

Judges/  
Ruth/  
1 Samuel

# GOD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

The Story of Ruth  
*the eye of redemption  
in the middle of a wicked storm*

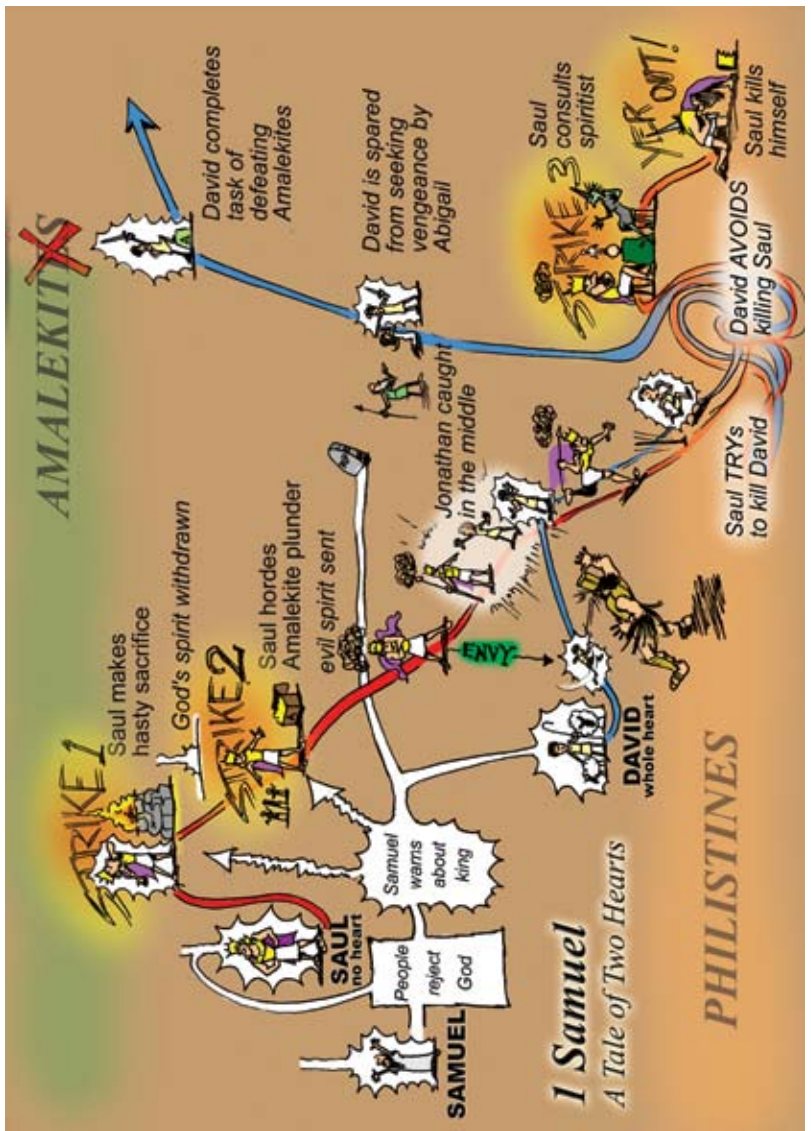
STORM OF JUDGES

Boaz' faithfulness  
Kinsman-Redeemer  
Spread his cloak over Ruth



Risks, and lays at Boaz' feet  
Willing to be Boaz' servant  
Committed to Naomi  
Committed to Yahweh  
Desperate; Moabite, childless widow

Obed  
Jesse  
David  
JESUS



Monday: Judges 16-21  
Tuesday: Ruth 1-4  
Wednesday: 1 Samuel 1-4  
Thursday: 1 Samuel 5-8  
Friday: 1 Samuel 9-12

## Introduction

This week we read in three different books: Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel. Throughout these chapters we meet some very colorful characters.

Samson

Micah

Ruth

Hannah

Eli

Samuel

Saul

It is difficult to write an introduction to a section of reading that lands in such diverse books. So, instead, the following are three mini-introductions to each of the books that you will be reading this week.

