

EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY ONE

An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14

Epochal events remind us that God has His way in life's storms and shocking moments. We may be stunned in disbelief, but God is not surprised or at a loss to know what to do. His plan is unfolding perfectly.

—Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever faced a trial that was so surprising, unprecedented, and intense that it took your breath away? You never saw it coming, and you had no idea how God would get you through . . . but somehow, He did!

Such severe trials are rare, thankfully. But they are among life's most valuable experiences because they reveal God's saving power in ways we otherwise would not see.

In this series, we'll examine four epochal events in which the main characters faced unexpected trials that seemed insurmountable until God intervened in an amazing way. Each episode began with an extreme test that stretched the individual's faith to the breaking point. The epochal event culminated in an epochal *moment*—a climactic saving act of God that has inspired generations of God's people to trust Him during their own impossible circumstances.

Our first study is based on an account of an aging father and his son: Abraham and Isaac. After decades of waiting for God to fulfill His promise to provide Abraham an heir, Abraham finally realized his dream when Isaac was born. But then, God issued a shocking command to Abraham: "Go and sacrifice [Isaac] as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you" (Genesis 22:2). It was the ultimate test of faith for Abraham and set the scene for an unforgettable, epochal event!



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An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a few moments to quiet your spirit and invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word. In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we always pray for God's Spirit to illumine our minds and hearts as we open God's Word. As Chuck Swindoll advised, "Study without prayer is an incomplete process—a futile effort."¹ You may wish to pray as Chuck prays before he studies the Word: "Lord, speak to me. Help me understand what this passage is saying. I am listening. I am sensitive to Your truth. Lead me into it."²

Write your prayer here if you wish.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Genesis 22:1–14* slowly. Print the passage from the online Bible and underline what initially seems important, or use your cursor to highlight the sections on the screen. Note below any questions you may have.



An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14

God's Command—Genesis 22:1–2

Notice how the author revealed God's perspective at the beginning of this account in Genesis 22:1. As you read, remember that you know more than the characters. Why do you think the author revealed God's intention to test Abraham?

How is Isaac described in 22:2? What did the author emphasize?

Abraham's Response—Genesis 22:3–10

According to Genesis 22:3, how did Abraham respond to God's call? What details in this section indicate Abraham obeyed immediately?

The following six verses illustrate the depth of Abraham's faith that could only be described as *total abandonment* to God. What does the dialogue in Genesis 22:5–8 tell us about Abraham's confidence that God would intervene in some way (see especially Genesis 22:5, 8)?



An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14

Abraham's response was immediate, and his faith was solid, as he prepared for the sacrifice. Isaac, however, couldn't hold his tongue any longer; he asked his father, "Where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7). Remember, Isaac didn't know what Abraham knew until Abraham placed him on the altar (22:8–10). In Genesis 22:9, it appears that Isaac let Abraham bind him with no resistance. What does Isaac's obedience reveal about Isaac's relationship with his father?

Heaven's Provision—Genesis 22:11–14

The author of this Genesis passage repeated himself for emphasis. How many times did the angel call Abraham's name in Genesis 22:11? How many commands did the angel give to Abraham in 22:12? Do you see other repeated words or phrases in 22:13–14?

What was the outcome of God's test, according to 22:12? Also, notice the writer used the same description of Isaac in both 22:2 and 22:12.

Look at what the author stated at the end of 22:13 and Abraham's response in 22:14. By comparing these points to Abraham's statement in 22:8, we begin to cross the bridge from observation to interpretation.



An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14



Interpretation: What Does This Story Mean?

Let's begin by looking up *burnt offering* (Genesis 22:2) in a Bible dictionary. If you're using the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, you'll find a helpful overview by looking under the entry for *sacrifice* and *sacrifice, human*. We also recommend exploring the NET Bible's notes on this passage at [Lumina](#) as well as Constable's Notes on this passage. How does a better understanding of *burnt offering* illuminate the meaning of God's command to Abraham to let go?

Now let's look up the term *Moriah* (22:2). Did any other significant biblical events happen at Mount Moriah? Next, let's look up *Yahweh Yireh* (or *Jehovah Jireh*). Some dictionaries place these terms under the heading "Names of God." The *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* contains the entry for *Jehovah Jireh* under *Lord Will Provide*. Note anything significant you find.

As we interpret the Bible, we look for what is important both historically and theologically. We understand the eternal nature of God in His actions with people through biblical history. We see Abraham's obedience in his response to God's command. What confidence does Abraham express in Genesis 22:5 and 22:8?



An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14

In Genesis 22:12, the angel told Abraham, “For now I know that you truly fear God.” In your own words, summarize what it means to fear God as illustrated by Abraham in Genesis 22:1–14.



Correlation: Let’s Compare the Scriptures

Did you know the New Testament references this event concerning Abraham and Isaac? It’s found in [Hebrews 11:17–19](#). Take a moment to read this passage and make a few notes on how it contributes to our understanding of Genesis 22:1–14.

