



Compromise

SAMSON'S PHYSICAL STRENGTH COULD NOT SAVE HIM FROM
THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS WEAK MORAL CHARACTER.

Scripture Passage: Judges 16:16-31 Memory Verse: Psalm 28:7

Numerous people have succumbed to sensual desires throughout history. Temptation has gotten the best of countless political, business, and religious leaders. Add to that the countless mass of non-famous people who have fallen into sexual sin. Like every sin, moral failure is no respecter of persons. Every human being is broken, and every human being has the potential to commit any sin without Jesus's help—including sexual sins.

Samson was set apart by God even before he was born, and he was empowered by the Spirit throughout his life. As a result, he accomplished supernatural feats that targeted Israel's enemy, the Philistines. Unfortunately, his promiscuity got the best of him on multiple occasions, and he paid a tremendous physical and spiritual price.

As you prepare to lead this session, wrestle with your own shortcomings before you step into your classroom. At the same time, ask God to give you boldness in addressing what could be a sensitive subject. Stress to adults that some of God's most effective servants have fallen, yet they also have recovered by God's grace and forgiveness.



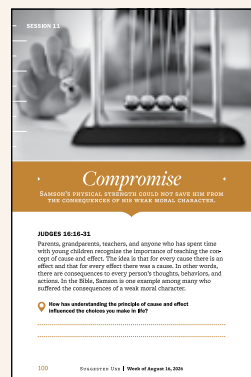
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Parents, grandparents, teachers, and anyone who has spent time with young children recognize the importance of teaching the concept of cause and effect. The idea is that for every cause there is an effect and that for every effect there was a cause. In other words, there are consequences to every person's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. In the Bible, Samson is one example among many who suffered the consequences of a weak moral character. (PSG, p. 100)

How has understanding the principle of cause and effect influenced the choices you make in life?



Understand the Context (Judges 13:1–21:25)

Just as the Bible includes countless ordinary people doing extraordinary things, it records how a myriad of imperfect servants carried out His perfect plan. Moses committed murder, but God used him to lead His people out of Egypt. Rahab, a prostitute, not only helped Israel's spies escape, but she also ended up in the genealogy of Jesus. David, a man after God's own heart, committed adultery and murder. Peter denied Christ, yet he became a key leader in the early church.

However, it might be that no one in Scripture is as conflicted as Samson, the final leader named in the book of Judges (chaps. 13–16).

After Gideon defeated Midian, Israel enjoyed forty years of peace. That ended, however, when his son, Abimelech, became Israel's self-declared king. To secure his position, Abimelech killed sixty-nine of his brothers.

Then, from the tribe of Issachar, came Tola, known as a minor judge. Next was Jair from Gilead. He was followed by Jephthah, known for his victory over the Ammonites. After that came Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. These judges served as regional leaders between Gideon and Samson. Their rules may have overlapped, but they served for a combined seventy-six years.

After Abdon, the Israelites continued the cycle of sin and did "what was evil in the LORD's sight" (Judg. 13:1). As a result, they fell into the hands of their enemies. This time, the Philistines oppressed God's people.

In the midst of this chaos, God dispatched the angel of the Lord to Manoah and his wife, a childless couple in Zorah, about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem. He went first to Manoah's wife, telling her that her son was to be a Nazirite (see Num. 6) and would deliver Israel from the Philistines.

Once Manoah arrived and heard the news, the couple presented an offering and fell face-down. As promised, the child came and God's Spirit began to move in his life.

Unfortunately, overdeveloped passion and a lack of self-control overtook Samson as he grew into a young man. Evidence of this surfaced when he chose to marry a Philistine, rather than a woman from among his people (14:3). As it turned out, the wedding fell apart, but God used the whole thing to create a confrontation between the Israelites and the Philistines (14:4). A series of back-and-forth acts of retaliation resulted in a Spirit-filled Samson killing one thousand Philistines with a single jawbone.

