Unit 10, Session 2

God Rescues His Ark

Summary and Goal
In this session, we will see the prophesied punishment on Eli’s family become reality. Because of the sin of Eli’s sons, the Israelites faltered in their battle with their enemies, the Philistines. In an effort to turn the battle in their favor, the Israelites looked to the symbol of God presence, but they didn’t look to the God behind the symbol. This led to a crushing defeat and the departure of God’s glory. When God brought His glory back home, the people responded with joy and worship, but they also forgot God’s holiness and suffered the consequences. God’s holiness must be respected as it drives us to repentance.

Session Outline
1. The people confuse the symbol of God’s presence with His actual presence (1 Sam. 4:2-7,10-11).
2. The people receive the symbol of God’s presence with joy and worship (1 Sam. 6:13-16).
3. The people fail to honor the holiness of God’s presence (1 Sam. 6:19-21).

Session in a Sentence
God’s people are to trust in Him alone and not fall into the trap of spiritual superstitions.

Christ Connection
The people of Israel mistook the ark as the symbol of God’s presence with His actual presence. Years later, God gave His people something greater than a symbol of His presence when He gave them His Son, Jesus. Many people didn’t recognize Jesus for who He is—God in the flesh who came to unite people with God.

Missional Application
Because God lives in us, we display God’s presence to the world around us by properly honoring, worshiping, and serving God.
Group Time

Introduction

**EXPLAIN:** Use the paragraph on page 20 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) to explain the concept of “life hacks.”

Have you ever used a paper clip for a purpose other than clipping paper together? Maybe you used one to replace a broken zipper handle, prop up a mobile phone, or retrieve something from a very small space. These and many other ideas have popularly become known as “life hacks.” The idea is to use time and tools more efficiently. Simple household items, such as a toothpick or a rubber band, can solve some complications in your life to make things easier.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

☐ What are some life hacks you have used recently? (Be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

**EXPLAIN:** Connect the idea of a “life hack” to the Israelites’ action of trying to use the ark of the Lord’s covenant for their personal gain and glory.

- Life hacks generally make use of items for purposes other than what their design intended, and often these uses are clever. But in spiritual matters, trying to “life hack” a situation can cause big problems. The Israelites once fought against the Philistines and tried to “life hack” their victory with the ark of the Lord’s covenant. They quickly discovered that using something holy to God for personal gain and glory is not clever but blasphemous.

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see the prophesied punishment on Eli’s family become reality. Because of the sin of Eli’s sons, the Israelites faltered in their battle with their enemies, the Philistines. In an effort to turn the battle in their favor, the Israelites looked to the symbol of God presence, but they didn't look to the God behind the symbol. This led to a crushing defeat and the departure of God’s glory. When God brought His glory back home, the people responded with joy and worship, but they also forgot God’s holiness and suffered the consequences. God’s holiness must be respected as it drives us to repentance.

*For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject.*
*For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.*
Point 1: The people confuse the symbol of God’s presence with His actual presence (1 Sam. 4:2-7,10-11).

SAY: The Philistines, a five-city league working together as one, were the major enemy of Israel during the time of Samson, Samuel, Saul, and David. In 1 Samuel 4:1, we are told that the Israelites went out to battle against the Philistines. But their first day of fighting did not go well, and they began to panic.

READ 1 Samuel 4:2-7 (DDG p. 21).

2 The Philistines lined up in battle formation against Israel, and as the battle intensified, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who struck down about four thousand men on the battlefield.

3 When the troops returned to the camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the LORD defeat us today before the Philistines? Let’s bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh. Then it will go with us and save us from our enemies.” 4 So the people sent men to Shiloh to bring back the ark of the covenant of the LORD of Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 When the ark of the covenant of the LORD entered the camp, all the Israelites raised such a loud shout that the ground shook.

6 The Philistines heard the sound of the war cry and asked, “What’s this loud shout in the Hebrews’ camp?” When the Philistines discovered that the ark of the LORD had entered the camp, 7 they panicked. “A god has entered their camp!” they said. “Woe to us, nothing like this has happened before.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to identify sin as the reason God did not fight for the Israelites so that they lost to the Philistines.