In complete obedience to God, Abraham released his precious son into the hands of God knowing that somehow God would provide for both of them. How about you? Are you as confident as Abraham that God will provide for you?



Application: What Should I Let Go?

Every parent who has choked back tears on a child’s first day of school understands releasing. Every retiree who removed the last picture, taped shut the last box, and said the last goodbye understands releasing. Any who have felt their life savings slip through their fingers, any who have waved at a disappearing moving van, any who have taken a heart-wrenching walk past a coffin understand releasing too.



An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14

Maybe you identify with some of these situations. In the space provided, describe a time when you had to release something or someone you dearly loved. Or perhaps you're still holding on and can't bring yourself to let go. What are the circumstances?

At the end of his sermon, Chuck made two profound statements:

- *God never puts us through a test without a purpose.* Usually, the purpose is designed to make us release what we're clutching.
- *When we trust God, He provides solutions that quickly loosen our grip.* The rewards of holding everything loosely will surpass anything we could have ever imagined.

As painful as it is to let go of God's good gifts, the process of releasing opens our hands to receive the greatest reward—the Giver Himself!

As we internalize this biblical account, let's anchor in our hearts the faithfulness of God who is our Provider. Centuries after Abraham released his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, our heavenly Father released His Son, Jesus Christ. Just as Isaac submitted himself to his father, so Jesus surrendered Himself to the altar of the cross. Only no lamb took Jesus' place, for Jesus was the Lamb! His sacrifice atoned for our sin, ushered us into an eternal relationship with our heavenly Father, and became the most epochal event of all.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this wonderful account of Your servant's faith and Your faithfulness. At this moment, I confess my temptation to cling to the things of this world because I believe the lie that life is better when I'm in control. Please increase my faith in You so that I may let go what needs to be released. Most of all, I thank You, Yahweh Yireh, for providing Your Son Jesus Christ as my sacrificial substitute so that I may have You as my portion forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 128.
2. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 128.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Abraham: One Nomad's Amazing Journey of Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 200.



EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY ONE

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

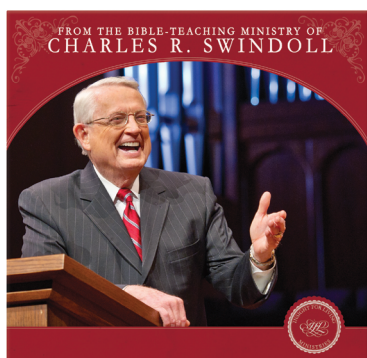
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An Aging Father and His Son

Genesis 22:1–14



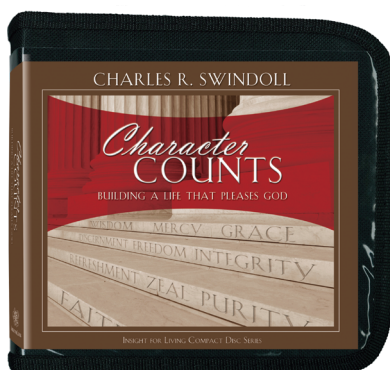
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Epochal Events Nobody Expected

by Charles R. Swindoll

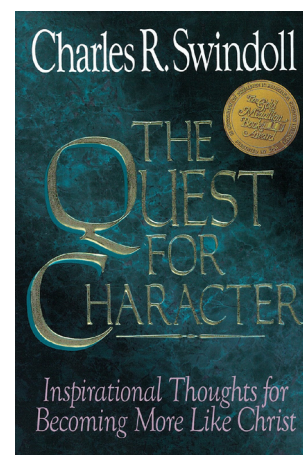
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY TWO

An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

God gave Joseph a long-range view and delivered him from the narrow tunnel of his past.

—Charles R. Swindoll

JOSEPH was the favored son of his father Jacob and heir to God's covenant with his great grandfather Abraham. As a teen, Joseph had a promising future, as hopeful as the sun rising over the green hills where he tended his father's sheep. But then, just as *every epochal event begins with an unexpected trial*, a sudden storm of adversity blew through Joseph's life and tore apart his world.

Jealous of Joseph's favored status, Joseph's older brothers nabbed him one day when he came to check on them in the fields; they intended to kill their brother. However, figuring there was no profit in murder, they decided to sell Joseph to slave traders instead. Then, to cover their sin, they soaked Joseph's coat in blood and led their father to believe a wild beast had killed his beloved son (Genesis 37:18–33).

Carted to Egypt, Joseph was auctioned off as a house servant to Potiphar and worked hard to win the favor of his master. But then, when Joseph refused Potiphar's wife's sexual advances, Mrs. Potiphar falsely accused Joseph of attacking her, so Potiphar threw Joseph into prison (39:1–20). This life was *not* the life of young Joseph's dreams!

As a boy in Canaan, Joseph had dreams—two very vivid, God-given dreams. They foretold that he would be a ruler someday and that his family, including his hateful older brothers, would bow down to him (37:5–11). How *impossible* those dreams must have seemed in prison! Joseph's "throne room" was a dingy, rat-infested cell and his "royal bed" a hard, bare floor. In this lonely place, Joseph sat day after day . . . *rehearsing every offense, nursing a grudge against those who had done him wrong, and bitterly plotting his revenge*. Well, that's what we'd expect him to do, right?