## Finishing Judges

As we finish Judges we hear the crashing of Israel on the valley floor. The opening chapters on Monday's reading describe the bizarre tale of Samson, the self-centered, super-naturally strengthened, womanizing, leader of Israel. His rule ends in humiliation and self-destruction.

From that point on the book of Judges becomes an almost satirical look at how completely dysfunctional a nation can become when it has no boundaries, no sense of collective conscience, and no strong leadership.

## Ruth

I don't know about you, but, after wallowing in the muck and mire of Judges, I was ready for a shower. The story of Ruth provides the redemptive cleansing and the breath of fresh air that we desperately need at this point in our journey through the Old Testament.

The true story line of the nation of Israel actually flows right from Judges into the book of 1 Samuel. Had we followed that continuous story line we may have found ourselves overwhelmed by the maelstrom of one blast of sinfulness to the next. If the story of the Israelites in the book of Judges and on into Samuel is a wicked storm of idolatry, disobedience, and destruction, then the story of Ruth is the "eye of the storm" that reminds us of God's faithfulness and blessing to the faithful.

# 1 Samuel

This book picks up right where Judges left off. The nation of Israel was intensely steeped in various forms of idolatry. The priesthood that served at the tabernacle was corrupt and self-serving. Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. After hitting the bottom of the barrel, there was no where left to go but up for the nation. At the very least, something had to change. 1 Samuel marks a very significant change for the nation as it records the shift from a theocracy (a system of government where the people self-rule with the assumption that all people are equal and equally value God's laws) to a monarchy (a system of government where one man rules with absolute authority over the lives of all citizens). In this week's reading we will be introduced to the last judge of Israel, Samuel, who anoints the first king of Israel, Saul.

## Monday: Formula for Disaster

Read the following verses and record the repeated phrases.

Judges 17:6

Judges 18:1

Judges 19:1

Judges 21:25

Let's now focus in on the story of Micah in Judges 17-18.

What did Micah do with the silver his mother gave him? (17:5-6)

What did Micah do with the traveling Levite? (17:7-12)

What confidence did Micah have as a result of having this Levite in his home? (17:13)

In chapter 18...

Where were the Danites heading? Why?

What did they do with Micah's Levite? Why?

How did Micah feel about it?

What obvious contrast does the author of Judges make between the Danites' behavior and the plan of God? (v. 31)

## Food for thought:

In the verses that you were directed to read you discovered the formula for disaster.

Israel had no king + Everyone did as he saw fit = Disaster

No King. Was this a bad thing for Israel to not have a king? We will find out later in 1 Samuel that it would actually turn out to be a bad thing for Israel to have a king. So why was the fact that Israel had no king a problem? The real problem is found in the second phrase, "everyone did as he saw fit."

The problem with Israel in the book of Judges is that they had no center. There was no unifying, centralizing core to the society. You may be thinking, "hey, wasn't the Law of Moses supposed to be the central, unifying aspect of the society." Yes it was. The problem was that the people chose to abandon the Law and follow after the pagan religions of the neighboring Canaanites. Without a common morality based in the Law, and without a central person to give leadership to the nation, the Israelites were spinning wildly out of control.

Here is a truth about society in general. When a society shares a common value system there is little need for a large government to rule over it. If each member of society lived according to the shared values, then the people would govern themselves. When the society does not share a common value system, when what is right to one person is wrong to another person, then it becomes very difficult for people to govern themselves. At that point there becomes a need for a ruling government to impose a standardized value system upon the people and then

to enforce that value system through legislation and punishment. This becomes an inverse relationship; the larger and stronger the common values, the smaller the government; the smaller and weaker the common value system, the larger and more necessary the government.

God's desire for His people was that they would circumcise their hearts, fully internalize the heart of God's Law, and walk according to the spirit of that Law. If the people had actually done this, then there would be no need for a king. Sadly, the people merely circumcised their flesh, viewed the Law of Moses as an external list of do's and don'ts, and quickly abandoned this value system. By turning to the neighboring pagan faiths, each tribe evolved into its own unique distortion of God's truth, resulting in confusion and animosity within the family of Israel. Without a common law and without a king to rule over them, Israel was doomed.