As time went on, Samson's promiscuous appetites again got the best of him, as he traveled to another Philistine town, Gaza, and met up with a prostitute. Later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who turned out to be an agent of the enemy and was determined to unlock the secret of Samson's strength.

As you read Judges 16:16–31, identify the sins Samson committed. (PSG, p. 101)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Prior to the session, display **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth) and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: The Oppressors in Judges) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 13** (Handout: The Cycle of Judges).

READ: Direct a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 100 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: How has understanding the principle of cause and effect influenced the choices you make in life? (PSG, p. 100)

CONTEXT: Briefly recount the previous sessions from Judges. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Cycle of Judges*) and review how Israel kept experiencing God’s punishment for sin.

SHARE: Highlight “Samson” on **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth). Summarize this information from “Understand the Context” to provide more background:

“The angel of the Lord appeared to his barren mother and informed her that she and her husband would have a son and that they must raise him as a Nazirite (13:2-7). This meant that he was not to consume anything derived from the grapevine, he was to abstain from alcohol, his hair was never to be cut, and he was to avoid contact with any corpse (Num. 6:1-21). The Spirit of the Lord stirred Samson, and he was a judge in Israel for twenty years (Judg. 13:25; 15:20). Samson, however, had a flawed character and kept the wrong company.” (PSG, p. 101)

TRANSITION: *Samson demonstrated a weak moral character on many occasions. But in his encounter with a woman named Delilah, his lack of self-control took him farther than he ever expected to go—and he suffered for it.*



Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute hymnals and direct the group to turn to “His Strength is Perfect” (No. 460, *Baptist Hymnal*, 2008). Lead the group to review the lyrics. Discuss how God gives strength when we are weak and when we need it most. Allow volunteers to share examples of how and when God has provided them strength. Explain that today’s session focuses on Samson and the consequences he faced because he refused to rely on God’s strength.

Strength Departed (Judg. 16:16-20)

16 Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, **17** he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.” **18** When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the silver with them. **19** Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him. **20** Then she cried, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” When he awoke from his sleep, he said, “I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

(vv. 16-17) After striking a deal with the Philistine leaders, Delilah immediately went to work to discover the source of Samson’s power. He toyed with her for a while, providing false answers (Judg. 16:1-15). But Samson’s “games” did not deter Delilah. She just **nagged him day after day**. The Hebrew word for *nagged* can also be rendered “oppressed” or “distressed.” The writer of Judges used it earlier to describe how Samson’s Philistine bride pestered him until he revealed the answer to a riddle he had posed (14:17). Moses also used it three times in Deuteronomy 28:53-57 as he warned Israel about enemy oppression that would result from violating God’s covenant

Whereas a strong, Spirit-filled wife can be a blessing to her husband, a wicked helpmate leads to disaster (Prov. 12:4; Eccl. 7:26). Unfortunately, Samson didn’t possess the wisdom of Solomon at the time. He failed to discern the danger as Delilah **pleaded with him** to reveal his secret. Eventually, her persistence paid off as her words **wore him out**.

Pressed to his limits, Samson finally **told her the whole truth**. He shared that he had been set aside as **a Nazirite to God** before he was even born. *Nazirite* comes from the Hebrew word *nazir*, which means “separated or consecrated.” The Nazirite vow, outlined in Numbers 6:1-21, prohibited consumption of beer and grape products (including wine and raisins), the cutting of hair, and contact with corpses.

During his life, Samson had violated the restriction related to corpses when he took honey from the carcass of a dead lion (Judg. 14:8-9). He also may have violated the prohibition against

strong drink and grapes, though Scripture is not explicit. Yet, Samson could say honestly that his hair had **never been cut**. For whatever reason, he had honored that part of the Nazirite vow to this point. But his confession gave her the information she needed to make him **weak . . . like any other man**.

It is interesting to note that Samson used the more general word for *God* (*Elohim*) rather than His covenant name (*Yahweh*). It is possible that this indicates a disconnect between Samson and the significance of his calling. It also could explain why he believed his hair—not his obedience to his Nazirite vow—was the source of his strength instead of God.

