

The material here is linked to the April–June issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about 45 minutes of study. In addition to the questions, you'll find Leader Notes to guide discussion. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

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Today's Light® (ISSN 1084-4775) is published quarterly by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Subscription rate: 1 year, \$27.00; 2 years, \$50.00; single copy, \$7.00. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO, and at additional mailing offices.

April Week 1 Discussion Questions

April 1–8; Deuteronomy 1–9

1. What are the key themes of Deuteronomy? How does the book apply to us? Review the introduction to Deuteronomy. Who were Og and Sihon (Deuteronomy 1:4–5)? Why does it matter?
2. Review Deuteronomy 2. Our “warfare” as Christians differs from that of ancient Israel in some ways. Still, in some ways it’s the same. How?
3. Read Deuteronomy 3:1–11. With the defeat of Sihon, the Israelites continued their northward march toward the city of Bashan. Along the way, Og, king of Bashan, marched his army to meet Israel near the city of Edrei. God encouraged Moses, telling him, “Do not fear him [King Og]” (3:2). According to 3:11, why might the Israelites have been intimidated by Og? Can you recall a time when God encouraged you?
4. Read Deuteronomy 5:1–33. Moses commanded the hearing of God’s moral laws as presented in the Ten Commandments. The agreement made with God at Mount Sinai binds God to future generations, yet each generation should hear it repeated. Should all of God’s Word be taught to new generations? Why or why not?
5. Read Deuteronomy 7. Our love for God does not earn our salvation. What is the real reason we as Christians desire to love God as He commands? (For help with your answer, consult 1 John 4:19).
6. What perils do God’s people face in poverty? What perils do we face in prosperity? How can we stay out of the “potholes” on *both* these roads? What if we’ve already fallen into one? (See Deuteronomy 8.)
7. What role did Moses play when the people fell into idolatry and worshiped the golden calf? See Deuteronomy 9:7–29. How does this incident apply to us?

April Week 2 Discussion Questions

April 9–15; Deuteronomy 10–17

1. God commanded the Israelites to “love the sojourner.” What significance did God place behind this command (Deuteronomy 10:19)?
2. What made the land of Canaan different from that of Egypt (Deuteronomy 11:10–12)?
3. In the Old Testament, God’s people had one place of worship (Deuteronomy 12). When and why did that change? See John 4:19–26.
4. In what ways does Deuteronomy 15:12–17 picture the believer’s relationship with the Lord Jesus?
5. Read Deuteronomy 16:9–17. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the beginning of the harvest, and the Feast of Booths marked the harvest’s completion. Why were both occasions appropriate times to honor God?
6. To whom was Israel to turn in order to resolve legal questions “too difficult for [them]” (Deuteronomy 17:8)? What penalty applied to those not following the ruling of these men (v. 12)?

April Week 3 Discussion Questions

April 16–22; Deuteronomy 18–26

1. Deuteronomy 18:1–8 relates that offerings were also for priests and Levites. What does that fact reinforce for New Testament believers?
2. Deuteronomy 20 speaks of the Israelites going to war against the people of Canaan. Some have criticized such Old Testament God-ordained warfare. How can we explain it? What light do God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 15:16 shed on this matter?
3. The Hebrew word for “atonement” (Deuteronomy 21:8) is *kaphar*, meaning “to cover.” With the elaborate rite detailed in verses 1–7, God “covers” Israel’s guilt so that she is no longer exposed to His justice. How might this help to deepen our understanding of what Christ did for us at Calvary?
4. Read Deuteronomy 23:1–14. Whom did God exclude from assembling before Him (vv. 1–3)? Why weren’t the Edomites and Egyptians excluded (v. 7)?
5. In a time when merchants sometimes carried two stone measuring weights—a lighter weight for purchasing and a heavier weight for selling—God wanted the Israelites to treat one another fairly. What ordinance did God pass on to His people to protect them from sinning against Him (Deuteronomy 25:13–16)?
6. We are not bound by Old Testament laws. Yet many of those laws focused on principles that still apply. What example does Deuteronomy 26:1–15 afford? Compare with 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 9:6–15.

April Week 4 Discussion Questions

April 23–29; Deuteronomy 27–33

1. Read Deuteronomy 27:1–26. Which tribes stood on Mount Gerizim to “bless the people” (v. 12)? Which tribes stood on Mount Ebal to utter the curses contained in God’s covenant (v. 13)?
2. Read Deuteronomy 29:1–29. Should Israel rebel and fall away from God, how would God use her rebellion to witness to other nations (vv. 25–29)?
3. What connection do you see between Deuteronomy 30:20 and Colossians 3:4? How do both apply to your life?
4. Through Moses, God offered Joshua advice and reassurance (Deuteronomy 31:7–8). Had you been Joshua, how would God’s words have strengthened you as you prepared to succeed Moses?
5. Moses’ song in Deuteronomy 32:1–43 includes many graphic word pictures. Which one strikes you as particularly powerful? Is a given picture an image of Law or of Gospel? Explain.
6. Read Deuteronomy 33. We may be tempted to glorify Moses, but he is not the real hero of Deuteronomy. Who is the real hero in Deuteronomy?

April Week 5 Discussion Questions

April 30; Deuteronomy 34

1. Reflect on Deuteronomy 34 and on your Old Testament readings thus far. Now that you've finished reading the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy), think back over what you've read. What attributes of God particularly strike you? Where have you seen the Lord's compassion toward His people? What confidence does this give you?

May Week 1 Discussion Questions

May 1–6; Joshua 1–6

1. What are some of the key features of the Book of Joshua, and how might you apply them to life today? See the introduction to Joshua. Joshua 1:8 is a key passage in the entire book. How did it apply to the Israelites under Joshua? How does this passage apply to our lives? Why does it appear that many devout Christians are not “prosperous and successful,” at least not outwardly? See Psalm 73.
2. What encouragement does Joshua 1:9 offer? The words “be strong and courageous” are repeated a number of times at the end of Moses’ leadership and throughout Joshua’s (Deuteronomy 31:6, 7, 23; Joshua 1:6, 7, 9; 10:25; 23:6 [with slight variation]). What is the significance of this repetition? How did God keep His promise in Joshua 2?
3. Why was Israel’s crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3–4) an event that called for such detailed treatment? Of what is it a picture for Christians of all times?
4. Describe the two monuments Israel set up as the people crossed the Jordan (Joshua 4). What purpose did they serve? See Joshua 4:21–24. What monuments do Christians today establish?
5. Review Joshua 5:4–8. Then study Colossians 2:11–15. How does the Old Testament ceremony of circumcision compare with the New Testament Sacrament of Baptism? See the devotion for May 5/6 for additional insight.
6. Take a moment to study the map of the division of the land. What are some of the features that strike you? How does it relate to the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation? Sometimes we’re tempted to think of our sins as “a private matter,” just between God and us. Think about Joshua 7, Achan and Ai. The devotion for May 7 reminds us, “We do not sin alone any more than Achan did.” Explain this.

May Week 2 Discussion Questions

May 7–13; Joshua 7–17

1. The destruction of Ai was complete and thorough (Joshua 8). Some see in the conquest of Canaan and God's orders to destroy the inhabitants a cruelty that is incompatible with the New Testament. Others see the seeds of religious persecution. How might we answer such challenges to biblical interpretation? Consult the devotion for May 8 as you discuss this question.

2. Why did the people of Gibeon feel they had to resort to a ruse to be treated mercifully by God and His people (Joshua 9:3, 24)? Describe the ruse they concocted. Do we ever engage in "ruses" in attempting to gain God's mercy? Tell how we might do this. What is a better path for us when we need God's mercy?