The formula we are discussing is true for all societies, including our own. The Western World and the United States in particular, is fully steeped in a pluralistic society. That means that there are many, many different people groups in our society, each carrying very different sets of values. Many of these people groups own values that are diametrically opposed to one another. One group says that you can abort your child, the other says you cannot. One group says that there should be same-sex marriage, another says you should not. One group says there is no difference between male and female and all people should have equal access to all levels of authority, another says that men and women are different and should be limited to gender-specific roles. The list of diametrically opposed value systems in our society could fill several pages.

What does this mean? It means that our common values are drastically diminished, necessitating a large government. As people left to ourselves, we can't get along. Knowing that this internal distress will rip our nation apart, the government becomes larger each year, passes more and more laws to regulate our "morality", and thus is taking more and more freedom and control away from people. The more freedoms that are taken away from people the more people will buck against the government and strive to gain identity.

As the commonly shared values decrease in our country, the power and control of the government will increase. Being a "democratic" society, the government will be persuaded to make legislation based upon the loudest lobbyists and the deepest pockets.

The point of this is that our society cannot continue much longer on the trajectory that it is on. Eventually something is going to give and the bubble is going to burst. As we have already stated, society needs one of two things to get along. It either needs a commonly shared value system or a powerful, authoritative government that is not afraid to enforce its own value system upon its citizens. Either way there will eventually emerge a dominant value system that will oppress and eliminate its competing systems in order to bring "peace" to the society. Just study history and you cannot deny this inevitability.

At this point some Christians reading this may interpret these words as a call to arms for the Christian activist to "reclaim America" for Christ. That is not the message. In human systems, the only way to "win the day" for your value system is through force. As wonderful as the democratic system is, and no matter how many Christians turn out to the voting stations to shoot down immoral

laws and fight for what's right, you cannot legislate morality. Let's say that the Christian world view won the legislature and biblical laws were established in our country. If the people of the country do not believe in the values that created the laws, then the only way to enforce those laws would be through a strong-armed government. Is having biblically based laws that are enforced by militant police really what we mean when we say we want to "Reclaim America?"

As Christians we need to always remember some important points:

1. If the church is going to be healthy then it must remember that we *do* have a central value system and a central ruler; Jesus Christ. Jesus fills both of these roles. That is what He meant when He said that He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. The center of the church is the person of Jesus Christ. The strength of the church is a twofold unity. First a genuine unity with Jesus in a personal relationship. And, secondly, a unity between the members of the body that flows from the unity each individual has with Jesus. We must stay focused, not be distracted, and stay filled.
2. The church's purpose in the world is not to conquer it with the sword of politics and impose the law of Christ on others. The church's purpose is to BE salt and light in the world. We are to demonstrate to society that the law of Jesus actually does bring peace to humanity. The Kingdom of God is the better way of true love. We will make a far greater impact on the world if each individual believer and each individual local congregation actually

walked in the Kingdom of God and loved everyone around them, regardless of race, religion, or social status. It is the unity of the body and the love of Jesus that will be the salt to make people thirsty for Jesus and the light to guide their way to Him.

3. Our King was physically crushed by the humanly constructed political systems of His day. As scary as this may sound, it is most likely that the United States will not go in favor of the values of the Kingdom of God. Our government will probably be overtaken by the loudest value system of the day. It is very probable that the church may come under persecution in order to “maintain peace” in our society. While that may be scary to our flesh... it’s OK. We are not citizens of this political system. We are citizens of Heaven, brothers and sisters with people from all nations, who bow the knee to the King of Kings. No matter what happens in our world, Jesus will always rule!

## Tuesday: The Eye of the Storm

Ruth

In this little book we see a beautiful story about love and redemption. As you read this story make some observations about the main characters.