The elders rightly looked to God as the cause of their defeat (see Job 1:21-22). God’s sovereign hand delivered the Israelites to the Philistines for one singular reason—sin. But instead of looking for the sin amongst the people, the elders believed the ark of the covenant itself, the symbol of God’s presence, would turn the battle in their favor.

- The “sin in the camp” belonged to Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who dishonored God and took advantage of their position as priests, and Eli allowed their behavior to go on unchecked (1 Sam. 2:12-34).

Commentary: The ark of the covenant served as a holy memory box (Heb. 9:4) and a throne (1 Sam. 4:4)—a representation of the presence of God among the people. The ark had led the way through the Jordan River into the promised land (Josh. 3—4). The ark was part of the procession around the walls of Jericho before they fell (Josh. 6). Here the Israelites wanted the ark to lead them to victory over the Philistines. They looked to a symbol of God’s presence rather than God Himself, who expected holiness among His people.
**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What are some symbols of Christianity we can revere without honoring the God behind the symbol? (the Bible; the cross, such as on a necklace; the church building; the church body; the Lord’s Supper; baptism)

**SAY:** When Hophni and Phinehas brought the ark, the Israelites cheered and shook the ground. The Philistines, however, shook in fear, recalling the tales of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt and their victories in the wilderness (1 Sam. 4:6-9). But in spite of the ark’s presence, God was not present, and Israel suffered a worse defeat.

**READ** 1 Samuel 4:10-11 (DDG p. 21).

10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and each man fled to his tent. The slaughter was severe—thirty thousand of the Israelite foot soldiers fell. 11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

**PACK ITEM 3: SYMBOLS OF CHRIST:** Use this poster to help you connect the Israelites’ sinful misunderstanding with the ark to the ways we can dishonor Christ when we treat Him like a symbol instead of the God-man.

- The Israelites valued a symbol of God’s presence above the real thing, God Himself. This was a form of idolatry that came with severe consequences. It is possible for us to do the same with the gift of God’s Son, Jesus. When we treat Jesus like a symbol and not the God-man, when we pray in Jesus’ name to try to secure our own selfish desires and wants while knowing they are not God’s will, we are just as guilty as the Israelites of trying to use God’s presence for our own purposes. Let us repent and give glory to God alone.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 21).

- **Jesus’ Deity:** Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3).

- **Essential Doctrine “Jesus’ Deity”**: Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).
Point 2: The people receive the symbol of God’s presence with joy and worship (1 Sam. 6:13-16).

TRANSITION: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to summarize the previous point and transition to this one, which begins with the truth that the Lord fights for His own glory.

The Philistines captured the ark and put it in the temple of their god Dagon; they believed they had bested the God of Israel in defeating the Israelites. They misunderstood the situation, however. God let them win to execute judgment on Eli’s sons and to teach His people and the Philistines a lesson: The Lord fights for His own glory.

EXPLAIN: Fill in the gaps in the story, showing that while the Israelites believed the glory of God was lost (1 Sam. 4:19-22), the Lord defended His glory among the enemies of His people.

- For two mornings in a row after putting the ark in the temple of Dagon, his statue was found prostrate on his face before the ark. On the second morning, his head and hands had broken off as well (5:1-5).
- The Philistines of Ashdod, Gath, and then Ekron were all afflicted with tumors and the fear of death when the ark came to their cities (5:6-12).
- After seven months of turmoil, the Philistines decided to send the ark back with a guilt offering of gold objects symbolizing their affliction to appease the God of the Israelites. They put the ark on a cart to be drawn by two milk cows that had never been yoked and whose calves were penned up. If the cows went for their calves, then the Philistines’ suffering would be recognized as nothing but a coincidence. But if the cows headed for Israel on their own, then the Philistines would know God had afflicted them.
- The cows made straight for Israel, following the road to Beth-shemesh and never deviating from it. The Lord brought His ark of the covenant home to Israel.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What role do God’s people have in God receiving glory? (they are to give God glory; they are to point others to His glory; they are to stand up for His glory; they should never distract or detract from God’s glory; they are to reflect God’s glory in their witness and their obedience)

READ 1 Samuel 6:13-16 (DDG p. 22).

