked God for forgiveness. We too can experience the freedom and peace that Jesus brings when we ask to be forgiven. It doesn't matter how large or small those sins may be, because Jesus can handle them. It's all in the spirit in which we ask.

**The Desire of Ages, pp. 224, 225.*

by Evan Valencia

Evan Valencia is a junior religion major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Friday, March 29

Realistic Relationship

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Sam. 23:5

I remember times when I questioned God's demands on my life. Wasn't He being just a bit rigid? How could I have a real relationship with God when He seemed always to be telling me what I was doing wrong? My spiritual life felt more as if God were dominating me rather than giving me a chance to give and take. I think David understood that, even though God was the supreme judge, He was also the best father anyone could have. How could anyone enjoy a relationship with someone they feared? I couldn't, and David couldn't either.

Somewhere in my spiritual life I realized that God wasn't the tough boss that I had thought He was. I thought of my own father, and then reasoned that surely God, a God of love and mercy, would give me a greater love than my earthly father, so I began looking at God in a more friendly manner. I thought of Him as being

with me all the way, all the time. I began sharing everything with Him because I knew that He would never leave me.

David must have looked at God in the same way because, even though he sinned, he always felt comfortable enough to cry out to God for help—even in the worst of times. David knew that he was a sinner, but even more important, David knew that God was his friend and the forgiver of his sins.

When a relationship is established with God's unconditional terms of acceptance, the relationship will grow and develop. It seems that our opinion of God's willingness to accept us will determine how much of a chance we are willing to give Him. If we see Him as impossible to please, then we probably won't give Him a second thought. However, if we believe that God will never leave us and that we can take any problem to Him, then we can restore our relationship and enjoy the full support of God's love. David found it. I found it. I hope you will find it too.

by Terry Wilks

Terry Wilks is a computer science major at Southern College, Colledale, Tennessee.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Ezekiel

For readers who have not yet received a copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY for second quarter 1991, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Calling and Mission

Scripture: Ezek. 1-3

Theme: This week's study provides a basis for understanding the historical context of the quarter's lessons and focuses on the subject of answering God's calling and discovering personal mission, or vocation, in the world. A calling drives Ezekiel's ministry as he learns what God wants for his life and begins to witness to that vision. This lesson explores what governs his life and, by extension, what guides our own decisions about purpose and meaning in life.

Lesson 2: Listening to God

Scripture: Ezek. 1-3

Theme: The prophet Ezekiel tries many things to get the people truly to hear the message of God. Although these early chapters of Ezekiel do not yet reveal a clear understanding of God's message, we should note His attempts to get those who should understand His will to respond and redirect their life. Ezekiel knows not only of the destruction to come on Jerusalem but also of the stubbornness of people who claim to be God's own. How will he resolve this tension? What God will do to get them to hear is the theme of this week's study.

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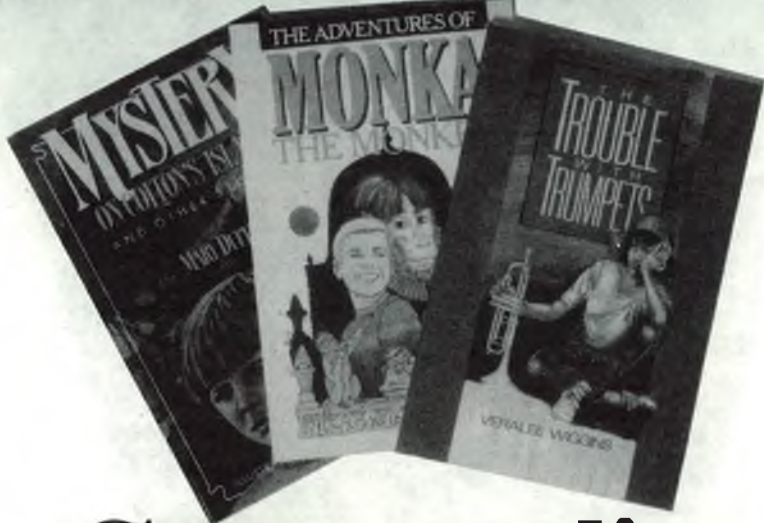
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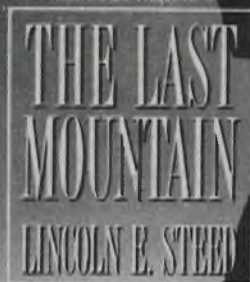
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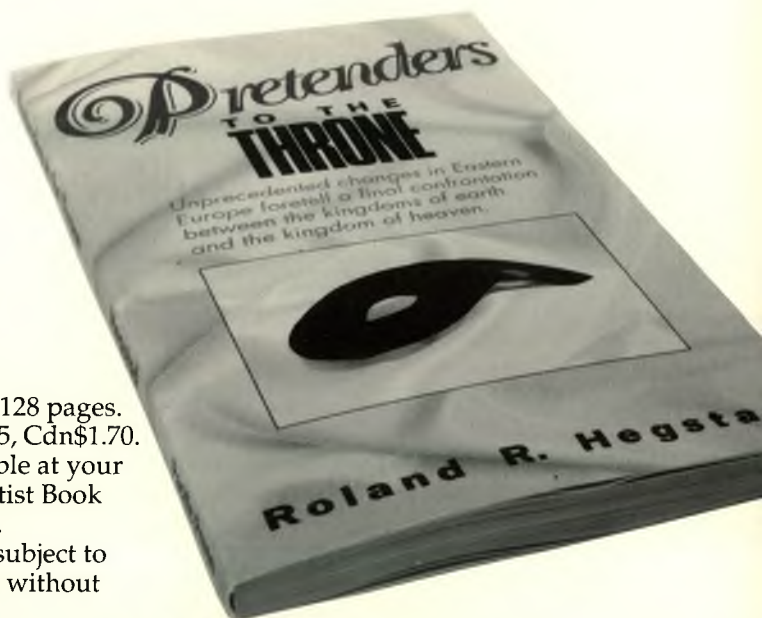


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