Naomi

Ruth

Boaz

## Food for thought:

In order to fully understand the story of Ruth there are some key cultural issues that must be made clear. First of all, we must remember, whether we like it or not, the 14th century B.C. in Canaan was a male-dominated society. Women were little more than property. This was not God's intent for the male-female relationship, but the Israelites were still in the process of emerging from their Babylonian/Egyptian/Canaanite influences. God deals with us where we are, puts up with a lot of misguided thinking, and leads us to where we need to go. That being said, we must place ourselves fully in this male-dominated society to see the truly redemptive aspects of this story.

Ruth was a woman who, in an Israelite's eyes, could not be any worse off. She was a Moabite (a cursed people), a widow, and childless. In those days, the only good, honorable, and lasting contribution that a woman could make to society was to provide a male heir to her husband so that his family name could live on and his real estate could stay within the family. A childless woman, or a woman who had no sons, was considered cursed and was to be pitied. Ruth was in bad shape. She had no husband, she was a foreigner, and she had no children. She was lost and destitute.

Ruth showed remarkable faithfulness in spite of her desperate condition. At first Naomi tried to convince Ruth to return to Moab, but Ruth was convinced that Yahweh was the one true God and that her covenant to Naomi's family was a lasting one. As we follow the story, we can see that Ruth's actions progressively stepped her up from a desperate state as an outsider of Yahweh into the center of Yahweh's redemptive plan.

1. Ruth's first act of faithfulness was to commit her life to Yahweh. This Moabite woman was demonstrating more faithfulness to Yahweh than the Judges that He had called to lead Israel.
2. Ruth's second act of faithfulness was her commitment to Naomi. Here we see the importance of family commitments and the intimacy and love that holds this foundational relational unit together.
3. Next, Ruth was willing to live as a servant of Boaz and glean from the left-overs of his field. If you will remember, in Leviticus, as a provision for the poor, the farmers were commanded to go through their fields only once to harvest and leave the left-overs for the poor in the community to glean. Ruth was simply acting as a poor, destitute woman, gleaning the left-overs to provide for herself and her mother-in-law.

Before we continue on with Ruth's steps of faithfulness, we must look at Boaz and observe how he was an equally faithful man, full of integrity. In order to understand Boaz' faithfulness there is one concept that must be fully explained.

*Kinsman-Redeemer OR the Levirate marriage. The Israelites felt that it was very important for a man to have an heir. To preserve the property inheritance that God had given them, they had to convey it through family lines (cf. Ex. 15:17-18; Ps. 127-128). A woman who was unable to have children often felt the rebuke of her neighbors (Gen. 30:1-2, 23; 1 Sam. 1:6-10; Luke 1:25). She and her family would then retreat into earnest prayer (Gen. 25:21; 1 Sam. 1:10-12, 26-28).*

*A more serious situation arose if her husband died before she had borne an heir. To solve this problem, the practice of levirate marriage was begun. First mentioned in connection with the family of Judah (Gen. 38:8), levirate marriage later became a part of the Law of Moses (Deut. 25:5–10). When a woman was widowed, her dead husband's brother would marry her according to levirate law. The children of this marriage became the heirs of the deceased brother, in order that "his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:6). If a man refused to marry his widowed sister-in-law, he was publicly disgraced (Deut. 25:7–10; cf. Ruth 4:1–7).*

*The most familiar example of this was the marriage of Boaz to Ruth. In this case, the nearest of kin was unwilling to marry Ruth; so Boaz, as the next-nearest of kin, acted as the kinsman-redeemer. Having paid the indebtedness on Elimelech's inheritance, he took Ruth to be his wife "to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place" (Ruth 4:10). David was the third generation from this marriage, and from this line later came Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:17; Rom. 1:3).<sup>1</sup>*

Boaz was faithful to the law of God, to the honor of his family, and to the honor of Ruth's faithfulness. He did the right thing by going to the closest of kin first, even though he probably wanted to swoop in and snatch up Ruth for himself.

(As a side note. His attitude reminds us of how Jesus and James taught to not place yourself in the seat of honor, but to humble yourself until you are invited to that seat. It seems that this is what Boaz was doing.