3. What is God's purpose for giving Joshua victory over all the kings as described in Joshua 10 (see Joshua 1:6)? What made it possible for Israel to win all these victories (Joshua 10:8, 12, 14, 19, 30, 32, 42)? For Christians today, what assurance is contained in all these passages?

4. Put God's instructions to Joshua that are recorded in Joshua 13:1–7 into your own words. Why did God want Joshua to allocate the land to Israel even though it had not yet been conquered? How is this section similar to Paul's words in Romans 8:31–39?

5. How did the focus of leaders such as Caleb and Joshua help Israel approach the conquest of Canaan? (See Joshua 14–17.) What lessons can we learn from them? See the devotion for May 12/13.

May Week 3 Discussion Questions

May 14–20; Joshua 18–24; Judges 1–5

1. What was the function of the cities of refuge (Joshua 20:1–3)? When would a refugee be free to leave a city of refuge (Joshua 20:6)? How is this mechanism for refuge in Israel similar to Jesus' functioning as our high priest (1 John 2:2)?
2. God fulfilled His great promise of providing a land for ancient Israel (Joshua 21:45; 23:14). What great promises and gifts of God have you experienced in your life?
3. The Book of Joshua ends with both a note of triumph and a warning. Identify each one in Joshua 24. Apply these messages to our own lives (your own life) today.
4. Review Judges 1, which sets the stage for the remainder of the book. What are some of the key features of the Book of Judges, and how might you apply them to life today? See the *Today's Light* introduction to Judges. What was the pattern that Israel fell into time after time during the period of the judges?
5. Underlying the stories of the three judges presented in Judges 3 is the call to remain faithful to God in the face of the temptations we face every day. What temptations seemingly conquered many of the Israelites? What temptations that we face today are similar to those of the Israelites during the time of the judges? How might we help the people of our time resist these temptations? For some ideas about the difficulties God's people may face, consult Judges 2:3, 10, 17. What help does God provide in our battle against temptation?
6. Deborah is considered one of the major judges. What is unique about her among the judges? See the devotion for May 19/20.

May Week 4 Discussion Questions

May 21–27; Judges 6–21

1. What great victory did God perform through Gideon (Judges 6–8)? How is this victory an encouragement for us as we face huge obstacles? See the devotion for May 21.
2. What will the punishment of the unrepentant be like? We can get a glimpse of what God’s punishment is like in Judges 9. What was Abimelech’s sin? How did God deal with it (Judges 9:50–57)? How did God punish our sin (Isaiah 53:3–9; Matthew 27:32–50; Galatians 3:13–14) and give us life and salvation? Thank God for your salvation using the words of the hymn “Christ, the Life of All the Living” (*LSB* 420).
3. What did you find especially startling about the story of Jephthah (Judges 11–12)?
4. State in your own words the prayer of Samson’s father, Manoah, in Judges 13:8, 12. What was God’s answer to this request (Judges 13:13–14)? What do you think the training of a Nazirite would entail (Judges 13:4–5)? Do you think Samson’s life was what the parents envisioned? Did his life honor God? At his death, Samson’s family buried him in his father’s cemetery plot (Judges 16:31). How might this family’s care for Samson reflect God’s care for us?
5. What was Micah’s sin (Judges 17:4–6)? How did this sin become the sin of the tribe of Dan (Judges 18:19)? Do we latch on to the sins of others and make them our own? Give some examples. What is God’s cure for this sin (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Colossians 2:8, 13–15)?
6. What tragedies occur when everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)! Several sinful tragedies are interwoven in the story recorded in Judges 19–21. Describe each of these sinful tragedies. Sin often leads to more sin. How did Israel deal with the sin in their midst? What new problem resulted? Was anyone “innocent” in this whole matter (Judges 21:22)? This whole situation is a picture of the sinful condition of all humanity; people die because of sin. What is God’s solution for our sinful condition (Romans 5:12–21)?

May Week 5 Discussion Questions

May 28–31; Ruth 1–4

1. How do Ruth's words to Naomi, "Where you go I will go" (1:16), attest not only to her love for her mother-in-law but also to the power of the Gospel? How do those words encourage us?
2. As you read Ruth 2, look for clues that help you develop a picture of the type of person Boaz was. What kind of person was he? Boaz is an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32). How is Boaz a picture of Jesus?
3. What is a kinsman-redeemer supposed to do (Deuteronomy 25:5–6; Leviticus 25:25)? How does Boaz fulfill that responsibility (Ruth 3:13)? How is Jesus our Kinsman-Redeemer?
4. God is a God of redemption. How do the words of the women to Naomi (Ruth 4:14–17) confirm this? Trace Naomi's path from being empty to full to empty to full (Ruth 1:1, 3, 21–22; 2:18; 3:15–18; 4:13–17)? How is our path similar?

June Week 1 Discussion Questions

June 1–3; 1 Samuel 1–2

1. The writer in 1 Samuel 1 describes Hannah, her prayer, and the birth of Samuel. What lessons can you learn from this woman of faith?

2. Skim Hannah's song of praise (2:1–10). Which verses best describe what the Lord has done for you? Explain.

June Week 2 Discussion Questions

June 4–10; 1 Samuel 3–11

1. Why do you think the holy writer mentions so pointedly that Eli, Israel’s “seer,” was physically blind (1 Samuel 3:2)? What spiritual truth does this irony communicate? What seems to be God’s cure for this blindness in Israel?
2. When the Philistines defeated Israel in battle, what did the leaders of Israel do to try to change their fortunes (1 Samuel 4:3)? What was really wrong in Israel (1 Samuel 2:12–17, 29; 4:21)? How is God already at work to make things better?
3. Why were men of Israel killed when the ark was returned to Israel (1 Samuel 6:19–20)? Can you identify instances when Christians of our own time may be guilty of the same sin? Review the Third Commandment and its explanation. With respect to His Word and worship, to what kind of life is God calling us (Matthew 4:10; Luke 11:28; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16)?
4. In 1 Samuel 7, we read of a victory over the Philistines. What is the significance of the stone memorial Samuel built (v. 12), and why is the name *Ebenezer* worth remembering?
5. Does God listen to our prayers and answer our petitions? Read 1 Samuel 9:15–16. Here God assured Samuel, as He does us, that He hears our prayers and acts to meet our needs. Did God really want to answer the prayer of Israel in this way (1 Samuel 8:6–9)? What evidence is there in 1 Samuel 9–10 that God loves His people, even in situations like this? Apply this insight into God’s love to your own life.
6. Based on your reading of 1 Samuel 11, how would you rate Saul as a king? Who seems to be the real ruler in Israel at this point (1 Samuel 11:12–15)? Identify some indicators that God is the ruler in our own lives, our families, and our church.
7. Identify the word of law and grace in Samuel’s sermon (12:1–25). Does any of this Law convict your conscience? Explain as much as you can comfortably do so. What words of grace here comfort you?

June Week 3 Discussion Questions

June 11–17; 1 Samuel 12–17

1. “What have you done?” asked Samuel (1 Samuel 13:11). What had Saul done to offend God? In the first two questions of his “Christian Questions with Their Answers” in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther directs us to ask essentially the same question: Do you believe that you are a sinner? How do you know this? As we prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper we reply, “Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner. (I know it) from the Ten Commandments. These I have not kept.” Basically, which commandment had Saul broken? How is much of our sin like Saul’s sin? Was Saul sorry for his sin? Are you sorry for your sins (Luther’s third question)? Luther uses the remaining questions to assure people of their forgiveness in Christ. Review these questions and answers with your group. They may be found in the catechism or in *Lutheran Service Book*, pages 329–30.