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An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

We'll find out Joseph's response to his abusers as we examine the rest of Joseph's story and the epochal moment when God made Joseph's impossible dreams possible. But first, let's prepare our hearts to study God's Word and receive His message of love to victims like Joseph.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The abuse Joseph suffered at the hands of his family and his captors must have left deep physical and emotional scars. Perhaps you have suffered at the hands of others as well. When others' sins wound us, where can we go for comfort, protection, and justice? We run to the Savior, who, as the prophet Isaiah foretold, makes a safe place for victims:

*He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. (Isaiah 42:3)*

Take a moment for quiet communion with your Savior. Ask the Lord to reveal His care for you through the account of Joseph's abuse and recovery. And pray that He will redeem your past, heal your wounds, then help you see His perfect plan for your life.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Up to now, Joseph's life was a downward spiral of injustices that forced Joseph into a pit so deep that there seemed no hope of rescue. Let's take a closer look at what happened to him and how God remained with Joseph even when all others abandoned him.



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21



Observation: The Lord Was with Joseph

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a crucial first step is observation, which involves examining the text as if we're looking through a magnifying glass. What specific abuses did Joseph suffer?

A Tragic Account of Abuse

Let's review the ways Joseph experienced abuse. Read each verse below and write down what form of abuse Joseph suffered. The first two are filled in as examples.

- Emotional and verbal abuse: "His brothers hated Joseph. . . . They couldn't say a kind word to him" (Genesis 37:4).
- Murder conspiracy: "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns" (37:20).
- _____: "His brothers ripped off the beautiful robe he was wearing. Then they grabbed him and threw him into the cistern" (37:23–24).
- _____: "Joseph's brothers . . . sold him to [the Ishmaelites] for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt" (37:28).
- _____: "The brothers . . . dipped Joseph's robe in [goat's] blood" and "sent the beautiful robe to their father" (37:31–32).
- _____: "the Midianite traders . . . sold Joseph to Potiphar" (37:36).
- _____: "[Potiphar's wife] kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her. . . . She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, 'Come on, sleep with me!'" (39:10, 12).
- _____: "'That Hebrew slave you've brought into our house tried to come in and fool around with me,' she said" (39:17).
- _____: "[Potiphar] took Joseph and threw him into the prison where the king's prisoners were held, and there he remained" (39:20).



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

Joseph endured unimaginable abuses, experiencing some of the worst forms of evil that humans can inflict on one another. Assault, fraud, confinement, kidnapping, human trafficking, sexual harassment, false accusation, and more. What impacts you most about this list? How would you have responded if you had been Joseph?

What a shock for Joseph to go from favored son to forgotten boy. From a pampered child to an enslaved, unknown, young man. How easy it would have been for him to nurse a grudge and lick his wounds as he rehearsed his abuses, none of which were deserved.
—Chuck Swindoll

An Inspiring Example of Character

And yet, as deep into the pit as Joseph descended, he never sunk into despair. What clue does the text give as the source of Joseph's stability during his storms? Read [Genesis 39:2](#) and [39:21](#).

Although people betrayed Joseph, God walked with him each painful step of the way. What character traits did Joseph's closeness with God highlight in Joseph? Draw your answers from Joseph's integrity displayed while in Potiphar's household and while in prison ([Genesis 39:2–9; 21–23](#)).



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

No one could have predicted the events that led teenaged Joseph from his home in Canaan to a prison in Egypt. It is the nature of epochal events that no one sees the storms coming, and rescue is humanly impossible. Only rays from heaven can light the way through the pitch-black darkness. For Joseph, God's guiding light came in the form of dreams.

A Providential Rescue through Dreams

Joseph's dreams and their fulfillment played a crucial role in God rescuing Joseph from prison and, ultimately, rescuing Joseph's family from famine in Canaan. They also testify to Joseph's *intimate walk with God*, which is both the reason for Joseph's survival and success in Egypt and the secret to his positive and indomitable attitude.

In the following chart, write down the elements of the dreams and the interpretations.

Verses	Dream Elements	Interpretation
<i>Genesis 37:5–11</i>		
<i>Genesis 40:5–23</i>		
<i>Genesis 41:1–36</i>		

“Interpreting dreams is God's business” (Genesis 40:8), Joseph told his prison mates. Why? Because God was the source of their dreams, and God held the prisoners' future in His hands. What did Joseph say when Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dreams (*41:16*)?



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph made it clear that he was merely God's mouthpiece. Pharaoh, who was considered a god by the Egyptians, marveled at Joseph's closeness with God: "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38).