(vv. 18-20) At Delilah’s urging, the Philistines came and **brought the silver** to pay her what she had earned. Some commentators see a parallel between Delilah and Judas, who also betrayed someone he claimed to love for a price.

With Samson asleep on Delilah’s lap, a Philistine was able to **shave off the seven braids on his head**. This made God’s judge **helpless**. In a sense, Samson’s lack of moral character led him to surrender his strength to Delilah.

On previous occasions, Samson had been able to shake free and escape the Philistine trap. However, something was different this time. As the text tragically notes, **the LORD had left him**. To make matters worse, Samson **did not know** that he was now working in his own strength.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers should avoid putting themselves in situations that will tempt them to sin.

Instruct each adult to read Judges 16:16-20 with a partner and to discuss what sticks out to them. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their thoughts. Highlight today’s summary statement: *Samson’s physical strength could not save him from the consequences of his weak moral character.*

PREPARE:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *The Oppressors in Judges*) and highlight the Philistines. Point out that Israel’s cycle of sin put them under the control of their enemies again.

CONTEXT:

Share this information to provide more context:

Judges 16:4 introduces Delilah, whose name means “flirt,” stating that Samson “fell in love” with her. When the five Philistine governors learned of this, they saw it as a possible opportunity to capitalize on Samson’s vulnerability. Therefore, they went to Delilah to convince her to persuade Samson to reveal the source of his tremendous strength so that they could take him captive. If she did this, each leader promised to give Delilah 1,100 pieces of silver—5,500 in all. (PSG, p. 102)



EXPLAIN:

Share that Samson’s strength did not come from his hair but from his obedience to God. Note that Samson’s character had led him to compromise his vow on multiple occasions, and his association with Delilah left him open to a final collapse.

ASK:

How can the people with whom we choose to associate impact our ability to remain faithful to God? (PSG, p. 104)

TRANSITION:

Encourage adults to repeat the summary statement together: *Samson’s physical strength could not save him from the consequences of his moral weakness.*

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Hollow Log

Prior to the session, locate a small section of a hollow log or a picture of a hollow log. Display the log and explain that the tree can look strong and sturdy on the outside, but it would crumble under the slightest pressure. Say: *Decay starts from the inside and works its way out. It may be slow and go unnoticed for a while, but it is still destructive.* Encourage adults to compare decay in trees to spiritual compromise. Emphasize that putting ourselves in situations where we can give in to temptation will hinder our walk with God. Discuss how Judges 16:20 reflects that Samson wasn’t aware of his spiritual slide.

Samson Defeated (Judg. 16:21-25)

21 The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison. **22** But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved. **23** Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said: Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us. **24** When the people saw him, they praised their god and said: Our god has handed over to us our enemy who destroyed our land and who multiplied our dead. **25** When they were in good spirits, they said, “Bring Samson here to entertain us.” So they brought Samson from prison, and he entertained them. They had him stand between the pillars.

(v. 21) Through his lack of conviction and discernment, Samson became easy prey for his adversaries. The ruthless Philistines **seized him and gouged out his eyes**. It has been noted that Samson’s eyes paved the way for his bad relationships and his immoral behavior.

Then, Samson was taken to **Gaza**. This Philistine stronghold was located along the Mediterranean Sea in southwest Israel. Earlier, Samson had slept with a prostitute in Gaza before ripping the city gates out of their foundations and carrying them to a hill overlooking Hebron (16:3). Now, the Philistines seemed determined to avenge that humiliation by bringing Samson back to the city.

His enemies **bound him with bronze shackles** in prison, where he was **forced to grind grain** like an animal. The primary Philistine god was Dagon, a god of grain (see v. 23). Some scholars suggest that Samson’s enemies were claiming their god’s superiority by forcing the one who had destroyed Dagon’s crops (Judg. 15:3-5) to “serve” him in the mill.