13 The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they were overjoyed to see it. 14 The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there near a large rock. The people of the city chopped up the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. 15 The Levites removed the ark of the LORD, along with the box containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. That day the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. 16 When the five Philistine rulers observed this, they returned to Ekron that same day.
EXPLAIN: Refer to the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) as you emphasize the right response of joy and worship to the glory of the Lord.

The Lord Himself brought His ark of the covenant home to Israel. The Israelites didn’t go after it or bargain for it; they moved on with life. But all the while, the Lord was working and displaying His glory among the Philistines. When the ark returned to the promised land, the people of Beth-shemesh immediately responded with joy and worship in the form of sacrifices for the symbol of God’s presence had returned, the glory of the Lord was among them once more.

Commentary: Beth-shemesh was one of the cities set aside for the livelihood of the Levites, the priestly tribe of Israel. This city, among others, specifically was given for the descendants of Aaron, who were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and the sacrifices (Josh. 21:9-10,13-16). How fitting that the ark should return to this city filled with those who were responsible for its care (Num. 4:1-20). But there may be an indication that the faithfulness of the priests at large was faltering in that they offered the female milk cows as a burnt offering, which required an unblemished male animal (Lev. 1:3), and they displayed the ark on a large rock for everyone’s eyes to behold (Num. 4:15,20).

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

What should our worship look like as living sacrifices for the glory of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1-2)? (Christians should live following Jesus’ example of communion with and obedience to the Father; Christians should view everything they have and their entire lives as opportunities to serve their Creator and Savior; being living sacrifices means living in ways contrary to the prevailing sinful thoughts and beliefs of the culture; seeking God’s will above our own)
Point 3: The people fail to honor the holiness of God’s presence (1 Sam. 6:19-21).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 6:19-21 (DDG p. 23).

19 God struck down the people of Beth-shemesh because they looked inside the ark of the LORD. He struck down seventy persons. The people mourned because the LORD struck them with a great slaughter. 20 The people of Beth-shemesh asked, “Who is able to stand in the presence of the LORD this holy God? To whom should the ark go from here?” 21 They sent messengers to the residents of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and get it.”

EXPLAIN: Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) as you emphasize the people’s offense in Beth-shemesh that caused the Lord to kill seventy people—they looked upon and into the ark of the covenant.

The Israelites at Beth-shemesh received the ark with joy, worship, and sacrifices. But then the Lord punished seventy inhabitants of the city with death. What was their offense? They looked upon and into the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s presence. Once again, God’s people treated casually what should have been regarded as holy.

- The Lord gave strict instructions to Aaron and his descendants that they were to cover the ark before it was moved from the tabernacle so the people would not look at the representation of God’s holy presence and die; nor were the people to touch the ark, lest they die (Num. 4:15,17-20). The people of Beth-shemesh violated both of these commands as they curiously looked at and looked into the ark of the Lord.

Commentary: The Hebrew regarding the people’s offense has been translated “looked upon” or “looked into” by various Bible translations. Either translation represents a violation of God’s commands not to touch or look upon the holy objects of the tabernacle (Num. 4:15,17-20).

Illustration: We are told all our lives not to stare at the sun because it will burn our retinas. The power of the sun can damage our eyesight when we do not have respect for that power. So we may briefly glance at the sun or cover our eyes, but we shouldn’t look directly at it. No one can look upon God and live (Ex. 33:20).

- The ark was holy because God had set it apart to reflect His holiness. It stayed in the most holy place behind the veil in the tabernacle until it was time to move it, and then it was covered by that same veil so it remained out of sight. Only on one day of the year—the Day of Atonement—was one person, the high priest, allowed to enter the most holy place to make atonement for the sins of the entire community. A sacrifice’s blood was brought in and sprinkled on the mercy seat, or the lid of the ark, the place where the Lord was said to be enthroned.
FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 23).

God Is Holy: God’s holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for “holy” means “separate” or “set apart.” God’s holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Holy”: God’s holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for “holy” means “separate” or “set apart.” God’s holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God’s image, we are called to holiness.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to show the comparison between the responses of the Philistines and the Israelites of Beth-shemesh—both wanted to send the ark away. Then connect this response with our tendency to hide in our sin, but the gospel calls us to repentance and back to God’s presence.