In the previous study, the epochal moment occurred when an angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven (22:11–12). In this epochal moment, God spoke through Joseph as he interpreted Pharaoh's dream. This divine word from the Lord forever altered Joseph's future and the future of Abraham's entire lineage. It moved the hand of Pharaoh to rescue Joseph from prison and give Joseph a God-ordained mission. What was this mission (41:37–57)?

When famine struck, Joseph's brothers, humbled by hunger, came to Egypt for food. Fulfilling Joseph's prophetic boyhood dreams, his brothers bowed before the one they had abused. Instead of taking revenge, however, Joseph took his family under his care and gloried in the providence of God who had brought good from evil (42–46).



Interpretation: God Intended It All for Good

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning of Joseph's life story. The key to understanding is found in a statement Joseph made to his brothers after they moved to Egypt: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20).

What had just occurred before Joseph made this statement (49:33–50:13)?



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

What were Joseph's brothers afraid of after their father died (*Genesis 50:14–18*)?

How did Joseph reassure his brothers (*50:19–21*)?

What was Joseph's view of God that made it possible for him to forgive his brothers?

Joseph told his abusers, in effect, “You weren’t in charge of my life; God brought me here, and His plan is right!” At the core of Joseph’s faith was an unwavering trust in the grace and goodness of God.

God gave Joseph a long-range view and delivered him from the narrow tunnel of his past. This is the same man who was hated by his siblings. Same man who was abandoned and sold. Same man who was falsely accused of rape, thrown in prison, and left to die. He was the same man who had the chance to get even but said, “Am I God, that I can punish you?” . . . Grace was the one concept the brothers could not fathom. —Chuck Swindoll



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21



Correlation: God Offers Grace

God shows grace to victims like Joseph by walking close to them through their trials. God also shows grace to sinners like Joseph's brothers by forgiving them when they humbly repent. What do the following verses say about the healing power of God's amazing grace toward those who sin and those who suffer?

2 Corinthians 12:9

1 Peter 5:5–7



Application: Grace for the Abused and the Abusers

We began our study focusing on Joseph as a model for sufferers. If you, like Joseph, have felt the sting of other people's sins, what about Joseph's walk with God encourages you today?



An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21

What principle about God's redemptive plan for our lives can you apply from Joseph's words to his abusers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20)?

On the other hand, you may identify with Joseph's brothers—as one who struggles to receive God's gracious forgiveness. How does Joseph's attitude of restoration toward his brothers reveal God's heart toward you?

From the pit of prison to the pinnacle of the palace, our sojourn in Joseph's life has been nothing short of incredible. Joseph ended his days in right standing with God and free from the bitterness of his past. He faced death with no resentment toward those who harmed him. How can we experience this kind of peace? By daily embracing God's grace. God will never abandon us, even through our deepest trials.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, God of grace and glory, master of my life, and planner of all that is good and best, hear my prayer of trust as I bring to You my pain and heartache. Relieve me of the guilt of my sin and heal me from the hurt caused by the sin of others. I release my resentment and bitterness to You, my Savior who loves me and walks with me through every trial I face. Amen.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

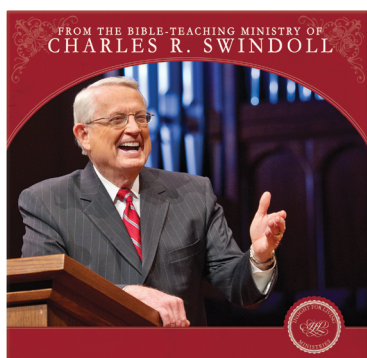
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An Abused Man and His Brothers

Genesis 41:37–44; 45:1–8; 50:18–21



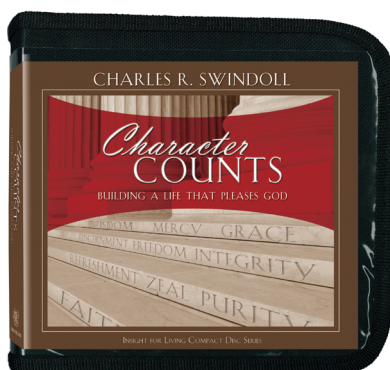
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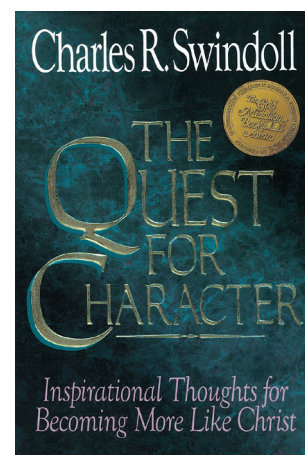
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EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY THREE

A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

Every one of us has giants in our lives. They are not nine feet tall, they don't wear armor, and they don't have a name like Goliath, but they're giants nevertheless. Unless I miss my guess, you're afraid of yours. Stay realistic rather than run scared. Remember, greater is He who is in you than whoever may be in this world.

—Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE likes to see an underdog take on a champion. Perhaps the most famous of all underdog contests was when the scrappy shepherd boy David challenged mighty Goliath. Have you ever been in a lopsided battle like that, overmatched and underequipped against some Goliath in your life?

