

Section 4, Week 29
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

Behind the Scenes Protection

Nothing is as confusing and disheartening—indeed, downright frustrating—as heading toward a goal and having something happen that throws you totally off the path. We wonder, at those times, why God allows such calamities. Discover why God changed the plans of the nation of Israel, and what lesson it holds for us (Exodus 13:17-18; p. xxx).

Day 3

My Identity

When the Best Is Yet to Come

It's hard to see the future when the present is covered with clouds. Death, divorce, disease, disaster—no one can be faulted for momentarily thinking that the good days are over. A prophet in the Old Testament thought his future was gone when God spoke to him. Discover what Joel learned in Joel 2:25 (p. xxx), and how it can help you as well.

Day 4

Impact

The Best Defense

Whether in sports competition or armed conflict between nations, the best offense is always anchored by a good defense. The same is true in the spiritual life. The spiritual battle that believers are in has the best defense possible, as the warrior-king of Israel, David, discovered. Read what, i.e., who, it is in 2 Samuel 22:31-33 (p. xxx).

Day 5

Implication

A Tower of Strength

What a name means is one thing; what a name does to you when you hear it mentioned is another. Does it produce fear or confidence? Joy or sadness? Trust or suspicion? Peace or anxiety? King Solomon said that the Lord's name should invoke something very important to the righteous. Discover what it is when you read Proverbs 18:10 (p. xxx).

Section 4, Week 29, Day 1
Habakkuk 3:17-19
358 words

The Promise Your Feet on High Places

Habakkuk 3:17-19 *Oreamnos americanus*—better known as the Rocky Mountain goat—makes Barnum and Bailey’s tightrope walkers look like amateurs by comparison. In search of pockets of vegetation rooted in sheer rock faces, these shaggy cliff-climbers make us gasp in amazement at their surefooted acrobatics. And just when it appears they are stuck—can’t go forward and no room to turn around—they defy gravity by turning their stubby legs into pogo sticks that launch them ten feet or more to a new perch.

In the summer, when the cliffs are free of ice, the mountain goat’s sharp-edged hoof can hook over the slightest piece of rock projecting from a cliff face. Which is exactly what it needs—the hotter it gets, the higher it climbs. Why? They have confidence in the high places—food is available, predators can’t touch them, and it’s cooler than the stifling heat below.

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk never saw an American Rocky Mountain goat—but he had seen plenty of similar sure-footed creatures: The deer, gazelle, roe deer, wild goat, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep. They were as confident in dangerous places as he wanted to be in the place where he was. It was getting hot in Israel, but not because of the weather. An army of human predators from Babylon was bearing down on Israel to reap God’s judgment. He had been fearful—he knew that the crops and livestock they depended on for their sustenance were about to be destroyed. But he also had learned that the righteous live by faith, not by sight (Hab. 2:4). And suddenly, like hind’s hooves, Habakkuk’s faith was taking him to high places: “Let the heat come!” he thought. “The hotter it gets, the higher I’ll climb on the mountain that is my God.”

What do you do when the heat rises in your life and the predators who would steal your faith come near? Fear, insecurity, worry, discouragement—they will always attack. But start climbing. God has given you feet of faith like hinds’ hooves that will allow you to live where no predator can follow—in the high places of God’s protection.

God’s Promise to You: “If you will only climb higher, I will keep you from falling.”

Section 4, Week 29, Day 2
Exodus 13:17-18
368 words

God's Identity Behind the Scenes Protection

Exodus 13:17-18 You rise early on Saturday to drive to a nearby city to take the Graduate Record Exam for admission to graduate school. You don't want to be late—or have anything worse happen—since this is the last time the G.R.E. is given for September admissions. Praying as you drive, you realize you haven't been this contented—or confident you were in God's will—for a long time.

And then it happened—or “didn't happen” is more like it. Your car sputters, struggling to make it up a steep hill. You give it more gas and shift to a lower gear, but to no avail. Before it stops completely, you manage to pull off on the shoulder of the road. And there you sit, dumbfounded, in a dead car. The test begins in an hour and you're still 40 minutes away. And all of a sudden, God seems to be on the other side of the universe. Where's His protection when you need it?

You aren't the first, and won't be the last, to ask, “Why?” One of the first to ask was the infant nation of Israel. After 400 years in slavery, God sent Moses to rescue them—and they were ecstatic: “We're going home! We just walk due east out of Egypt, turn north around the corner of the Mediterranean Sea, and we're there! What could be easier?” Instead, Moses took them due south out of Egypt into the heart of the Sinai desert, a land of sand, sun, snakes, scorpions, and scorching attitudes. You know they were asking Moses, “Why?” but as far as we know, he didn't answer them. But we know why God did the opposite of what they were expecting. By going south, they avoided the Philistines, a warlike nation Israel would have encountered had they taken the short route home. The Sinai route was longer—but at least they were alive.

The next time you hit a bump in your road—a diversion, a delay, a drastic change in your plans—remember Israel in the desert: You never know what God might be protecting you from. He can see much further down the road than we can, and protects us accordingly.

God's Promise to You: “If I change your plans, it's because my plans are safer for you.”