How many times do we dive in to grab hold of the credit, or the praise, or the choice cuts, only to be embarrassed later. God is the one who knows the true score of the game. Let's let Him reward us in His time...even if that is after we are glorified with Him.)

Back to the story. Knowing Boaz' character, we can now return to the steps Ruth was taking.

4. She took a big risk when she lay down at Boaz' feet. First of all, women were not supposed to be on the threshing floor. Secondly, what if he rejected her? That would have been emotionally devastating for her. Here we can learn a life lesson. We must be bold and take relational risks if we are going to experience the redemptive power and blessing of God. Ruth could have stayed a servant girl and eeked out a meager existence off the gleanings of Boaz' field. Instead, she got bold, walked onto the threshing floor, and submitted herself to this man. Where do we need to take risks? Is there a phone call we need to make to someone against whom we are harboring bad feelings? Is there a conversation that needs to take place with a spouse that will be a tough-love, truth-telling session that puts knots in the pit of your stomach? Is there a financial step you need to take in order to get out of debt or move to the next level of your business? Is there a new person in the church that you need to come alongside and get to know? The ultimate risk we need to take is that of facing God. Are we willing to lie down at God's feet and let Him do with us what He will?

When Boaz saw Ruth, his heart went out to her and he "covered her with his cloak." This phrase, all throughout the Old Testament, means that he took

her in marriage. Covering her with his cloak was symbolic of providing shelter and protection for this vulnerable and helpless woman. It is much like a mother hen that takes her chicks “under her wing.”

This beautiful act of protection from Boaz is a picture of God in Jesus. It is not much of a stretch to draw an analogy between the story of Ruth and our own spiritual journeys. We begin our journey as a desperate individual, lost in sin, and a stranger and alien to God’s people. Jesus is our kinsman. He became human, He entered into the human family in order to become related to us, to be our kinsman. He knows our desperate situation and waits for us to make the move. We must first commit to God, commit to the community, and risk laying ourselves in absolute surrender before Him. When we do that, Jesus covers His blood-soaked garment over us and brings us into a life-giving, redemptive relationship with Him. Once we are “married” to Him, then we can enjoy the blessings of His full estate, which is the infinite glory of God. Isn’t that awesome?!

Notice in the chart that I have reconnected to the vessel, filling, and overflowing motif that we talk so much about. Ruth and Boaz were faithful vessels. God remains always faithful to His covenant and pours Himself into any vessel that willingly opens itself up to Him. Notice what the overflow of this vessel is. From Boaz and Ruth came Obed. Obed had Jesse. Jesse had David (a king to whom God promised an eternal throne), and ultimately, from the line of David came Jesus Christ, the supreme Kinsman-Redeemer. Isn’t it just like God to use a desperate, childless, Moabite widow to be an integral part of His redemptive plan for the whole world. If He can use Ruth, He can use you.

# Wednesday: A Faithful Mother: A Negligent Father

1 Samuel 1-2, 4

Why was Hannah sad?

What vow did Hannah make to God? (1:11)

What was the result of Hannah's actions? (2:21)

What kind of men were the sons of Eli?

What accusation did God make against Eli? (2:29)

What contrasts can you make between the mothering of Hannah and the fathering of Eli?

## Food for thought:

Here are some observations about why Hannah seems more honorable than Eli.

She obeyed the Law regarding the redemption of the firstborn. (Exodus 13:13-15; 34:20; Numbers 3:46; 18:15-17) In the Law of Moses, since God had taken the firstborn of every household in Egypt, the Lord required that the people of Israel give their firstborn to Him. The firstborn son was to be dedicated to the Lord, given completely over to Him. He did mean this literally, but He also made a provision for the people to “cash out” on the commitment. A monetary value was placed on the life of the firstborn child, and a family could opt to “redeem” the child and give the money to the house of the Lord rather than the child.

There are many reasons why this law was created, some of which we probably don't understand. One reason it was created was to provide an analogy for the redemption that God gives us through Jesus Christ. God redeemed us, or bought us out of sin, with the blood of Jesus.