2. For whom was Saul fighting (1 Samuel 14:24)? For whom was Jonathan fighting (1 Samuel 14:6, 10, 12, 45)? What difference did this make in the way they handled situations? How can regarding our daily tasks as opportunities to serve the Lord and relying on His power to complete them be a blessing to us?

3. Why was Saul’s incomplete obedience (1 Samuel 15) no obedience at all? When are you tempted to obey the Lord only partway? What light does James 2:10–11 shed on God’s attitude about partial obedience?

4. Since the Church has recently celebrated Pentecost, it is appropriate to think about this passage: “The Spirit of Lord came upon David in power” (1 Samuel 16:13). The power of the Spirit has enabled many people to do great things for the Lord and His people. Review some of the things that the Spirit has enabled by His power: Numbers 11:21–30; Judges 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:5–6, 9–10; Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:3–11. God will pour out His Spirit on you too (Acts 2:17). What does He empower you to do (Romans 10:10)? Pray for this power of the Spirit to be bestowed on your group abundantly.

5. David’s victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17) is one of the best-known and beloved stories in the Bible. Who really won this battle (1 Samuel 17:37, 45–47)? Is this then a story of the “little guy” winning over the “big guy”? What comfort and assurance does this story give to us who battle Satan each day (1 Corinthians 15:55–58; 1 John 5:1–5)? Read Psalm 21 together to praise God for the victories He gives.

6. Have you had success in life? To what do you attribute your success? Encourage your group to share their experiences and ideas regarding these two questions. Then reflect on the observation of the writer in 1 Samuel 18:14 with respect to David's success. Look at these passages that also speak of God being with us: Exodus 33:15; Numbers 14:9; Deuteronomy 31:17; 1 Kings 8:57–58; 2 Chronicles 32:7–8; Psalm 46:7, 11; Matthew 1:23; Luke 24:29; 2 John 1:3. What are some results of God being “with us”?

June Week 4 Discussion Questions

June 18–24; 1 Samuel 18–24

1. In 1 Samuel 19, the writer further describes Saul’s growing jealousy of David and several of his attempts to kill him. What lessons can you learn from the tragedy of Saul? What makes his life so tragic? What is God’s antidote to this malady?

2. Against the tragic background of the life of Saul, the story of his son Jonathan stands in bright relief. Read about Jonathan’s efforts to protect David from Saul in 1 Samuel 20. Read also the portrait of Jonathan in your *Today’s Light* booklet. What evidence is there that Jonathan and David both had faith in the Lord our God (1 Samuel 20:3, 8, 12, 14, 16, 42)? Give thanks for the shared faith that molds the friendships that you have.

3. What was Jesus’ evaluation of the incident reported in 1 Samuel 21:1–9 (Matthew 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5)? What did Old Testament ceremonial law have to do with Jesus, and how did it relate to the Good News of the Gospel (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 10:1–10)?

4. Do you sometimes feel as Saul did: “None of you is sorry for me” (1 Samuel 22:8)? What are some of the problems Saul had that are a background for his statement? What might be some of the background for anyone who makes such a statement? What encouragement do each of these Scripture passages have for a person who feels no one cares about them: Psalm 115:12–13; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 9:20–22; John 14:1, 18–19; 1 Peter 5:7?

5. In spite of Saul’s attempts to kill David, how did David respond? See 1 Samuel 24. Why did David respond the way he did?

6. As you read 1 Samuel 25, note the many ways that Abigail is a blessing to David. She especially saves God’s servant and ancestor of Jesus from avenging a slight with murder. In your closing prayer, thank God for the many women who serve the Lord faithfully. You may want to use the hymn “For All the Faithful Women” (*Lutheran Service Book* 855) as a resource for this prayer.

June Week 5 Discussion Questions

June 25–30; 1 Samuel 25–31

1. Are you ready to leave resolution of problems in your life to the Lord? Identify the problems David had been having with Saul and the impact this situation had had on David's life. Why didn't David resolve the issue when he had the opportunity (1 Samuel 26:9–11)? Consider a problem you are facing in your life. How might your thinking and approach to dealing with the situation change if you thought of the problem as "the Lord's anointed"?

2. "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy" (1 Samuel 28:16)? Samuel's question is another call to Saul to repent of his sin, even after years of hate and jealousy. It comes at a time when Saul is in despair and using a fortune-teller to contact the dead prophet Samuel. God is serious about our confession also. He dearly wants us to confess our sin and receive His forgiveness. What opportunities do you have to confess your sin? Have you used them faithfully? With your group, study the form for "Individual Confession and Absolution" (*Lutheran Service Book*, pp. 292–93) or "A Short Form of Confession" in Luther's Small Catechism and identify the types of sin we should confess. Then pray together Psalm 51:10–12.

3. Why didn't the Philistine leaders trust David and his men (1 Samuel 29:4)? Do you think their fears were well-founded (1 Samuel 27:8–11)? In some respects, trust must be earned. What has God done to earn our trust? Consult these Bible texts to help your group answer this question: Psalm 57:1–3; Matthew 1:22–23; 8:17; 12:17–21; John 3:16.

4. Living the Christian life is a matter of focus—focus on our Savior-God. What indications are there in 1 Samuel 30 that David, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, did not lose focus (1 Samuel 30:6, 21–23)? Can you name others who, by God's grace, were able to remain focused (faithful) to the Lord, even in times of stress? Pray for that same grace in your own life.

5. It's never too late to give thanks. How did the men of Jabesh-gilead live out this truth? See 1 Samuel 31:11–13. Here it is—midway through 2018. For which blessings are you especially thankful? Share some of these blessings with your group's members. Then praise God for these blessings, perhaps by using the hymn "Now Thank We All Our God" (*Lutheran Service Book* 895).

Leader Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

April Week 1 Leader Notes

April 1–8; Deuteronomy 1–9

1. The Book of Deuteronomy repeats the giving of the Law. It is structured around the farewell sermons of Moses. It is a reminder to us of God leading His people to the Promised Land in keeping with His Word. God will watch over and keep us in the same way. Og and Sihon were the first kings defeated by the Israelites as they began their conquest of the new homeland God had promised to give them. As such, these kings represent the first victories that came to Israel because of the Lord's almighty presence among them. Many psalms refer to these two kings as examples of enemies that the Lord will defeat for His people. Other Old Testament Scripture passages also refer to these two characters. Two and one-half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh) inherited this land east of the Jordan River (sometimes called the Transjordan tribes), but promised to lead their brother Israelites into battle for the Promised Land west of the Jordan River.

2. Talk together about the enemies we battle each day—Satan, the world, our own sinful nature. They endeavor to keep us from living truly Christlike lives, lives that witness to our Lord's grace and the peace our Savior gives. Although these enemies surround us, like ancient Israel we already know the ultimate outcome of our earthly battles. Victory belongs to us because of Christ's cross. In a spiritual sense, Christians here on earth fight a continual "holy war," relying on our Savior for strength and forgiveness even as we look forward to the day when we will enjoy the ultimate victory of heaven.

3. Og was a giant, the last of the Rephaim (an ancient race of large people known for their deeds), who slept in a huge bed. Answers will vary. God often strengthens our faith by using those around us. Moses often received God's reassurance during his travails—reassurance he passed on to his fellow Israelites.

4. The Ten Commandments, which are a restatement of God's moral law for the Israelites, nevertheless allow us to see our sins as if looking in a mirror. God's covenant and His work to bring about salvation for all people through His Son, Jesus Christ, abound even in the Book of Deuteronomy, which, at a cursory glance, appears only to

provide rules and regulations to His peculiar people. The whole teaching of God, both Law and Gospel, should and must be taught to all new generations for the purpose of eliciting contrition and engendering faith.

