

This morning we return to our ten-week series of tracing God's salvation story through the Bible. During our first three weeks we heard how Jesus Christ is the Seed of Eve who will crush the serpent's head; He is the substitutionary Lamb of God, His horns encircled by thorns offered in place of Isaac and each of us; and He is the Passover Lamb whose shed blood saves us from the angel of death on Judgment Day.

Abraham, whom we learned about in week two, lived about 2000 BC and Moses, whom we learned about in week 3, lived about 1500 BC. Today, we glide through another five hundred years to 1000 BC where we will see still *another* Old Testament picture of Jesus, our Savior.

Here we go! After the night of the Passover, that is the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh finally freed Israel. In fact, he actually drove them out of his land. But then, not surprisingly, the hard-hearted ruler of Egypt changed his mind... again. Disobeying God his Creator, he sent his army to recapture the people of God as they were camped out alongside the Red Sea. As you might imagine, that was not a smart move. God caused a strong wind to part the Red Sea so the Israelites could pass through on dry ground. When the Egyptians tried to follow, God closed the Red Sea over them, and they drowned.

From there, God led Israel through the wilderness to Mount Sinai. He was present among them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The cloud shaded them from the sun, and the fire gave them light and heat in the dark, cold night.

At Mount Sinai, God spoke to the Israelites, reciting His Ten Commandments to them. Terrified of God's booming voice, the people begged Moses to speak with God on their behalf and promised they would obey everything Moses told them.

So, Moses went up onto Mount Sinai and spent forty days in God's presence, receiving two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them, along with regulations for worship and the design for a worship space, called the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting. After the Tabernacle was built, God led them toward the Promised Land.

Just a little over a year after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at the border of the Promised Land. But Israel was afraid of the mighty nations of Canaan and didn't trust God's great power. So they refused His command to enter the land. In punishment, God made them wander forty years in the wilderness until that generation of fighting men died and their sons and daughters arose to replace them.

Though the people grumbled and complained, God provided food and water and kept the nation alive and well through the forty years of wilderness wandering. And this is something that we can relate to in our lives today. We can view our whole life on earth as a reliving of this wilderness wandering, as Jesus provides all our needs, protects us, and guides us toward our promised land—the heavens and the earth which will be restored to perfection at His return. Even our request for God to “give us this day our daily bread” in the Lord's Prayer is a reminder of the daily manna with which God fed His people during this wilderness wandering. Sadly, like Israel, how often do we lose faith and grumble about the hardships we face in our daily lives and question God's love and mercy?

Finally, at the end of forty years, God brought Israel to the Jordan River, across from the Promised Land. Moses died, and God chose his assistant Joshua to lead His people across the Jordan River into Canaan. God stopped the Jordan River when it was at flood stage so the Israelites could pass through on dry ground. And then He was with Joshua and the Israelite armies to break the power of the Canaanite nations and give the core of their territory to the Israelites. God told Israel that in time, when they grew more numerous and powerful, they were to drive out the Canaanites and take full possession of the land God had set aside for them.

Sadly, after Joshua died, the Israelites disobeyed God and failed to drive the surviving Canaanites out. Instead, they began worshipping the false gods of those nations. And if you think about it, isn't that kind of odd? The Israelites didn't seem to stop to think that none of these false gods had been able to protect their people against the God of Israel. Well, anyway, since the people of Israel broke the covenant the Lord made with

them at Mount Sinai, He brought in foreign nations to occupy and oppress them so that in their misery, they would turn back to Him in repentance.

When they suffered under these enemies, the Israelites cried out to the Lord for relief and rescue, and He raised up for them a series of judges or tribal chieftains. Each judge delivered and led God's people, but when the judge died, the nation descended back into idolatry, resulting in God bringing in other nations. This terrible downward spiral is recorded in the Book of Judges.

Finally, Israel grew tired of the endless cycle. But failing to realize **their sin** was the cause, they wrongly concluded what they really needed was a king and his descendants who would permanently be there to deliver them.

Even though God's people rejected Him, God never gave up on them. He **loved** His people and chose a man named Saul to be their first king. God filled him with His Holy Spirit, equipping Saul with everything he would need to be a good and faithful king. Saul started out good and faithful and humble, fighting against Israel's enemies, especially the Philistines. But in time, Saul grew proud and defied God's will—kind of like Adam and Eve. He felt Israel was **his** nation to lead, not **God's**, and when Saul rejected God, God rejected him as king.

God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint a replacement king. The Lord chose a young shepherd named David from the town of Bethlehem, and Samuel anointed him king. The Holy Spirit, who had left Saul, now filled David. It was now about 1000 BC.

Meanwhile, the war with the Philistines continued, and David's older brothers joined Saul's army. Some time later, David's father, Jesse, sent him with provisions for his brothers. When David arrived in camp, he heard a booming voice coming from the Philistine side of the battlefield. It was the Philistine champion, a giant of a man named Goliath. He said, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall

be our servants and serve us.” And the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together.” (1 Samuel 17:8–10)

For forty days Goliath kept issuing this challenge, and King Saul and all his men were terrified. None dared oppose him. When David finally arrived on day forty and heard Goliath’s rant, he was filled with a holy anger—no doubt the Holy Spirit prompting him. He asked, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26)

The soldiers who overheard David brought him to King Saul. David assured him, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine... Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God... The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:32, 36–37).

Saul permitted David to go. He even offered him armor and weapons. But these were too big and cumbersome for David, and he wasn’t used to moving around in them. So he went, just as he was, with nothing but a sling and a pouch with five smooth stones he took from the brook nearby. He would only need one.

Goliath saw the young Israelite coming toward him and despised him. He mocked and cursed David, but David answered with great courage and faith: “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down” (1 Samuel 17: 45–46).

David took his stone, placed it in the pocket of the sling, swung it round and round, and released it at full speed. It found its mark, striking the giant on his forehead. Goliath collapsed to the ground without a sound. David rushed up and killed him with his own sword.

After Saul died, David became king of all Israel. God promised that one of his descendants would be the promised Savior whose kingdom would last forever without end.

David's courageous battle against Goliath gives us yet another glimpse of Jesus' great mission as He went to the cross on Good Friday. David carried nothing but a sling and a pouch with stones. Jesus carried a cross. And on that cross, David's greater Son sank His foot into the serpent's head, inflicting a blow every bit as lethal as David's stone that sank into Goliath's forehead.

Just as David was a shepherd-king defending Israel from its enemies and ruling in justice, Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd and King, who provides for us, protects us, forgives us, and leads us safely toward our eternal home. You and I are part of our Lord Jesus' kingdom scattered around the world, the holy Christian Church gathered around God's Word and Sacraments. And on the day Jesus returns, He will restore His creation and establish His kingdom on the new earth and in the new heavens with great power and glory. Amen.