Another reason, and probably the deeper and more immediate reason, was to give the Israelites an opportunity to actualize and demonstrate their total commitment to the Lord. Remember, God is not messing around; He wants the best of all that we have. He wants the firstborn of our lives, not the leftovers. In our culture this is true, but especially in the ancient world the firstborn son was everything to a family. The firstborn son received the inheritance of the father and carried the family name on into the next generation. By offering your firstborn to the Lord you were literally saying, “Lord, you own everything I have.”

God still asks us for our firstborn, even if we don't

have a physical child. He wants the firstborn ambitions, the firstborn fruit; He wants the best of all that you have. Too many times we tend to give the best of what we have to the taskmasters of the world who don't love us, don't care for us, but give us money to put food on the table. We give the world our best, and then drag our weary self into the presence of God...if we feel like it. We don't give God the first because we are afraid that if we give it to Him, then we won't have enough to pay the bills and meet our commitments at work and in the world. God promises us that if we will trust Him enough to give Him the first of what we have, that He will more than take care of the rest.

In Hannah's day it is most likely that the people of Israel had abandoned the law of bringing their firstborn to the Lord. If they did follow that Law, they probably opted to throw some money at it and get their child back. While cashing in or redeeming the child was acceptable according to God's Law, it leaves room for outward behavior to exist without a transformed inward attitude. In the same way it is very easy for us to go through the right motions (giving a tithe, coming to church, serving in a ministry, etc.) but still have an unsundered heart. Hannah wasn't like that. She didn't just follow the letter of the Law, she actually did the Law. She gave Samuel to the Lord and handed him over to Eli to serve in the Tabernacle. Wow! It must have been a difficult step for Hannah, yet she did it in faith. Her simple and bold faith changed the course of life. It changed her life and the life of the nation. Because of her faithfulness God opened her womb and she had many more children. Because of her faithfulness the nation of Israel was given the man named Samuel who would guide them into the next phase of their existence.

Her parenting was God focused, Eli's was child and self-focused. Eli made the tragic mistake that most parents fall into. He looked out for the best interest of his children over and above the best interest of God. Too many times we become child-centered and want our kids to be happy all the time. Unfortunately this becomes true in how we train our kids about God. We want our children to love God so much that we can fall into the temptation to always present the "happy and fun" God to them. We never want church to be boring, so we cart them off to their own church service where they can have fun the whole time. We don't want them to have to sit still in church because that might turn them off and they will grow up and turn away from God.

Unwittingly, by creating this environment of constant entertainment and "fun" for our children, we are actually teaching them the opposite message that we intend. Rather than teaching them that God is fun and cool, we are teaching them that God exists to entertain them. We are teaching them that every impulsive desire of their hearts is something that demands attention. We are teaching them that God is their servant.

Children (young and old alike) are basically self-focused. When we have a need or a desire, we cry and whine until we get it. Part of the transformation that must take place in every person's heart is that of focus. We must focus our attention and fixation away from self and onto God. In so doing we will become "other-oriented" and will be able to actually love God and love our neighbor. If we always got what we wanted, when we wanted it, then we would never have to realize that we are not the center of the universe.

Eli made this mistake. He trained his boys that their position in the temple was self-focused. In the Law of Moses God told Aaron that the offerings given at the Tabernacle belonged to the priests. It was their sustenance, to support their service of God and the people. Eli and his son's distorted this truth and manipulated into believing that they deserved the choice pieces of the sacrifice, that it was owed to them, and that their position as priest gave them authority in the lives of the "common man" to use and abuse as they saw fit.

Hannah, on the other hand, trained her son that service to God, for God's sake is the mode in which we should operate. She did not look to meet her own needs first, but kept God's Law at the forefront of her mind and her behavior toward her child.

As parents in our current youth-centric, over-stimulated, must-be-entertained-at-every-moment, can't-sit-still culture, perhaps we could make some effort to teach our children the discipline of waiting. We can teach them that it is OK to sit and listen to an adult talk during worship time. It is OK to politely allow someone to express themselves in a way that may not be interesting or even make sense to you, and that you, out of sheer respect for others, should pay attention and show respect.