5. We love God because He first loved us. We keep this command in loving response to what God has done through Christ.

6. It is only by the grace of our loving Savior that we receive power to avoid each of the “potholes” your group has discussed. His grace works in us as we read the Holy Scriptures and as we receive the Sacrament for our strengthening and reassurance. Then, too, if we have already fallen into greed or worry or any of the other sins the group has discussed, only Jesus’ blood can wash away our guilt and give us confidence in God’s presence. Deuteronomy 8 is a good text to use during this discussion. Ask participants to pull phrases or whole verses from this chapter as they make their points.

7. Like the Israelites of old, we need to always guard against the sin of idolatry—if not to a golden calf, then to the things that money can buy or that power affords. There is another, less obvious lesson as well. Moses prayed for the people, “O Lord GOD, do not destroy Your people” (Deuteronomy 9:26). We often think of prayer as a *petition* in which we ask for something we need or want. But, like Moses, we will also want to use *intercessory* prayers, that is, prayers for the welfare of others. Nor should we forget that prayer includes *thanksgiving* as well. God answered Moses’ prayer and did not destroy the people. We have much to be thankful for—especially the forgiveness and salvation that are ours through Christ.

April Week 2 Leader Notes

April 9–15; Deuteronomy 10–17

1. God gave this command to care for the sojourners (those who stayed in the land on a temporary basis) because at one time, Israel herself had been a sojourner in Egypt.

2. Canaan was different from Egypt in that God showered His blessings upon this land. He set this land apart as a prized possession for His people.

3. The various features of the tabernacle (and later the temple in Jerusalem) prefigured Christ. The sacrifices, for example, represented the great sacrifice that the Messiah would make. God kept the Israelites separate from other nations, and the one central place of worship helped keep the people together. As Jesus pointed out in John 4, with the fulfillment of the Old Testament there was no longer need for such centrality. Wherever the Gospel produces faith, people will gather to worship.

4. Deuteronomy 15:12–17 speaks of freeing slaves. This takes on an even deeper meaning as we consider it in relationship to our connection with the Lord Jesus Christ in His cross. Through Christ, we are freed from slavery to sin, death, and Satan.

5. The Feast of Weeks celebrates the Lord's blessing of a harvest. The Feast of Booths celebrates the end of the harvest season.

6. The Levitical priests ruled in cases of homicides and assaults. The death penalty applied to individuals who rebelled against the rule of these men whom God had established to judge over them.

April Week 3 Leader Notes

April 16–22; Deuteronomy 18–26

1. The fact that the priests and Levites were to receive a portion of the sacrifices calls to mind Jesus' words, "the laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). We are not to neglect the needs of those who are devoting their lives to the full-time work of the church. Pastors, teachers, and other church workers need the support of fellow believers—their prayers, their encouragement, and their offerings.

2. Genesis 15:16 says, "And they [Abraham's descendants] shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." The Amorites lived on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Like the other Canaanites, their worship practices included child sacrifice, idolatry, prostitution, and divination. Yet God in His patience gave these people 400 years (in Abraham's case a generation was 100 years) before the Israelites came to take the land. The taking of the land was God's just judgment upon people who worshiped false gods and even went against the natural law (see Romans 2:12–16). Of course, we no longer live under a theocracy—that is, a government directly ruled by God—and so it would be presumptuous for any nation today to declare that an act of aggression is God-ordained. Wars of defense, of course, are part of a government's God-given role in protecting its people.

3. We can apply the word *kaphar* ("to cover") to the work of Christ. Indeed, in His death, God covered our sin so that whenever God looks upon us, He does so through the redeeming blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, instead of seeing our unrighteousness, He sees Christ's righteousness imputed to us.

4. God did not exclude the Edomites because of their relationship to the Israelites; they were descendants of Jacob's brother Esau (Edom). He did not exclude the Egyptians because the Israelites had sojourned in Egypt.

5. God forbade the carrying of two different weights while traveling or at home. By having only one weight, the Israelites again set themselves apart from the nations around them. God promised long days in their new homeland for treating one another fairly.

6. As believers living in the New Testament, we are no longer bound by the laws of the Old Testament. Yet these laws still serve a valuable purpose. They show the people's

inability to fulfill God's demands and their need for the Savior. More than that, they provide us with useful examples and helpful guidelines. The firstfruits and tithes of Deuteronomy are a prime example of this. We do not *have to* give the first of our income, nor do we *have to* give one-tenth of our wealth. Nevertheless, as the New Testament passages from 1 and 2 Corinthians show, we will gladly, freely, and generously prioritize our gifts to the Lord and His work.

April Week 4 Leader Notes

April 23–29; Deuteronomy 27–33

1. The descendants of the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin offered the blessings from Mount Gerizim, while the descendants of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali offered the curses from Mount Ebal.

2. Those nations that saw Israel taken into captivity would realize that her downfall came because she had broken her covenant with God by serving other gods. God would use Israel's captivity to witness to other nations who observed Israel's struggles.

3. Both Deuteronomy 30:20 and Colossians 3:4 explain the truth that the Lord is our life. The first verse says that "the LORD is your life," and the New Testament passage speaks of "Christ who is your life." Jesus is the Lord who led His Old Testament people just as He leads us today. He is not merely one *part* of our life; He *is* our life! Only in Him do we have eternal life. All of life is sanctified by His presence and power actively at work within us.

4. Had we been in Joshua's sandals, we would have been encouraged by knowing that God goes before us and that He will not leave or forsake us. These same words apply to us as we consider letting go of the micromanagement of our lives and surrendering everything into the Lord's hands.

5. Let volunteers comment. It will be helpful if everyone has the text of Deuteronomy 32:1–43 in front of them. The text includes many word pictures, pictures of both Law and Gospel. For example, verse 11 offers Gospel comfort when it speaks of the Lord as "an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions." Accept reasonable answers drawn from the text. Help the group identify whether a given picture is Law or Gospel.

6. The real hero of Deuteronomy is God. He alone led His people to the east side of the Jordan. By God's hand, Moses instructed God's people about how to live in harmony with Him and with one another. God constantly instructed, warned, and disciplined His people. God called His people to Himself even when they distrusted Him, and He fulfilled all of His promises to them through Christ.

April Week 5 Leader Notes

April 30; Deuteronomy 34

1. Reading through the Pentateuch, the first five books of Scripture, is an exhilarating experience. Invite members of the discussion group to share their thoughts. Spend a few minutes reviewing the sweep of the five books of Moses: from creation through the fall to the chosen nations and their arrival on the borders of the Promised Land. We see God's plan unfolding step-by-step, steadily, and surely. As certainly as God carried out His plan of the coming Messiah, we can be certain that He will lead us to the promised land of heaven.

May Week 1 Leader Notes

May 1–6; Joshua 1–6

1. Joshua is a book about warfare—not only the physical conquest of the land, but also spiritual warfare against unbelief and fear. It is also the story of how God keeps His promises. Just as He said, He settled His chosen people in the land of Canaan. Moreover, the very name *Joshua* means “the LORD saves.” As we struggle against the devil, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful flesh, we can be confident of ultimate victory through our Joshua, that is, Jesus. He leads us, strengthens us, and promises the ultimate victory of everlasting life in heaven.