The Lord commanded His people Israel to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 19:1-2). As the people of God, they were to be different from the nations around them. But when the Lord punished those who did not respect His ark, the people of Beth-shemesh responded just as the Philistines did—they wanted to send the ark away. The fear of death came upon them, and instead of running to God in faith and repentance, they ran away from His holy presence.

- God expects His people to follow His pattern of holiness in both separation from sin and devotion to His glory. Yet when we embrace sin, we defy His glory and seek our own. Furthermore, our sin drives us to separate ourselves from the holy God. Like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, we want to run and hide (Gen. 3:8-10). Like the people of the world, we try to suppress what we know to be true about God (Rom. 1:18-21).

- But even in the midst of our sin, the Lord calls us back to Himself. That’s part of the gospel—while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). And when we sin again, Christ has still died for us (1 John 2:1-2). The Beth-shemites sent away God’s presence symbolized in the ark, but God’s presence in Christ will never leave or forsake His people because He dwells not on a box but in our hearts.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How can repentance distinguish Christians from the world and be a witness to the world? (Christians repenting of sins against others communicates a gospel-centered worldview; repentance evidences freedom from guilt and shame in Christ; repentance acknowledges the holiness of God and the grace of God)
EXPLAIN: In such an irreverent, rebellious, and cynical world, we can forget about God’s holiness. Having everything at our fingertips, from bottled water to the Internet to items delivered to our homes and devices with the click of a button, it can be easy to forget God. But this isn’t just an issue because of our world, culture, or environment. Our propensity to forget about God and His holiness comes from deep within us personally. We are sinners by nature. Our hearts need to be changed, and that work is accomplished through the presence of God. By faith in Christ, we become the sanctuary in which God dwells, we become temples of the Holy Spirit. Then our fear is transformed and it becomes our delight to revere and stand in awe of God, the Holy One, and to proclaim His holiness and salvation to the whole world.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 24), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God lives in us, we display God’s presence to the world around us by properly honoring, worshiping, and serving God.

- What step of faith will you take because God is holy and full of grace?
- How can your group encourage fear-free confession of sin and holy living amongst yourselves?
- What are some circumstances in which you need to express repentance in order to share the gospel?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, we praise You for Your holiness and grace. No sin or evil can be found in You, so we can trust You to fulfill Your Word to work all things together for our good. You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf to die for our sin to declare us holy and righteous in Your sight and to free us from the fear of death and judgment. And then You sent Your Holy Spirit to take up residence in us to make us holy and righteous. Help us to share the good news of Your holiness and grace in Christ with this world that lives in fear. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 25-27), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 28) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 28) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 5 as a part of point 3 in the session: We are welcome to approach God as our loving Father. But even still, we should never forget that we always come before a holy God.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “The Israelites thought they could find victory in the ark instead of through the God of the ark.”
- Day 2: “Our first response should not be to look outside of ourselves for why God’s glory has been diminished but rather within ourselves.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 28) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to gauge their desire for God’s presence and whether or not their pursuit of God is centered around His Word.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
**Additional Commentary**

**Point 1: The people confuse the symbol of God’s presence with His actual presence (1 Sam. 4:2-7,10-11).**

“Tough times reveal where our trust is placed. Israel was at war with the Philistines again. The first battle did not go well. Four thousand Israelites died. When the Hebrew troops retreated to their camp, they told their elders what had happened. Scrambling for solutions and success, the leaders resolved to trust in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was a wooden chest, covered in gold. (It is also sometimes called the Ark of God or the Ark of the Lord.) It held the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod, and a pot of manna. The Ark represented the presence of God. So, the leaders of Israel thought that this physical object could provide victory for them in war. Can you hear their confidence? ’If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies’ (1 Sam. 4:3). Their plan for success was to place their trust in a sacred object. While the ‘box’ sowed terror among the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:7-8), it proved to be no substitute for God’s help and presence … Victory and safety were not in the Ark but in the presence of God. Trust is not to be placed in ‘things’ but in the living Lord. Never replace the real God with a symbol.”

“The Philistines are anxious and the Israelites confident. So the outcome is unexpected: Israel is utterly routed. Men going to war in those days vowed not to return to their own tents until they had secured victory (Judg. 20:8). Thus the fact that every man fled to his tent probably indicates not just retreat but desertion in disgrace (4:10). Many men are killed, including Hophni and Phinehas, thus fulfilling the prophecy in 2:27-36. However, the defeat is more than political—not only has the ark not produced the anticipated result, but the ark itself is captured (4:11). Israel is left in a state of shock. The power of God is put into serious question as our attention is once more called back to Shiloh.”