Am I saying that we should intentionally make church boring to "teach our selfish kid's a lesson?" No. Should we never do wild and crazy kid-oriented stuff in worship? Of course not. Should our worship space be dull and lifeless? No way. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is that, as parents and spiritual aunts and uncles in our church communities, we need to make sure that we find practical ways to teach our children that God's desires and the needs of others take priority in the life of a Christian. No human

being is the center of the universe. God is the center and we all, equally and mutually, orbit around Him.

# Thursday: It's Not You They Have Rejected

1 Samuel 8:1-22

What did the people demand from Samuel? (vv. 4-5)

What was the emotional response to this demand on Samuel's part? On God's part? (vv. 6-8)

What warning did God give the people concerning their request for a king (what would the king do to them)? (vv. 9-18)

What was the people's response to this warning? (vv. 19-20)

What did the people think the King would do for them? (v. 20)

## Food for thought:

What a slap in the face this must have been for Samuel and for the Lord! Try to put yourself in the Lord's perspective here (I realize this is an absurdity to even attempt to see from God's perspective, but work with me on this). From the day you brought these people out of slavery in Egypt you have promised to go out before them, to govern them, and to defeat their enemies for them. Not only have you promised to do it, you have delivered it time and time again. Did *they* drown the mighty Egyptian army in the sea? Did *they* have to tear down the walls of Jericho? Did *they* hurl hailstones at the Gibeonites? Did those 300 men slay the Midianites with torches and trumpet blasts?

After all that God had done for the Israelites, imagine how He must have felt to hear them say that the king would, "lead us and go out before us and fight our battles" If I were God I would have said, "Hello! What am I, chopped liver?" Fortunately I am not God (a resounding Amen comes from the congregation!) and His ways are higher than my ways.

Here are some observations and lessons from this passage:

- 1. It was inevitable for the people to request a king.** As we saw in Monday's devotional, the people had taken their eyes off of God for so long, and their common values had become so diluted and pluralistic, that they had to defer to a centralizing, human ruler to bring peace to their society.
- 2. Their focus was so deeply based in human, physical reality, that they could not even see the Kingdom of God at work in them.** The reality of God's hand in their history made no

impact on their practical life. They were so focused on their bellies and their survival that they could not see the spiritual reality of the covenant relationship that they had with God.

**3. Their spiritual blindness had created such tunnel vision that they were willing to reject the sound reasoning that God offered them when he spelled out the consequences that would come from choosing a human king.**

So many times, when people feel that they are backed into what appears to be a desperate situation they are willing to betray reason and their own conscience just to get out of it. The old saying goes, “desperate times call for desperate measures.” Spouses who feel trapped in an impossible marriage will have an affair, sabotage the relationship, or just plain run away from it, rationalizing that “it was so bad, I had to do it.” People who are on the brink of a financial crisis will cheat on their taxes or “fudge the numbers” to make ends meet. People whose lives are literally being threatened will kill in order to save their own life. In human logic this makes sense. The question is, “are there really any desperate times in the Kingdom of God?” Or we could pose the question this way, “by what standard are we measuring desperation?” Is self-protection really the rationalization we need to justify sinful behavior? If so, what did Jesus mean when he said we are to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and pray for those who persecute us rather than repaying evil with evil?

**4. In spite of their short-sighted choices, God was gracious to them.** One of the recurring themes we can observe in God’s

relationship with His covenant people is that He continually gives them a lot of rope. Was it right for them to want a king? No. Was having a king going to make their situation better? No. The right answer to their problem would have been to repent from their ways, reconnect to the heart of God, and allow Him to be their spiritual King. He would, through their surrendered heart, overflow into the physical reality of their existence and bring true peace to their society. Yet, that is not what they requested from God. So, God gave them what they asked for. He allowed them to have a king and worked with them within the parameters of that mixed up situation.