By remaining faithful to God’s Word, according to Joshua 1:8, the Israelites would take the land and prosper in it. As they turned from God, they would suffer calamities, such as foreign invasion and defeat. In general, following God’s laws leads to earthly stability and frequently to prosperity and success. Yet at times it is the wicked who seem to prosper, while the righteous struggle. We need to keep in mind that being spiritually “prosperous and successful” is far more important than enjoying a few brief years of earthly success. While He builds our spiritual lives, God often allows both setbacks and successes to enter our lives. Ultimately, we live by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

2. “Be strong and courageous” are oft-repeated words, because weak human beings (both the Israelites of old and believers today) need constant encouragement and strengthening. As Joshua 1:6–10 shows, true strength and courage come from God’s Word and from knowing that “the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (v. 9). In Joshua 2, God is shown keeping His promise by giving courage to and being with both the spies and Rahab.

3. Crossing the Jordan marked the fulfillment of promises going back to the time of Abraham, more than five centuries before Joshua. In His good time, God fulfilled everything He had promised. Just as Israel crossed into the Promised Land of Canaan, in keeping with God’s promises, through Jesus, Christians look forward to crossing the Jordan into the promised land of heaven. This, too, is a miraculous crossing—through death to life eternal. Crossing the Jordan is a beautiful picture and is used in hymns and many other allusions. Sing stanza 3 of “Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer” (*LSB* 918) as a closing prayer.

4. The monuments described in Joshua 4 included one on the shore and one on the floor of the riverbed. Each was made up of twelve stones, the stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Joshua 4:21–24 describes one of God’s purposes for these monuments. They were to serve as stimulation for faith-talk between parents and children. Elaborate on this as time will allow. You might want to talk about opportunities the Lord provides

parents and grandparents today to witness to their children. Our church buildings today are memorials to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. The devotion for May 5/6 spells out many of the parallels between circumcision and Baptism. Emphasize the point that throughout history the Lord has tied His Word of promise to ordinary physical elements. God connects His Word with these physical things and communicates His love and power to us through them.

6. The division of the land reflected Jacob's blessings upon his sons, as recorded in Genesis 48–49. The descendants of both of Joseph's sons—Ephraim and Manasseh—received portions of land. In this way, Joseph's descendants received a double blessing (see Genesis 48). Rather than having a portion of land, the Levites—who became temple workers and teachers—were scattered throughout the land, while the tribe of Simeon received only scattered towns in the territory of Judah, into which they were eventually absorbed (49:5–7). The tribe of Judah would rule, and from it would come the Savior (49:8–12). Note Judah's relationship to the town of Bethlehem and city of Jerusalem.

Refer participants to the devotion for May 7 as they think about the effect of individual sins on the entire Body of Christ. When we sin, we water down both our witness and our zeal. Of course, God forgives us for Jesus' sake. We will want to ask the Lord to protect us from disobedience, however, in part, because it damages other believers around us.

May Week 2 Leader Notes

May 7–13; Joshua 7–17

1. The destruction of the Canaanites (Joshua 8) was God’s just judgment upon the wicked people of that land. He had said to Abraham that the sin of the people of the land “is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). After half a millennium had passed and the people of Canaan continued in their wickedness and idolatry, the time for judgment had come. That judgment was no different than God’s judgment upon wicked nations in the New Testament era—God brings them down. (Think, for example, of the downfall of the evil empires of the Nazis or atheistic communism.) What was unique about the conquest of Canaan was that the Lord used the Israelites. He has given no such commission to His Church today.

2. The people of Gibeon tried to make it appear that they lived far away from Israel and still wanted the Israelites to treat them mercifully. Their representatives, who looked tired and ragged from long travel, said they had heard about the destruction of Jericho and Ai and did not want the same fate; they “feared greatly for their lives” (Joshua 9:24). We may try to offer God some humble deed or a great offering to obtain His mercy. Early in his life, Martin Luther offered a beaten body. No ruse will gain God’s mercy. Repentance of sin is what God desires (Ezekiel 18:30–32; Luke 15:3–10; 24:47; 2 Peter 3:9), for He is eager to forgive (Psalm 86:5).

3. God was determined to fulfill His promise to Abraham and Jacob and give the land to their descendants (Genesis 15:7–21; 28:13). Joshua and Israel were victorious because God gave them the victories in battle. God has promised His people victory over sin, death, and the devil. He has kept this promise in His Son’s victory over sin and the devil on the cross and His resurrection from the dead on Easter. In addition, God has promised to be with us as we go about His work of proclaiming the Gospel and caring for others (Matthew 28:19–20). He sends His Spirit to strengthen us as we serve (Acts 1:8; 2:17–21). Paul spoke of the help God gave to Him (2 Timothy 4:17–18). He has promised to strengthen us through Word and Sacrament also.

4. Since Joshua was getting old and much of the land promised to Abraham and Jacob was still not conquered, God assured Joshua that He Himself would finish conquering the land (Joshua 13:6). That the land would be conquered was a sure thing, so God told Joshua to be sure to allocate this land also to the various tribes. Paul spoke in a similar confident manner. Since Christ had already died and risen from the grave, no one could any longer condemn those who trust in Christ for salvation. In addition, nothing could separate believers from God. Our place in God’s family is assured. We who believe in Jesus as our Savior can be confident that our salvation is sure and can live lives of joy and service to Him without fear.

5. Rather than focusing on the dangers or the seemingly impossible odds against them, Joshua and Caleb focused on God's sure word and promises. As we set our sights on God's Word and His promises in Jesus Christ, our troubles and problems begin to shrink and we realize with the apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

May Week 3 Leader Notes

May 14–20; Joshua 18–24; Judges 1–5

1. A person who accidentally or unintentionally killed another person could find safety in one of the cities of refuge and there be protected from anyone who might want to punish them for murder or take revenge on them. The person was confined to the city of refuge until he received a fair trial and the high priest died, at which time the person was free to leave the city, presumably his confinement ended and amnesty declared. Christ functions as our high priest, in one respect, by sacrificing Himself for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3) and thus freeing us from having to suffer for our own sin (1 John 2:2). Like the death of the high priest that signaled freedom for the refugee, Christ's death signals our freedom from punishment for our sin. He has suffered death for us.

2. Encourage participants to relate specific examples. The greatest promise that God gives is the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. Along with that, He gives us such priceless gifts as peace, life, contentment, love, and joy.

3. The triumphant note on which the Book of Joshua ends is that the Israelites finally take possession of the Promised Land. The warning is that they must remain faithful to God. As we travel through life, we come to realize that we are always in danger because we are always in spiritual warfare. At the same time, we already possess God's great and unchangeable gifts given for Christ's sake, including the promised land of heaven. Thanks be to God!

4. The Book of Judges covers a much longer period of time than that of Joshua. This in itself is significant. God's watchful providence comes not just in brief bursts, but it extends forever. Because of this, we know that the future is bright; God will never leave us or forsake us. Judges also reminds us that even in seemingly chaotic times, God is in control. Just as the weakness and wickedness of human beings carry on from one generation to the next, so do God's strength, mercy, and forgiveness in Christ.

Time after time, the Israelites fell into sin, only to repent (more or less sincerely), call upon God for deliverance, and then experience God's help. Not only is this the pattern for the period of the judges, but for much of history in general. Participants may wish to relate this pattern to their own individual life experiences.

5. The Israelites frequently succumbed to the temptation to adopt the ways and beliefs of the people around them who worshiped other gods. They intermarried with these families and adopted their ways and forgot what God had done for them. Many values and

practices of the people around us tempt us to forget about God and His Word and to relegate His Law and Gospel to the fringes of our lives. Eventually His Word is forgotten completely. Participation in faithful study of God's Word and worship, teaching God's Word faithfully to children, and living in accord with God's Word are necessary to combat these temptations. God's Holy Spirit will bless faithful living in the Word and generous support of programs of Christian education.