All of us face giants. Whether powerful opponents or menacing problems, giants are terrifying . . . until we see, just as David did, our bellowing Goliaths from God's point of view.

In this study, we'll examine the biblical account of David and Goliath from what may be a new perspective: *David's victory was not the result of a miracle.* Indeed, the battle belonged to the Lord, but David still utilized his long-held talent as a master slinger. And although no one could overpower Goliath hand-to-hand, his hidden weaknesses made him vulnerable against David's skill. Giants are not always what they seem.

So, we wonder. Who was the *real* underdog in this epochal event featuring history's most mismatched foes: David or Goliath? Let's find out!



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A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, think about any giants that may be casting a threatening shadow over you. In his message, Chuck Swindoll lists four types of giant-sized challenges that can paralyze us with fear and defeat us if we let them.

- *Domestic:* Marital discord is one type of domestic giant. So are divorce, death of a loved one, or a wayward son or daughter. These giants attack, heaping upon us deep grief, confusion, and heartache.
- *Personal:* This type of giant may involve individuals who threaten us, a serious health issue, fears about aging, a distressing lawsuit, or an unwanted move to a strange new place. These giants hurl spears of loneliness, depression, negativity, and bitterness.
- *Economic:* The name of this bellowing bully may be unemployment, financial collapse, or out-of-control spending. Perhaps your business has gone under or your savings are dangerously thin.
- *Spiritual:* The most dangerous giant of all is unbelief. We must overcome this giant first, with the aid of the Spirit who helps us trust that Jesus bore our sin on the cross and promised to be with us always.

Unfortunately, ignoring these problems won't make them go away. There's only one way to handle a giant: face it head-on. What are your giants?

Now take a moment to commit these giants to the Lord. Invite His Spirit to strengthen your faith and ask Him to help you see them through His eyes.



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read [1 Samuel 17:1–3](#). These verses describe the Philistines' invasion against the Israelites via the Valley of Elah, a strategic gateway to Israelite hill country. You can locate the Valley of Elah in your atlas or Bible maps. Or, at insight.org, you can view the “[Kingdoms of Israel](#)” map, which shows Philistia and the city of Gath, Goliath's home. To view a satellite image of the Valley of Elah, a diagram of the possible site of the battle between David and Goliath, and photographs of the valley, see “[The Valley of Elah](#)” at biblewalks.com.

As you can see from these maps and diagrams, the Philistines' invasion was like the thrust of a spear into the heart of Israel. What was at stake if Saul's army could not defeat the Philistines and send them back to Gath?



Observation: The Combatants

Now that we've set the scene, let's observe the characters and action surrounding the Israelites and their giant enemy.

Goliath's Challenge

As the Israelite and Philistine armies faced each other on opposite hills, the imposing Goliath strode to the valley floor with his challenge. Read [1 Samuel 17:4–10](#) and write down what made Goliath a terrifying foe.



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

Goliath's taunt took aim directly at Saul, who was Israel's obvious choice to fight the giant. How is Saul described in [1 Samuel 9:1–2](#)? And what was the reason he was made king, according to [1 Samuel 8:20](#) (NASB)?

The Philistines' strategy was not just to divide Israel but to demoralize the nation by humiliating Israel's king. What did Saul do in response to Goliath's challenge? Let's see.

Saul's Fear

Read [1 Samuel 17:11](#) and [25](#), and write down how Saul responded to Goliath's confrontation.

While Saul's knees knocked in fear, David's heart pounded with courageous determination. Both men heard the same taunts from Goliath—but how different were their responses!

David's Determination

For forty days, twice per day, Goliath "strutted in front of the Israelite army" (1 Samuel 17:16). When David arrived at the battle camp with food for his brothers, he heard the giant "shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel" (17:23). What did David ask the soldiers ([17:26](#))? How did his brother, Eliab, react to David's questioning, and how did Saul react ([17:28–31](#))?



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

While Saul and his army saw only Goliath's colossal size, David measured Goliath against the true object of the Philistine's taunts: the Lord. What was Goliath's might against the Almighty? How could this blasphemer shake his fist in God's face and win?

Observe closely David's conversation with Saul in [1 Samuel 17:32–40](#) and write down evidence of David's perspective as he viewed the situation from God's point of view in contrast with Saul's human-oriented perspective.

Evidence of David's Godly Perspective	Evidence of Saul's Human Perspective

From Saul's earthly point of view, no teenage boy could overpower the heavyweight champion. But that was Saul's problem all along. He couldn't see himself or his problems from the perspective of an all-powerful, faithful God.



Interpretation: The Contest

In the interpretive phase, we seek to understand the meaning of David's victory. Take a few minutes to read the account in [1 Samuel 17:40–51](#). What do you think were the reasons David was able to defeat Goliath?

David acknowledged the Lord as the true victor (1 Samuel 17:46–47). And yet, the Lord won the victory not by thundering from heaven, as He had done in a previous battle with the Philistines.¹ Instead, God prevailed *through David* and his stone-slinging skills. No miracle was done that day.