(v. 22) In the middle of Samson’s darkest season, the writer of Judges shines a ray of hope. Although he’d never regain his sight, **his hair began to grow back**. It’s not clear how long Samson had been in Gaza before his hair started growing out, but the writer’s simple statement leads readers to understand that God was not finished with Samson just yet. The Lord of second chances was demonstrating grace.

It’s fair to wonder why the Philistines, aware of Samson’s source of strength, didn’t make sure that his head remained shaved. It’s possible they were too caught up in their enthusiasm to attend to the details necessary to keep their prisoner in check. Whatever the reason, the writer wanted readers to see a connection between his hair and the ultimate plans and purposes of God.

(vv. 23-25) While Samson slaved and his hair grew, the Philistines celebrated. The name of **Dagon** is mentioned in only two other places in the Bible (1 Chron. 10:10; 1 Sam. 5). He was physically depicted as half-fish and half-man. However, its name likely came from the word meaning “grain,” indicating that Dagon was a weather god or agricultural god.

The Philistines believed that Dagon had **handed over our enemy Samson to us**. Such a response is understandable. The Philistines noted that, over the years, Samson had **destroyed our land** and had **multiplied our dead**. With him in chains, they not only were celebrating with a **great sacrifice**, but they also were retaliating. Samson had become their trophy.

In good spirits likely refers to widespread drunkenness. In that condition, the leaders decided to degrade Samson further by bringing him out to **entertain** his oppressors. The Philistines may have hurled insults at Samson, but his humiliating circumstances may have been enough to amuse the crowd.

Meanwhile, he was placed **between the pillars** that supported the entire structure.

Key Doctrine

God’s Purpose of Grace

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See John 10:27-29; Colossians 1:12-14.)



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers who compromise their faithfulness to God will eventually be put to shame.

Call for a volunteer to read Judges 16:21-25, directing the group to listen to how the Philistines mistreated Samson.

RECAP:

Lead a brief discussion about Samson's devastating fall:

Ironically, the man who lived his life by the lust of his eyes had his eyes gouged out. The man who could not be restrained was bound in bronze shackles. The man who proudly went wherever he pleased was now forced to grind grain in prison like an animal. And the man who appeared to have little regard for others was now humiliated. In many ways, Samson was experiencing personally what the nation of Israel repeatedly experienced during the time of the judges. (PSG, p. 105)

EXAMINE:

Lead adults to work in groups of three or four to learn more about the Philistine god, Dagon. If possible, provide Bible dictionaries and other Bible study resources for each group. Encourage them to find other places in the Bible where Dagon is mentioned. After a few minutes, allow a volunteer from each team to report on their work. Use information from Judges 16:21,23-25 (p. 124) in the Leader Guide to supplement the conversation. Call for reports and discuss the findings. Discuss why the Philistines would credit Dagon for delivering Samson to them and why they were eager to humiliate him even more.

REFLECT:

Encourage adults to suggest things that Samson lost as a result of his weak character. (Examples: his eyes, his dignity, his strength, his intimacy with God, and so forth) Record their responses on the board or on a large sheet of paper.

ASK:

What do you think was Samson's greatest loss, and why? (PSG, p. 106)

SHARE:

Samson certainly lost a great deal through his compromise and his lack of self-control. But the writer of Judges also provides a glimmer of hope: Samson's hair began to grow back. This was a sign of God's grace and a reminder that He wasn't done using Samson just yet. As believers, we can take comfort in the "second chances" God provides.

Philistines Destroyed (Judg. 16:26-31)

26 Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, “Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them.” **27** The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. **28** He called out to the LORD, “Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes.” **29** Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. **30** Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life. **31** Then his brothers and his father’s whole family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. So he judged Israel twenty years.

(v. 26) A *young man* led Samson *by the hand* to his spot in the temple. The text offers no clue about the identity of the boy or his role other than bringing Samson from the prison. The writer again highlights Samson’s pathetic situation. The one who once struck fear in the hearts of Philistines was now blinded and being led by a boy.