6. Deborah was the only woman judge. She was also a co-leader with Barak. In both of these facts, God shows that He can use all of His people in various ways to carry out His purposes. Ask the participants to think of ways that He might be using them for His Gospel ministry.

May Week 4 Leader Notes

May 21–27; Judges 6–21

1. Gideon’s victory over the Midianites is a classic story of God’s use of small forces to achieve great ends. We can be greatly encouraged knowing that no matter how insurmountable the odds may appear, God can and will bring us the victory of salvation and life through Jesus Christ. See, for example, the promise of 1 Corinthians 15:56–58.

2. God’s punishment for unrepentant sin is horrible. Scripture tells us that “God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he had committed” by murdering his seventy brothers with a cruel, shameful death (Judges 9:56). To deal with our sin, God punished His own Son. He laid the punishment we deserved on Jesus. The crucifixion was not a pretty picture, but Jesus endured it because He loved us. Thank God for your forgiveness by singing the hymn and, by the power of the Spirit, living a life worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20; Colossians 1:10–14).

3. Answers may vary. Some might be struck by the rashness of Jephthah’s promise. In the account of Jephthah, we again see human frailty in contrast to divine faithfulness and power. Others might notice how similar Jephthah’s discussion with the “elders of Gilead” (Judges 11:5–11) is to God’s discussion with Israel (Judges 10:6–16). Jephthah questioned why the leaders in Gilead wanted his help after they had disowned him; God told Israel they should ask the gods they had chosen to follow for help (Judges 10:14). Out of love, God rescued His people (Judges 10:16); similarly, the Lord gave Jephthah victory over the enemies of Gilead (Judges 11:32). In Christ, God is always at the heart of any rescue from sin and temptation.

4. Manoah, Samson’s father, prayed that God would provide direction as to how Samson should be raised. The angel of the Lord told him that Samson’s mother must follow the directions she had been given (Judges 13:4–5, 13–14) to never drink wine or fermented drinks, eat unclean food, or shave or cut his hair; their son was to be set apart for God, meaning that he was to receive training at the synagogue. These parents most likely also taught Samson the stories of God’s dealings with Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Isaac. Samson’s life, in most respects, was probably not what the parents expected, especially when he asked to marry a Philistine woman (Judges 14:1, 3), slept with a prostitute (Judges 16:1), and loved the Philistine Delilah (Judges 16:4). It is hard for us, and for these parents, to understand how these things could be “from the LORD” (Judges 14:4), but their care for Samson’s body is a reflection of God’s forgiveness and care through Christ Jesus for us, His people, in spite of our sin and unfaithfulness.

5. Micah set up his own shrine, complete with an idol; then he hired a Levite to be his own priest. By setting up his own place of worship, he felt the Lord would be good to him (Judges 17:13). When people from the tribe of Dan found out about this shrine, they took the idol and hired the priest to serve the whole clan (Judges 18:19, 27, 30–31). Worship of the idols became part of the way of life of the people of Dan. We, too, become enamored of things in our society; they often become the focus of our lives, our idols—money, hobbies, athletic activities, fame. God calls us to repentance and washes us clean of our idolatry through His Son.

6. The sinful tragedies of Judges 19–21 are numerous:

a. A Levite took a concubine.

b. The Levite and his concubine, as they traveled, stayed in what they thought was a safe city, Gibeah, only to be warned that they shouldn't "spend the night in the square" (Judges 19:20); the Israelite city was unsafe.

c. Men of the city were interested in having homosexual relations with the Levite (Judges 19:22).

d. The Levite was willing to let the men of the town rape and plunder the woman who was his concubine and put her out on the street for them to do so.

e. The men of the town raped her repeatedly and eventually killed her (Judges 19:25–28).

f. The Levite cut up her body and sent the various parts into all the areas of Israel (Judges 19:29).

g. The tribe of Benjamin defended the men of Gibeah (Judges 20:12–13).

h. In a series of bloody battles, Israel almost annihilated the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:17–48).

i. To ensure that the tribe of Benjamin would survive, Israel agreed to let the Benjaminites "kidnap" four hundred women [the girls of Shiloh (Judges 21:21)] so they could not be accused of going back on an oath (Judges 21:18) and so that the tribe of Benjamin would not go out of existence.

One sin had led to another. This is a picture of the sinful condition of all humanity. Through God's "abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17), many were made righteous. God's solution for man's sinfulness is the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, on the cross to wash away the sins of all people.

May Week 5 Leader Notes

May 28–31; Ruth 1–4

1. Ruth said, “Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Naomi’s godly lifestyle and her witness won Ruth’s heart, not only to Naomi, but also to Naomi’s God. Our Christian life and witness also have effect, often in ways that we cannot foresee. Like what occurred in Naomi’s life, when we live for our Savior-God and share His love with everyone, beginning with those who are close to us, God promises that others will be drawn to honor Him and trust His Son (Colossians 1:6).

2. Boaz, whose name means “in him is strength,” appears to be a man with a good reputation in Bethlehem, a generous and well-loved property owner and farmer who treated his workers well (Ruth 2:4). He appreciated the sacrifice Ruth had made and the care she provided for Naomi. He made it easier for Ruth to glean in his fields than it might have been by encouraging the harvesters to intentionally drop grain, by inviting her to eat and drink with his workers, and by showing concern for her safety. Boaz is a picture of Jesus’ kindness and care for people. Boaz went beyond what was necessary to provide for Ruth and Naomi. Jesus went beyond what any person would do for others when He gave Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of all people (1 Corinthians 15:3; Philippians 2:5–8).

3. A kinsman-redeemer was to protect the interests of the family by marrying the wife of a deceased brother and providing an heir through her so that the brother’s family did not disappear and by buying property that had been sold to someone outside the family. In some instances, the kinsman-redeemer was also to avenge the death of a family member (Numbers 35:19–21). Boaz agreed to marry Ruth if a closer relative did not want to function as her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:13). Jesus, our brother, through His sacrifice on the cross bought us back from Satan and restored us to God’s family (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 2:17).

4. The women acknowledged that God had given many blessings to Naomi: He had provided a kinsman-redeemer in Boaz for both Ruth and Naomi; through Boaz, Ruth had become the mother of Obed and Naomi had a grandson; Ruth was a blessing to Naomi. God had “redeemed” her from a life of poverty. She had moved to Moab in a time of famine (empty), had married and had two sons (full), had lost both husband and sons (empty), had returned to Bethlehem at harvest time to receive grain from Boaz (full) as well as being made a member of Boaz’s family through the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, and been blessed with a grandson (full). God, through His Son, has redeemed us from the emptiness of sin and filled us with salvation (Psalm 107:8–9; Ephesians 2:4–7). Encourage your group to tell about how God has filled their lives with good things through His Son.

June Week 1 Leader Notes

June 1–3; 1 Samuel 1–2

1. Answers will vary. Hannah is a remarkable example of faith, persistence, and selflessness.

2. Not only was Hannah persistent in prayer, but she was also profuse in praise. Members of your group may remember times when they praised God for a deliverance He had given them (1 Samuel 2:1), a time when He delivered them from some poverty (1 Samuel 2:8), or guarded their feet (1 Samuel 2:9). They may also point to Hannah's prophetic first reference to a king, an Anointed One, that God would provide; this is a reference to Christ, the promised Messiah.

June Week 2 Leader Notes

June 4–10; 1 Samuel 3–11

1. The irony that Israel’s “seer” was blind conveys the truth about Israel’s spiritual condition. Many of the people no longer saw circumstances through the eyes of faith. They ignored the reality of their covenant with the Lord. They relied only on themselves and the strength they could discern with their physical senses. God’s cure for this blindness in Israel is to provide “sight” to Samuel. Samuel learned from God’s Word and was known as a prophet of the Lord (1 Samuel 3:19–21).