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

David had honed his skills through countless lonely hours of practice in the wilderness, and it had been battle-tested against lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Little did David know all this was in preparation for the day he would fling a stone with the accuracy and velocity of a bullet to Goliath’s forehead.²

What principle can you draw from God working through David’s competence to win the battle against Goliath?

How did David do it? He remembered how God had strengthened him in days past. He had a lot of wolf and lion and bear stories to recall. Don’t forget your own stories. Every one of us can name them. Remember and call to mind the things God did for you in the past. It will strengthen your faith for today. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God Looks at the Heart

The key to understanding the account of David and Goliath is the truth that God sees beyond externals to people’s hearts. Size and power may impress us, but God is more interested in a person’s character and devotion to Him.

Read the account of a previous episode when Samuel anointed David ([1 Samuel 16:1–13](#)). What do you learn about viewing people from God’s point of view? How can this perspective help you when facing giants?

Some researchers have speculated that Goliath may have had a medical condition that contributed to his massive size. But that same condition also may have limited his mobility and eyesight.³ Consequently, what made Goliath gigantic may have made him vulnerable. For an agile and experienced slinger like David, *Goliath* was an easy target. Against David, Goliath was the underdog!



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17

That's why we don't go by size. That's why statistics don't intimidate us when we have the right perspective. There's an important lesson here for all of us who face our own giants. The powerful and fearful in appearance are not always what they seem. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Two Lessons for Battling Giants

In his message, Chuck provides two lessons that emerge from this epochal event.

1. *Remember what God has done for you in the past.* Just as David reminded himself of God's enablement that resulted in earlier victories, we can draw courage and strength for our own challenges today.
2. *Develop a theology that gives you a God-centered perspective.* View your battles as ones the Lord fights. While Saul retreated from the fight, David took the fight to the enemy and, in that way, had the thrill of engaging in the Lord's battle and experiencing the strength of the Almighty through him.

Recall the giants you listed at the beginning of this study. What new insight do you have toward them now?

How do you plan to put into practice the principles you learned from David's victory over Goliath?

Don't overestimate the might of taunting giants, and never underestimate the power of God. Many of the giants we face are powerless, for they are nothing but empty shells, having no substance at all. And what gives the story of David so much impact is that deep within his life there was substance . . . there was truth. And there's nothing more confidence-building as a pocketful of truth when facing giants!



A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17



A FINAL PRAYER

Close this study by praying a prayer of Patrick of Ireland and express your dependence on God's power.

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, his might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.⁴

ENDNOTES

1. An example of a battle won by a miracle occurred when the Lord “spoke with a mighty voice of thunder from heaven” (1 Samuel 7:10), throwing the much stronger Philistine army into such confusion that the fearful Israelites easily routed them.
2. Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2013), 11–12. Gladwell describes the scene. David “puts a rock into his sling, and whips it around and around, faster and faster at six or seven revolutions per second, aiming his projectile at Goliath’s forehead—the giant’s only point of vulnerability. Eitan Hirsch, a ballistics expert with the Israeli Defense Forces, recently did a series of calculations showing that a typical-size stone hurled by an expert slinger . . . would have hit Goliath’s head with a velocity of thirty-five meters per second—more than enough to penetrate his skull. . . . ‘Goliath had as much chance against David,’ the historian Robert Dohrenwend writes, ‘as any Bronze Age warrior with a sword would have had against an [opponent] armed with a .45 automatic pistol.’”
3. Gladwell, *David and Goliath*, 14–15. “What many medical experts now believe, in fact, is that Goliath had a serious medical condition. He looks and sounds like someone suffering from what is called acromegaly—a disease caused by a benign tumor of the pituitary gland. . . . And furthermore, one of the common side effects of acromegaly is vision problems. . . . What the Israelites saw, from high on the ridge, was an intimidating giant. In reality, the very thing that gave the giant his size was also the source of his greatest weakness.”
4. Patrick of Ireland, as quoted in *The One Year Book of Personal Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 4.



EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY THREE

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

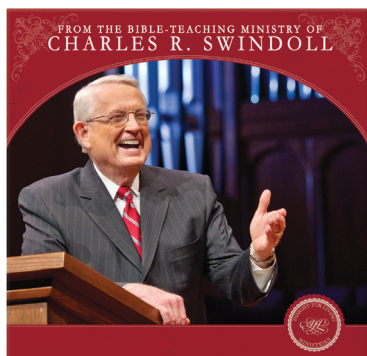
STUDY

A Brave Teenager and a Giant

Selections from 1 Samuel 17



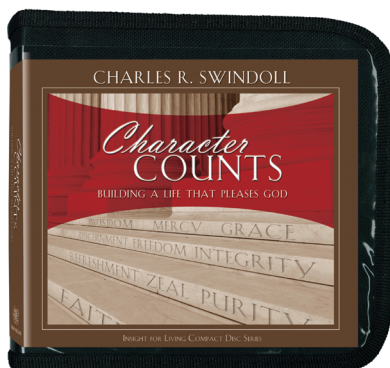
Tools for Digging Deeper



Epochal Events Nobody Expected

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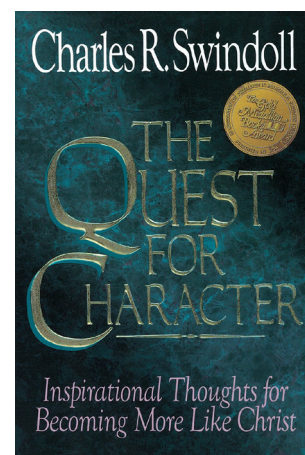
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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED STUDY FOUR