**Point 2: The people receive the symbol of God’s presence with joy and worship (1 Sam. 6:13-16).**

“When the people of Beth Shemesh looked up from their harvesting and saw what must have been an amazing site—two noisy cows pulling a new cart with the ark of covenant—they rejoiced. The destination was no coincidence. Beth Shemesh was one of the Levitical cities and was set aside for the clan of Kohath, the Levitical family in charge of caring for the ark (Num. 4:4,15). Beth Shemesh was also one of the designated homes of the descendants of Aaron (Josh. 21:13-16). So it stands to reason that the people of Beth Shemesh would have real cause to rejoice. They would also know how to treat the ark of the covenant as the symbol of God’s holy presence—or at least they should have known.”
“With the ark and the golden gifts from the Philistines displayed prominently atop a ‘large rock’ in Joshua’s field, one that would be celebrated in subsequent Israelite history (v. 18), the Israelites continued their revelry with a festive event that included additional offerings of food gifts. The Philistine tyrants observed the Israelites’ joyous activities and then returned to Ekron ‘that same day’ (v. 16), no doubt with a sense of relief. They left behind not only the Israelite ark but five gold tumors and five gold rats ‘according to the number of the Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers’ (v. 18), the fortified cities of ‘Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron’ (v. 17). Ironically, their foolish strategy for ridding themselves of the ark had worked!"6

**Point 3: The people fail to honor the holiness of God’s presence (1 Sam. 6:19-21).**

“The Masoretic Text reads ‘seventy men, fifty thousand men,’ but many manuscripts omit the fifty thousand men, and Beth-shemesh could not have supported such a large population. The reading seventy persons, on the other hand, is undisputed. The phrase looked inside the ark may also be translated ‘looked at the ark’ in the sense of unholy staring or gazing. The Levites should have covered the ark as soon as possible and treated it more reverently.”7

“This episode introduces the concept of the holy in ancient Israel. The Hebrew root qds originally meant ‘separate’ and could denote any object withdrawn from ordinary use and devoted to God. As such the object became imbued with his power. In its right place holiness was beneficial, for in some way it brought God’s presence to bear on a situation. It was therefore a cause of rejoicing, blessing and reverent worship (1 Sam. 6:13-15; cf. 2 Sam. 6:11-19). But in the wrong place, handled in the wrong way or approached with a wrong attitude, holiness was potentially dangerous, as the descendants of Jeconiah and Uzzah found to their cost (1 Sam. 6:19-20; cf. 2 Sam. 6:2-10).”8

References
1. Viktorin Strigel, Commentary on 1 Samuel, quoted in 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, eds. Derek Cooper and Martin J. Lohrmann, vol. 5 in Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
In this volume of The Gospel Project, we cover the roughly one hundred and twenty years of Israel’s heyday: the united monarchy. After decades of the devastating cycle of sin and deliverance and being ruled by a series of judges, the Israelites called on Samuel to appoint a king for them—one like those of the nations around them. God warned His people that what they were requesting would lead to heartache and trouble, but they insisted. So God, in His kindness, gave them what they wanted in order to teach them to trust Him.

What followed was a series of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon, each ruling for about forty years. In some ways, these kings provide us with examples to follow: the fierce determination of David not to stand for anyone impugning God’s character; the mercy and kindness David showed to a foe and his family; the wisdom of Solomon. But we also discover that each of these three men fell woefully short of being the king God’s people wanted and needed, each one proving God’s warnings true. Bookending God’s people crying out as one for a king at the start of this volume, by the time we finish, we encounter God’s people being divided into two kingdoms.

Our takeaway is clear: The hope of humanity does not rest in any human king or leader but is fixed solely and securely in the King of kings, Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we see that God delights in using His people despite their failings. God would fulfill His covenant with David, even though he committed adultery and murder. This reaffirmed the promises God had made to Abraham generations before. And though Solomon would succumb to polygamy and idolatry, God used him to build the temple, a place for God’s people to worship and be in relationship with God.

So consider as you study: What might God do through us?