2. When Israel was defeated, the leaders decided they needed to bring the ark from Shiloh to the battle scene (1 Samuel 4:3). In this way, they would be assured that God was with them. God, however, was not tied to the ark. The ark’s presence did not guarantee God’s presence or support. The people had neglected God’s Word; Eli and his sons had not followed God’s instructions with respect to making sacrifices to the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12–17), nor had they been diligent about teaching God’s Word (1 Samuel 3:1). The people could not gain God’s favor by anything that they did. They had driven Him out of Israel, in many respects. By providing Samuel as the next prophet, by removing Eli and his sons, and by calling Israel to repentance through the loss of the ark, God was already at work to make things better.

3. As they rejoiced over the return of the ark to Israel, some of the men “looked upon the ark of the LORD” (1 Samuel 6:19). For this disrespect to the ark, God killed seventy of them. Christians today disrespect God’s Word by neglecting worship and Bible study and not treating God’s Word with seriousness. Your group members will probably be able to provide specific examples of instances when people have shown disrespect to God’s Word and worship. God calls us to worship and serve God only (Matthew 4:10), and He promises blessings when we hear His Word and live according to it (Luke 11:28). Luke reports that the early Christians devoted time to being taught God’s Word and receiving the Sacrament (Acts 2:42) and the Colossian Christians were urged to let the Word of Christ dwell (live) in them and to sing it in songs of gratitude to God (Colossians 3:16). Sing a song of gratitude to God to close your session today.

4. After God defeated the Philistines with a thunderstorm at Mizpah, Samuel set up a stone that he named Ebenezer, “Till now the LORD has helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12). God’s help in the past is an assurance of more of the same in the future. Refer participants to the hymn that reflects on Samuel’s words about Ebenezer (*LSB* 686). The name is certainly worth remembering because it keeps us mindful that God has indeed helped us to this point in our lives, especially through His Son, Jesus Christ, and He will continue to help us always.

5. God answers them with “Yes,” “No,” “Later,” or “I’ll meet your need in another way.” In the case of the Israelites’ request for a king, they were rejecting God (1 Samuel 10:19). God really did not want Israel to have a king at this time. He wanted them to live under their covenant relationship with Him where He was their Savior and Deliverer (Deuteronomy 33:1–5). At this time, however, God gave them a king. The picture is of a loving father who, against his better judgment, permits something he does not approve of, and then hovers over things to make sure nothing goes wrong. In this situation, God took care of the details surrounding Saul’s appointment (1 Samuel 9:20) and sent Samuel to carefully instruct Saul and Israel about the duties of the king (1 Samuel 9:27; 10:25). God is eager to help us and answer our prayers (John 14:13–14). In His Son, He saved us to be His own (Galatians 4:4–5). In spite of our sinfulness, He continues to care for us (Psalm 103:13; 136:1). Thank God for His faithfulness to us in your closing prayer.

6. At this point, Saul rates high as king. He continued to perform his daily tasks as he waited for the Lord’s direction (1 Samuel 11:5). When Israel was successful in battle, Saul acknowledged that the Lord was the One who had rescued Israel (1 Samuel 11:13). Encourage your group to identify several indicators that would show that God is the ruler in our lives, families, and churches. Some ideas: “We speak often of the fact that our blessings come from God.” “We speak of serving the Lord rather than doing things for the church.” “I don’t need to have my way all the time. It’s the Lord’s church, not my church.”

7. Let participants read specific statements of Law and grace from 1 Samuel 12:1–25. Then let volunteers comment on specific applications of the Law and grace. Some examples of proclamations of the Law: 1 Samuel 12:9, 13–15, 25. Some examples of grace, of God’s deliverance: 1 Samuel 12:8, 11, 22, 24. God’s deliverance for all people came most completely through His Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose from the dead to secure the forgiveness of sins for everyone who believes in Him.

June Week 3 Leader Notes

June 11–17; 1 Samuel 12–17

1. Saul offended God by taking matters into his own hands; he did not trust that God would protect and deliver the army of Israel. He trusted, rather, in his own good sense and planning. Saul broke the First Commandment. Our sin is often Saul's sin: we do not trust the Lord. Saul was not sorry for his sin; he continued to justify his actions to Samuel. When we confess our sin, God in His mercy forgives our sin. In the remaining questions of the Christian Questions, Luther uses the various parts of the Creed to assure us of this gracious Good News: Christ died for us and shed His blood for us on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

2. Saul was fighting for himself; any victory was going to be his victory. Jonathan, on the other hand, placed everything into God's hands and, in that spirit, the writer of 1 Samuel declares that "the LORD saved Israel that day" (1 Samuel 14:23). To establish his leadership credentials, Saul had his men take a foolish oath that left them vulnerable (1 Samuel 14:24); eventually they had to make a choice between Saul and Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:45), a choice that resulted in harm to Saul as king. Jonathan was a blessing to Israel; Saul was not. Help your group show how serving God in each daily task can be a blessing to them and others.

3. Saul clearly knew exactly what the Lord wanted (1 Samuel 15:3). He chose to ignore it, thus revealing his stubborn and idolatrous heart. Perhaps, in greed, he wanted the best of the spoil for himself. Perhaps the people had demanded saving some of the spoil, but if so, Saul respected the will of the people more than the will of the Lord. He blamed the people for his failures. His partial obedience was no obedience. James clearly states that to disobey one of God's commands is to transgress them all (James 2:10). With your group, pray that the Spirit might strengthen each one to serve the Lord faithfully.

4. The power given by the Spirit enabled the seventy elders at Moses' time to prophesy (Numbers 11:21–30); they probably praised the Lord for the gift of food that He was to supply. The Spirit of the Lord gave Samson the strength to defeat the Philistines (Judges 15:14), and the Spirit empowered Saul to prophesy and changed him to a different person who could serve the Lord (1 Samuel 10:5–6, 9–10). The Spirit of the Lord gave the disciples the ability to speak in various languages so that they could share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people from many lands (Acts 2:4). The Spirit gives faith and enables people to confess that Jesus is Lord. The Spirit also gives gifts to people so that they, using their various gifts, can work for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:3–11). Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to be bestowed on your group, perhaps by singing one of the Pentecost hymns from *Lutheran Service Book*.

5. The story of the shepherd boy David defeating the giant Goliath is not a story of the “little guy” defeating the “big guy.” It is the story of God being stronger and caring for His people in the face of any danger that might come their way. David readily proclaimed that this victory was God’s victory (1 Samuel 17:45, 47). After suffering the punishment for our sins on the cross, Jesus proclaimed His victory over sin, death, and the devil by His descent into hell and by His resurrection from the dead. Through Him, we, too, are conquerors (Romans 8:37); He gives us the victory over Satan and will make sure that our work for the Lord is not done in vain (1 Corinthians 15:55–58). Praise God together using the words of Psalm 21.

6. People attribute success to many factors. The writer of 1 Samuel attributed David’s success to the fact that “the LORD was with him” (1 Samuel 18:14). God promised Moses that He would go with him and the Israelites. For Moses, God’s presence meant rest, assurance that he was doing the right thing as he led the people, and it was a declaration to others that God was pleased with Israel (Exodus 33:15). For Joshua, the Lord’s presence meant protection for the people (Numbers 14:9). When Israel rebelled against God, the resulting disasters indicated that God was not with them (Deuteronomy 31:17); God’s absence was a call to repentance. It was a reminder that the people had left God, not that God had left them. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed that the Lord would continue to be with Israel so that they would walk in all His ways (1 Kings 8:57–58). Hezekiah assured the people that God was with them to help them as they fought their battles (2 Chronicles 32:7–8), a thought echoed in Psalm 46 that brought Luther much confidence. God is most clearly with us in Christ Jesus (Matthew 1:23). Because Jesus’ teaching brought them such comfort and joy, the disciples traveling to Emmaus asked Jesus to stay with them (Luke 24:29); this is our prayer also. He is with us as His Word is taught. In Christ Jesus, God’s grace, mercy, and peace are with us (2 John 1:3) each day.