He asked the *young man* to lead him to the *pillars supporting the temple*. His reasoning was that he needed to *lean against them*. In his condition, Samson’s request probably seemed harmless.

(vv. 27-28) Setting the stage for the upcoming sequence of events, the writer of Judges left no doubt as to the massive nature of this celebration. The temple was *full of men and women*. In addition, *all the leaders of the Philistines* were there. Philistine government was organized around a union of five major cities, called the Pentapolis. These *leaders* were the governing officials of these cities. A balcony or terrace attached to the building’s *roof* held approximately *three thousand* additional onlookers. Total attendance has been estimated at between five thousand and ten thousand Philistines.

As Samson’s hair grew out again, his faith seemed to be restored as well. With Delilah, he had referred to God generally as “*Elohim*” (16:17). Now, he prayed to the **Lord God** (*Adonai Yahweh*), Israel’s covenant Ruler. Samson only used this language one other time in the book of Judges, in a moment of physical desperation after killing one thousand Philistines with a donkey’s jawbone (15:18). This indicates that Samson was rededicating himself to God’s plan and purposes.

Samson’s downfall had placed him in a position of total dependence, which is reflected in the two parts of his prayer. First, he begged God to *remember* him. Since God is omniscient, it would have been impossible to forget his servant. However, the Hebrew word (*zakhar*) often refers to acting on behalf of another. In essence, Samson was asking God to reveal Himself and glorify Himself through Samson one last time.

Next, Samson asked the Lord to *strengthen me . . . just once more*. While his primary focus may have been on vengeance for *my two eyes*, the wording reveals his willingness to turn to God for help. Coming to the end of his road, Samson finally acknowledged the Lord and submitted to His authority.

(vv. 29-31) Reaching out toward the temple’s *two middle pillars*, Samson began to push against them. He also voiced one final prayer to God: **Let me die with the Philistines**. Samson had spent a good deal of his life associating with the Philistines. His fascination with Israel’s enemies eventually led him to this final moment. After decades of living with the enemy, he now would die with thousands of them.

God answered his prayer by supplying one final burst of supernatural strength. Samson *pushed with all his might*, bringing the temple to the ground and killing more Philistines at his death than *he had killed in his life*.

Later, his *father’s whole family* retrieved Samson’s body. They buried him in a tomb *between Zorah and Eshtaol*. The writer noted he had been a judge for *twenty years*.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can be confident that God does not abandon them, in spite of their sin.

DISCUSS:

Read aloud the application point above and lead the group to discuss when they have personally experienced this truth.

READ:

Read Judges 16:26-31, instructing the group to consider how God did not abandon Samson. Allow adults to share their insights.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that despite Samson's destructive choices in the past, he knew he could call out to God in this moment. Affirm that the Lord heard and answered Samson's prayer.

RECAP:

Share that even in this moment, Samson's motives likely were not noble. Explain why Samson prayed for God's help:

First, Samson called upon the Lord to remember him. In Hebrew, "remember" is not the opposite of "forget" in English. It means "to be mindful of" or "to act on behalf of." Second, Samson asked the Lord to give him the strength to pay back the Philistines for gouging out his eyes. His motivation for killing the Philistines was selfish, just as it had been before. Samson was not concerned about the Lord's reputation or the appalling falsehoods the Philistines were spewing about Dagon. Nor did Samson express concern about the well-being of his own people. In the end, Samson was all about Samson. (PSG, pp. 106-107)

ASK:

In light of Samson's story, how would you counsel someone who is experiencing the consequences of sinful choices?
(PSG, p. 107)

SAY:

Samson's relatives retrieved his body and buried him in a family tomb. It is a sad ending to a sad life. Samson suffered the consequences of his sinful choices. We can know that believers still suffer for immoral decisions. But we also know that God is just a prayer for forgiveness away.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Memorize Psalm 28:7, then write the verse in your own words. Reflect on ways Samson's life illustrated this verse and ways that he fell short. Write a brief prayer, asking God to help you trust Him more, celebrate His work in your life, and show gratitude for all He has done.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 108 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers should avoid putting themselves in situations that will tempt them to sin.*
- *Believers who compromise their faithfulness to God will eventually be put to shame.*
- *Believers can be confident that God does not abandon them, in spite of their sin.*

REVIEW:

Lead the group to summarize this session. Allow one adult to start the story with a single sentence. Go around the group, allowing each adult to add a sentence until the entire story is complete. Lead the group to answer “Why?” for each statement above.

EXAMINE:

Refer to **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: The Cycle of Judges*). Lead the group to scan the article again and to share how they see the major points illustrated in Samson’s life.

REFLECT:

Read the session’s summary statement: *Samson’s physical strength could not save him from the consequences of his weak moral character*. Direct the group to read and reflect on the first question set on page 108 of the PSG. Allow volunteers to share ways they can help each other avoid compromise.

PRAY:

Close in prayer, asking God to give each adult an awareness of the Holy Spirit that will keep them from sinful choices.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group. Suggest they read the rest of Judges to see how Israel continued to spiral into sin. Challenge them to remember God’s faithfulness. Encourage them to respond to the second question set on page 108 of the PSG. Explain that the next session begins a study of the book of Ruth, a story of God’s faithfulness in a dark time. Urge them to read through this short book before your next Bible study.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
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offers additional information and biblical
insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com**.)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.

Moab

Robert Bergen

Moab is remembered in biblical history from the days of Abraham through Nehemiah. It is the subject of prophecies and three different psalms. All but a handful of the references portray it in a negative light, as Israel's troubler.

THE LAND AND CITIES OF MOAB

Biblical Moab was located in the modern nation of Jordan, directly east of the Dead Sea. The heart of Moabite territory was situated between Wadi Arnon (modern Wadi el Mujib) in the north (Judg. 11:18) and Wadi Zered (modern Wadi el Hesa) in the south. Its territory extended only some thirty-three miles north to south when Moab was at its weakest. Both the Arnon and Zered cut this hilly area crosswise, descending westward into the Dead Sea and serving as natural barriers for Moab.

Another region associated with Moab extends a few miles past the north shore of the Dead Sea, along the east bank of the Jordan River. Though this area was known as "the plains of Moab," (Num. 22:1), it was not always under Moabite control (Num. 33:48).

On its western border along the Dead Sea, Moab lies some 1,300 feet below sea level. However, as one moves east, the terrain ascends rapidly. A mere ten miles from the Dead Sea, the elevation is about 3,000 feet above sea level, a net rise of about 4,300 feet.

This great variation in elevation meant that Moab contained several distinct climatic zones. Near the Dead Sea is a desert region that receives

less than five inches of rain annually. The region atop the plateau normally receives ten to twenty inches of rain per year and is more conducive to farming.¹ The rainy season generally extends from October through March.

The soil is relatively thin in Moab's hill country, but the land still supports wheat and barley, fruit trees, and vineyards. Grasslands provided pastures for sheep and goats (2 Kings 3:4). Biblical evidence for Moab's productivity is seen in Ruth 1:2, which states that Elimelech moved his family there from Bethlehem to escape a famine.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Moab had established a series of fortresses along its border, overlooking the caravan route known as the King's Highway.² Border defenses were "less pronounced in character because of the rather fluid nature of the border itself."³

The Bible seldom mentioned major cities in Moab. Moses mentioned the city of Ar (Deut. 2:18), while David left his family with a Moabite king in Mizpeh (1 Sam. 22:3-4). The prophet Amos pronounced judgment on Kerioth (Amos 2:2). Isaiah (15:2; 16:7-9) spoke of Dibon, Kir-hareseth, Hesbon, Sibmah, Jazer, and Elealeh.