Did he remove their consequences? No. The nation suffered terribly for having chosen a king. All the warnings that He gave them came true in the centuries to follow. Did He abandon them? Never.

The point for today is, "Be careful what you ask for, because you just might get it." God does have a simple plan and will for our lives. He wants our surrendered heart to do with what He will. He wants us to live in His Kingdom and serve Him as King. Yet, the battle between our kingdom and His Kingdom still rages on in our hearts. Let's learn from the poor choices of the Israelites. Let's not look around at the "Jones'" and see all the cool stuff that the "other guys" are doing. Let's not fall into the trap of comparing our lives and our church to others and asking God to make us "like that guy". God does not grade on a curve. He looks at each heart and deals with it based upon the truth of His kingdom. Let's spend some time today and ask God to release us from any of the distractions that we may be facing from someone else's king and get our eyes focused on

Him.

## Friday: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

1 Samuel 12

What emotions can you detect in Samuel's speech?

Outline the brief history that Samuel highlights in vv. 8-12.

What is the key to the success of the nation?  
(vv. 14-15; 20-25)

## Food for Thought:

In this chapter we encounter the third great farewell speech in the Old Testament. The history of Israel and its shifts from era to era seem to be punctuated by these speeches. As the nation shifted from the era of the patriarchs and slavery into the era of conquest in the Promised Land, Moses stood up before them and proclaimed, "I set before you life and death... choose life!" After the dust settled from the conquest of the land and the nation was moving into a system of theocracy, God's ideal form of government, Joshua stood up before the throngs and said, "Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Now, in today's reading, after a radical societal shift from a theocracy to a monarchy, we see Samuel place before the people a choice of living and walking in the ways of God or persisting in evil. The former will lead to life and the latter will lead to death.

Do you see a common theme here? We need to read between the lines a bit when we listen to Samuel's speech. Was Samuel happy about the people's choice to have a King? No. Was God happy about it? No. It seems that Samuel is saying (allow me to paraphrase) "guys, listen. Now that you have a king you think everything will be fine. You're wrong. Nothing has changed. From the beginning God has wanted one thing...your heart. He wants you to fear Him, to love Him, and to serve Him with all your heart. Nothing less. Had you done this from the beginning we wouldn't be having this discussion. Yet, you haven't and now here we stand with a king on our hands. Hear this. The rules haven't changed. Now you just have two layers of responsibility to deal with. Not only do you have to follow God, but you also have to hope and pray that your king follows God as well.

Because if he doesn't...oh boy...are you in for a world of hurt. Bottom line...if everyone keeps their eyes and hearts on God, then this whole thing will work out great. If you or your king gets distracted by the nonsense that is going on around you, then it will be lights out for the whole party. Enough said."

In our lives the same is true. We have all made really stupid choices and we are stuck with the consequences of those choices. We may have brain damage from taking drugs. We may be in prison because we killed someone. We may have blended families and hurting children because we got divorced. Were these things God's perfect desire for us? No. Will God take these consequences away? No. Will the pain and ripple effect of these consequences cease? Probably not. Is all hope lost? No. God can and will work through the mess that we have created and bring something redemptive out of it. The only way that will happen, however, is if we get back to the simple game plan. We must fear the Lord, we must love Him with all our heart, and we must run away as fast as we can from the sin that brought about these consequences in the first place. We must surrender our heart to Jesus, every day. Then, God will come in and work with the "king" that you asked Him to place in your life.

He can work with faulty church systems (because 100% of church systems have some level of human corruption within them, be sure of that) and bring blessings through them in spite of the dysfunction. He can take an illegitimate child and use him to transform the world for His kingdom. He can take a damaged drug-addict and make her a shining beacon of God's grace, forgiveness, and redemption.

Let's never forget that changing the "what" of our lives without changing the "how" of our lives is not

going to make the difference. Changing the “do” without changing the “be” is like rearranging the deck chairs on the sinking Titanic. What difference is it going to make?

Let’s pray for a heart that is surrendered to Jesus and let Him handle the rearranging of our life, our family, our church, and our society.