A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

As the saying goes, “You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.” Today we meet Elijah whose bow was broken. His depression happened suddenly, unexpectedly. But when Elijah finally stopped looking down and around and within, and finally looked up, it was an epochal event. And he never slumped again.

—Charles R. Swindoll

KING Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, led Israel into more sin than any other king and queen before them. They worshiped Baal, the Canaanite false god of thunder and rain, and built a temple to him in Samaria (1 Kings 16:29–33). Because of their sin, the Lord brought drought to the land (17:1). But He also wanted His people to repent and worship Him, so He planned a showdown between His man Elijah and 450 prophets of Baal.

The false prophets prepared a sacrifice, and from morning until evening, they called upon Baal to send fire to devour it. But the heavens remained silent until Elijah prayed, and, immediately, the Lord sent fire that consumed not only Elijah’s sacrifice but the firewood and stone altar as well.

When the people saw the blinding flash, “they fell face down on the ground and cried out, ‘The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!’” (18:39). Elijah prayed again, and the true God of creation opened the heavens and poured down rain, breaking the three-year drought (18:41–45).

It was a magnificent triumph! Fire and rain from heaven displayed God’s awesome greatness and grace. Unfortunately, this was a single victory in a spiritual war that continued within the soul of a person nobody would have expected. After Mount Carmel, the godly Elijah battled a deep depression that almost took his life.

Let’s follow Elijah into his desert of discouragement and learn the lessons from *the prophet’s crash and God’s rescue* to help us win the fight with our own devil: Despair.



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A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open God's Word, take a quiet moment to meditate on the following assurances of God's presence in your dark times. Highlight the phrases that give you the most comfort and invite the Lord into your time of study.

*Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me. (Psalm 23:4)*

*Don't be afraid, for I am with you.
Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you.
I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

*"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you." (43:1–2)*



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Observation is the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. As you read 1 Kings 19, look closely at the dialogue between the four main characters and the description of the action. Step into the scenes as if you were present: walk with the people, observe the landscape, feel the atmosphere, and sense the intensity of each moment.



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19



Observation: Elijah's Retreat

First Kings 18 closes with heavenly raindrops refreshing the land and cleansing the nation's sin. First Kings 19 opens with Ahab, still drenched from God's rainstorm, running to his wife like a spoiled child running to his mother.

Weak-Willed Ahab and Wicked Jezebel

Ahab purposefully slanted his report of the events on Mount Carmel to ignite Jezebel's rage. What did Ahab say, and did he omit any details (*1 Kings 19:1*)?

Baal may have been silent . . . but Jezebel *thundered* her threat to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you" (19:2). How did Elijah respond to the roar of Jezebel's rage? He bolted!

Have you ever had your life threatened? Strange things happen to your mind when you're threatened and know you're being stalked. The attacker's gun is loaded or his knife is sharpened, and any shadow may conceal the person who is out to get you. Fear does something to you, even if you are an Elijah. —Chuck Swindoll

Elijah Discouraged

Knowing Jezebel's threat had teeth—she had tried to kill all the prophets in the past (1 Kings 18:4)—Elijah became "afraid and fled for his life" (19:3). Seeking safety from danger is a wise move, but Elijah let his fear take control. Let's observe the fault lines that weakened Elijah's faith so we can learn from his example and better prepare for attacks that come our way.

Read *1 Kings 19:3–4*, and write down your observations about Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's threat.



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

In his message, Chuck Swindoll notes five characteristics of Elijah's actions that are common among those who struggle with depression.

1. *Elijah wasn't thinking realistically or clearly.* Elijah, who once urged others to not be afraid (1 Kings 17:13), allowed fearful thoughts to run loose in his mind.
2. *Elijah separated himself from strengthening relationships.* Elijah fled to Beersheba, about a hundred miles south of Jezreel. Depressed people often isolate themselves when they feel vulnerable.
3. *Elijah was caught in the backwash of a great victory.* Depression frequently comes on the heels of a great triumph.
4. *Elijah gave in to the beast of self-pity.* Elijah's plea for God to take his life flowed out of a false sense of failure: "I am no better than my ancestors who have already died" (19:4).
5. *Elijah was physically exhausted and emotionally spent.* Elijah's ministry had been full-speed ahead without a break. Finally, alone under the broom tree, Elijah slept for the first time in perhaps weeks (19:5).

Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah were the first three characters in this drama. The Lord took center stage as He came to Elijah not with a lecture but with loving compassion.



Interpretation: Elijah's Restoration

Let's focus on interpretation as we step into the next section of the narrative. What can we learn about God from His tender response to Elijah?

Compassionate Lord

The Lord's initial response to His discouraged prophet was to give him *time to rest and refresh*. What did God do, and what can we infer about God's nature from His actions (1 Kings 19:5–8)?



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

Next, how did God correct Elijah's negative thinking by *communicating wisely* (1 Kings 19:9–13)?

What does God's display from nature mean? Wind, earthquakes, and fire were all associated with the Lord's power and often His judgment (*Judges 5:4–5*; *Psalms 18:7–15*; *Isaiah 64:1–4*). This was especially true on Mount Sinai, the mountain covered in smoke and fire when Moses received the law (*Exodus 19:18*).

Elijah probably assumed God brought him to a place of suffering for judgment. What reassuring message did God wisely communicate about His nature by coming to Elijah in the sound of a “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12)?

So, God gave Elijah rest and refreshment and wisdom. But Elijah needed one more boost to get out of his pit of depression. What did God do for Elijah next (19:14–21)?



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

All ended well as Elijah and Elisha exited the scene shouldering the ministry together. Elijah found his needed rest, companionship, and communion with the Lord. He learned that God was still in charge, not Ahab or Jezebel, and that the outcome of God's plan for Israel did not all depend on him.



Correlation: God's Heart for the Downtrodden

God came to discouraged Elijah in a gentle whisper. His compassion came again to the world in the gentle Savior. Read the following verses, and write down the ways that Jesus expressed the heart of God to hurting people.

Matthew 9:35–36

Luke 7:11–15



Application: Lessons Learned

The same God who came to Elijah with a tender touch in the prophet's darkest hour can come to you as well. Can you see any similarities between your experiences and Elijah's? Have you followed in Elijah's stressed-out steps? What happened, and how can you bring balance back to your life?



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19

Have you withdrawn lately into a wilderness of isolation? Have depressing thoughts been feeding your loneliness? What is God speaking to you in this lonesome place? Recall the verses in the Preparing Your Heart section at the beginning of our study.

How do you see God? As a purging fire? A quaking mountain of judgment? A terrifying wind of rebuke? Thinking about Elijah's story, how can you experience the God who seeks to whisper gently to you in the quietness of your ordinary day?

Do you tend to set unrealistically high expectations for yourself? Despite the triumph on Mount Carmel, Elijah was convinced he was a failure because Ahab and Jezebel didn't change. Do you blame yourself because others won't change? Do you have a supportive friend who can help you rest in God's plan when circumstances don't turn out as you hoped? Who can walk with you through your dark times of self-doubt?

The next time fear comes knocking, remember to turn first to the Lord. He won't tear you apart with wind, earthquakes, and fire; He'll draw you to Himself in quietness, gentleness, and care. He is more powerful than any thundering Jezebel, and He has a plan that's bigger than your circumstances.



A Sad Prophet and a Bad Queen

1 Kings 19



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, our enemy, the Adversary, prowls like a lion looking to devour me. He knows when I'm vulnerable. He sends enemies to terrify me. Lord, I need Your help. Help my thoughts not to run wild with fearful imaginations. Remind me of what is true—Your faithful presence and sovereign control. Come to my rescue, just as You came to Elijah's aid. I need You, Lord. I need You every hour! Amen.



EPOCHAL EVENTS NOBODY EXPECTED

STUDY FOUR

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

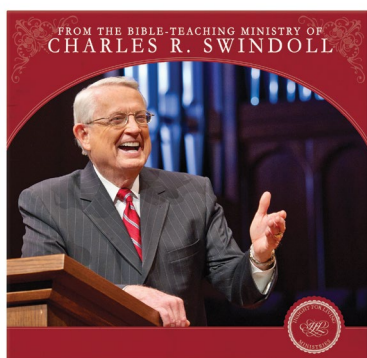
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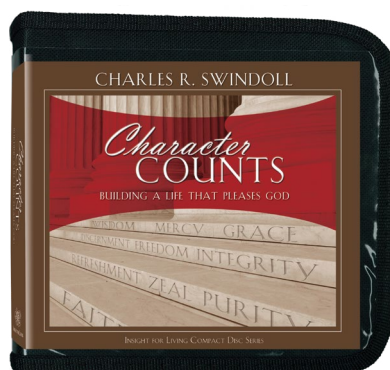
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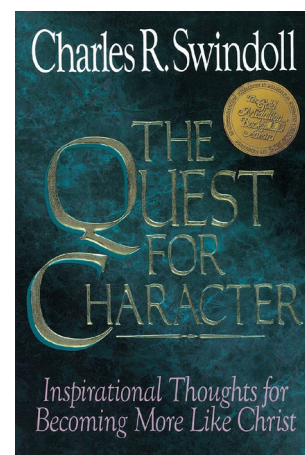
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