MOAB'S PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND INFLUENCE

Genesis 19:30-37 explains Moab's origins. The man named Moab, the father of the nation, was born as a result of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. So, the Moabites were considered a Semitic people indirectly related to the Israelites.

We can assume that sometime before the days of Moses, the descendants of Moab migrated from the western side of the Dead Sea to its eastern highlands. There, they displaced the Emim, a people group that had lived there in the days of Abraham. However, further details regarding the early stages of Moabite history are absent from the Bible and modern archaeology.

By the time of the exodus, Moabite culture had adopted a monarchical form of government, with a king supported by a clan of leaders known as elders (Num. 22:4,7,10). At that time, Moab had a smaller population than Israel and evidently lacked sufficient military resources to defend itself from Israelite invasion. Consequently, Moab's King Balak sought the assistance of a diviner named Balaam to curse Israel (Num. 22:2-11).

Prior to the Israelite monarchy, the Moabites consolidated their territorial holdings and, at times, even dominated their neighbors (1 Sam. 12:9). During the days of the judges, the Moabite king Eglon forced the Israelites to bring him annual tribute payments for eighteen years (Judg. 3:14). The best-known Moabite king, Mesha, mounted a revolt against Israel and ruled from Dibon during the mid-9th century BC.

On the other hand, many nations, including Israel, gained control over Moab and its resources. Israelite leaders whom the Bible mentions as winning wars against the Moabites include the judge Ehud (Judg. 3:15-30), Saul (1 Sam. 14:47), David (2 Sam. 8:2), Jehoram, and Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:6-27). But Mesopotamian nations like Assyria and Babylon caused Moab more trouble than the Israelites or the Edomites, their neighbors to the south. The Assyrians conquered Moab in the eighth century BC, while the Babylonians dominated them a few years after capturing Jerusalem (581 BC).⁴

Moabite religion exerted a decidedly negative influence on Israel. At various points, God's people became involved in the worship of at least two Moabite deities. During the days of Moses, some Israelite men followed Baal of Peor. This worship included sexual rituals (Num. 25:1-8) and sacrificial meals for the dead (Ps. 106:28).

Later, out of respect for a Moabite wife in his harem, Solomon built a high place for the god

Chemosh, Moab's national deity (1 Kings 11:7-8). The Israelites maintained this high place, located just east of Jerusalem, for more than three hundred years until King Josiah destroyed it as part of his reforms in 626 BC (2 Kings 23:13).

AN ATYPICAL MOABITE

Israel and Moab had a history of bitter enmity throughout the Old Testament period. So, why was one of the books of the Old Testament named after a Moabite woman? Indeed, the story of Ruth is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. It is an engaging account of love, devotion, and duty.

Perhaps God gave us the book of Ruth because she behaved in such an un-Moabite way. Her life certainly contrasted sharply with other Moabites in the Bible. For example, Eglon oppressed Israel for eighteen years (Judg. 3), while Ruth blessed and provided for the widow, Naomi. King Mesha murdered his own son and burned the corpse as part of a religious ritual (2 Kings 3), while Ruth gave birth to a son that led to King David and the Messiah. Orpah abandoned Naomi, while Ruth clung to Naomi, turning her back on her home and her gods (Ruth 1).

The name "Moab" may have evoked a negative emotional reaction from the ancient Israelites. However, Ruth presents a totally different image of those who had been the enemies of God's people. From her lineage came the One who was and is the Redeemer of all humanity (Matt. 1:5). Our reaction, rather than fear and dread, should be worship and celebration.

1. J.H. Paterson, "Palestine" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 578.
2. R.K. Harrison, "Moab," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, 262.
3. Ibid, p. 263.
4. J. Maxwell Miller, "Moab," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed. In chief, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 890; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, *The Works of Josephus*, Complete and Unabridged New and Updated Edition, William Whitson, trans. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishing, 1987), 10.9.7.

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