Section 4, Week 29, Day 3

Joel 2:25

368 words

My Identity

When the Best Is Yet to Come

Joel 2:25 Antonio Stradivari (also known as Stradivarius; 1644-1737) fashioned two of his most famous violins, the “Habeneck” and the “Muntz,” in his early 90s. Noah Webster (1758-1843) published his two-volume *An American Dictionary of the English Language* at age 70. Galileo (1564-1642) published his masterpiece, *Dialogue Concerning Two New Sciences*, at age 74. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) designed the Guggenheim Museum in New York City at age 91. Dame Agatha Christie (1890-1976), at age 84, oversaw production of the movie *Murder On the Orient Express*, based on her novel of the same name. Golda Meir (1898-1978) served as prime minister of Israel from age 70 through 76. Peter F. Drucker (1909-) wrote *Managing in Turbulent Times* at age 71 and *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* at age 89.

Need we produce more evidence that human potential does not stop at some arbitrary age? Neither does it cease after a seemingly disabling event. The energy and creativity God has built into the human being seems boundless for those with vision. Unfortunately, many seem to lack that vision—and sometimes we can understand why. Something so drastic, so debilitating, so discouraging happens that we feel life surely must be over. We may survive, but we feel we will not live. That is how the prophet Joel felt after his homeland of Israel was decimated by swarms of locusts.

The devastation of the locusts was so dramatic (Joel 2:1-12) that it appeared the land would never recover. And on top of that, the locusts seem to be a harbinger of human invaders sent by God to judge Israel. How would Joel, the people, the land ever recover from years of ravaging and destruction? With God’s help: “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten,” said God to his prophet. Neither age, nor circumstances, nor resources are a limitation for God. It is not *what* we have that is important, but *who* we have.

Perhaps you think the future looks dim or nonexistent. Remember that you, and your future, are guarded by God. Whatever you think you have lost in the past is nothing compared to what you can gain, with his help, in the days to come.

God’s Promise to You: “Nothing you have lost is as valuable as what I can restore.”

Section 4, Week 29, Day 4
2 Samuel 22:31-33
368 words

Impact The Best Defense

2 Samuel 22:31-33 The history of the human race is often, unfortunately, chronicled by its wars. As dynasties and nations over millennia have sought to impose their will upon others, or defend their homelands from such imposition, wars have occurred. And because no one knows the outcome of wars until they are over, the destinies and liberties of nations and individuals are often changed dramatically. For that reason, governmental spending for military preparedness has always occupied a major portion of most national budgets. The theory that military readiness is the greatest deterrent to war shares a familiar perspective with sports: The best offense is a good defense.

While there have been two so-called “world wars” in history, neither of them can compare to the scope and the stakes of a “universal” war that has been waged since the beginning of time—and is waged today. Satan and his forces of evil seek to attack and harm all human beings. Christians are harassed, intimidated, and lied to about their God; non-Christians are kept on a path of destruction and deception in an attempt to prevent their salvation. While this war is fought primarily in the spiritual realm with resulting physical manifestations, the metaphors and images of armed combat, in whatever age, still help to picture the Christian’s offensive and defensive weapons and tactics.

David, the warrior-king of Israel, was the greatest military leader in all the Bible. Yet even he knew that there was only one true defense for the righteous. It was not a man-made sword, a shield, or a strong tower—it was God himself. For David, God’s way was perfect, which meant that if David took refuge in God he would be “protected” by God regardless of the outcome of any battle. Because God’s way is perfect (v. 31a), David’s way would become perfect as well (v. 33b).

Whether you ever participate in an armed conflict or not, you are participating in a spiritual one. Like warriors through the ages have proved, your best offense is to have the best defense, and your best defense is God himself. He has given us every bit of armor we need to defend ourselves against the enemy of our souls (Eph. 6:10-18).

God’s Promise to You: “When I am your defense, you are protected from all enemies.”

Section 4, Week 29, Day 5
Proverbs 18:10
375 words

Implication
A Tower of Strength

Proverbs 18:10 The main character in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is Christian, though, as he tells Watchful, the Porter, his name wasn't always such: "My name is now Christian; but my name at the first was Graceless . . ." On his way to the Celestial City, Christian encounters a host of others who, by their names alone, are revealed for what they are: Evangelist, Obstinate, Worldly Wiseman, Pliable, Goodwill, Backslider, Unready, Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Formalist, Hypocrisy, Mistrust, Discretion, Piety, Prudence, Apollyon, Faithful, and on and on.

The association of names with traits, trades, or family trees is well-known: John the baker became John Baker; Joe the blacksmith became Joe Smith, and Will who tended the castle gate became Will Porter. In biblical days, names meant certain things as well: David meant "beloved," Daniel meant "God is my judge," Abigail meant "my father is rejoicing," and Jesus meant "salvation." But when king Solomon, the writer of most of Proverbs, tells us something about God's name, he doesn't tell us what it *means*—he tells us what it *is*. The difference is subtle, and important.

Say a father learns that his daughter, away at college, is involved in an auto accident. She's in the hospital for observation, and will be okay, but she is understandably shaken up and upset. She's worried about car repairs, insurance, medical bills, the fate of the other driver, getting behind in school work. The father reaches her hospital room and hears a weak and trembling "Hello" on the other end. "Hello, honey, it's Dad," he says—and before he can say another thing his daughter's relief in hearing the voice of the strongest person she knows comes out in a flood of tears. "Dad" to her *is* knowledge, safety, security, acceptance, forgiveness, and love personified.

For Solomon, the name of the Lord was (and still is) a strong tower. It didn't *mean* strong tower; it *was* a strong tower, a place where the righteous could find safety and protection. To say that Yahweh (God's self-given name; see Exod. 3:14-15) is my God is to say that a tower of safety and strength is my God. Yahweh *means* "I am," but Yahweh *is* a strong tower for all who run to him.

God's Promise to You: "There is protection for any who will call upon my name."