June Week 4 Leader Notes

June 18–24; 1 Samuel 18–24

1. From the growing tragedy of Saul, as described in 1 Samuel 19, we get insight into the consequences when pride, jealousy, and hatred destroy faith and love. The tragedy of Saul is that God had blessed Saul and changed his heart (1 Samuel 10:6–9), but Saul was overwhelmed with jealousy when David was given the victory over Goliath. In God’s Word and Sacraments, given by the Holy Spirit so that we might receive forgiveness and strengthening of faith, we have the best and only antidote against a tragic loss of faith and fall from grace.

2. As the *Today’s Light* portrait of Jonathan points out, his name means “the Lord gives.” His friendship was a gift from God for David. Even when Jonathan knew that David would rise to power instead of him, he accepted God’s will. Loyal both to his friend David and to his fallen and disgraced father, Jonathan stands as an example of a faithful friend for all ages. David and Jonathan both professed their faith in Yahweh, their Savior-God, and asked God to witness their pledges of faithfulness to each other. Encourage members of your group to give examples of friendships that have been nurtured by a mutual faith in the Lord Jesus and to describe some of the benefits of such friendships. Then thank God for His blessings of Christian friends.

3. David asked Ahimelech to give him and his men some bread. Ahimelech had only “consecrated bread,” but he offered to give it to David if David’s men were ceremonially clean by virtue of the fact that they had not had sexual relations with women. Jesus cited this incident when His disciples were accused of “doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath” (see Matthew 12:1–8). Give members of your group time to discuss whether Jesus approved or disapproved of Ahimelech’s and David’s actions. A basic purpose of Old Testament ceremonial law was to emphasize regularly the holiness of God and point forward, through many of the rituals and sacrifices, to the Messiah who would accept as His own our guilt under God’s moral law, endure in His all-atoning sacrifice the punishment we deserve, and win victory for us over the devil and all evil.

4. At some point, all of us have felt that “none of you is sorry for me” (1 Samuel 22:8). Saul, though he was king, felt David was getting more attention and respect than he was. He felt betrayed by Jonathan, and he was sure that others were helping David. He suspected everyone of withholding information. He was frustrated at not being able to capture David. People who feel that no one cares may be frustrated about their own health, living situation, loneliness, relationships, or other factors. Many passages of Scripture provide comfort for those who feel abandoned. The psalmist reminds us that the Lord remembers and will bless those who fear Him (Psalm 115:12–13); look at Psalm 116 also. Isaiah reminds us that the Lord cares for us like a good shepherd cares for his

sheep (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus cares. In one instance, He healed a woman who had been sick twelve years (Matthew 9:20–22) and encouraged her to “Take heart.” Because of her faith, she had been healed. Jesus has healed us from the ravages of sin with His own blood; take heart. “Believe in God,” He urges (John 14:1). “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18–19). Peter reminds us to cast all our anxiety on Him “because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Encourage your group members to share their favorite Bible passage of comfort and hope.

5. David spared Saul’s life (see 1 Samuel 24). David still considered Saul God’s choice to be king; Saul was “the Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 24:6, 10). By his actions, David honored God for the love and care God had shown to him. Scripture also teaches us not to kill or seek revenge. It is not easy to forgive those who wrong us, but this is God’s good and gracious will. It is what Jesus said we are to do (Matthew 5:43–48), and it is what He Himself did when on the cross He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Rather than punish us for our sin against Him, God sacrificed His Son so that we might be forgiven.

6. Abigail was a blessing to David in several ways. She prevented David from vengefully murdering many people because he had been slighted, the very sin into which Saul had fallen. She provided the provisions David’s men needed. She preserved David’s reputation so that in a future time he could serve the Lord without this sin on his record. Through Abigail, the Lord reiterates that David will be the king of Israel and that he is in God’s care (1 Samuel 25:28). The hymn reminds us of other faithful women who served the Lord in a variety of ways, including Deborah, Hannah, and Ruth, all of whom have been the subjects of recent *Today’s Light* devotions. Praise God for the faithful women who serve the Lord in your midst.

June Week 5 Leader Notes

June 25–30; 1 Samuel 25–31

1. David had been having many problems with Saul over the years. Saul had made an attempt on his life, he had placed David in battle situations with the intent that David should be killed, and his actions had driven David to a life of hiding, marauding, and fleeing to other countries for safety. Yet, when David had the opportunity to kill Saul, he refused to do so because he thought of Saul as the person whom God had chosen to be king in Israel (1 Samuel 26:9–11). He would never second-guess God. He chose to let God be the one to change the situation in His own time and in His own way. Thinking of the illnesses, brutal co-workers, family concerns, and world problems that impact our lives as “the Lord’s anointed” places the situation in the Lord’s hands. Discuss these Scripture passages in your group for words of assurance that all will be well in His hands: Psalm 33:6–11, 18–22; Psalm 91; Romans 8:28–39; 2 Peter 3:8–9; Jude 20–25.

2. After a life of jealousy and hatred toward David, Saul, with terror in his heart (1 Samuel 28:5), sought the help of an unbelieving fortune-teller. By some means, God enabled Saul to be confronted by Samuel, who reminded him that he long ago had abandoned the Lord. Why should the Lord help him? Saul was “filled with fear” (1 Samuel 28:20), but he offered no confession. Help your group identify the opportunities for confession that are available to them, including confessing to individuals whom they have wronged, the general confession in church services, and the opportunity for private confession with the pastor. The forms for confession available in the hymnal and the catechism can be used in many situations. Pray for God’s help as members of your group consider their own Christian lives with respect to confession. Assure them again of God’s full and free forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

3. The Philistine leaders suspected that David and his men would attack them while they battled the Israelite army. They remembered that David was the one who had been praised for his victory over Goliath; they suspected that his loyalties were still with Israel. In view of David’s secret attacks on Israel’s enemies from Philistine territory, their fears were well-founded. God has earned our trust by keeping all His promises to send a Savior to take away our sin (Psalm 57:1–3; Matthew 1:22–23; 8:17; 12:17–21; John 3:16).

4. Even when David and his men found that the Amalekites had raided their homes and taken all that they possessed, including their wives, and amid the accusations and blame that David faced from his own men in this situation, David, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, “strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). After the victory over the Amalekites and the recovery of all their possessions, David insisted that all people receive a share of the plunder, the spoils of victory, because the Lord had given them their possessions and the victory (1 Samuel 30:21–23). Others who have given

glory to God and served Him in times of stress that your group members might remember may include the following: the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, Corrie ten Boom, and others. No doubt, there are people in your own community who serve faithfully in stressful situations and get their strength from God. Praise God for their witness.

5. The men of Jabesh-gilead never forgot that Saul had defended them against the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11; 31:11–13) and prevented bodily harm to them. These men, at great danger to themselves, traveled through the night to bring back to Jabesh the bodies of Saul and his sons to bury them. Even though Saul had been so ignominiously defeated, these men expressed their thanks to Saul by taking this extraordinary step to honor Saul. Their example should stimulate us to thank God for His many blessings to us each day. Remember especially to give Him thanks for the gift of His Son, who has given us eternal life through the sacrifice of His own life.