

“SUPERHERO WANTED”

(Deuteronomy)

This lesson is part of the “What’s in the Bible?” series, starting with “Memories & Stories” on Genesis

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Sally Ulrey

Key verses: Deuteronomy

“All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God” (Deut 28:1)
“Now choose life...that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life...” (Deut 30:19-20)

Objective:

- **To understand the book of Deuteronomy as an agreement where the people need a hero to help them**
- **To learn a little bit about what’s in Deuteronomy, and what the agreement (covenant) between God and the people was, and its conditions**
- **To renew our own covenants with God**

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- **Hook:** Attracting a SuperHero (20 mins)
 - Creating mini towns and marketing them so that a SuperHero would want to be the hero of your town
- **Book:** Overview of Deuteronomy (10 mins)
 - Learning about the way the covenant was set up between God and the Israelites, who needed a hero
- **Look:** No Marketing Needed (15 mins)
 - Small group discussion about how we don’t actually have to convince God to want to be our hero; what we need from God has already been offered in Christ
- **Took:** Renewing the Covenant (5 mins)
 - We don’t renew it because we have to entice God to help us (God’s already offered). We renew it because we love God.

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Something to make mini towns with: Legos, cards, sticks & tape, blocks, cereal boxes, (lots of things would work)
- Bibles
- Prayer Books
- Flip Chart/White board and markers
- AV Equipment
- Bonus: if you have a cape or superhero shirt or costume, wear it!

The Preparation:

- Get small group questions ready (print, project, or pre-write them on a flip chart)

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Attracting a SuperHero (Hook, 15-20 mins)

This main idea in Deuteronomy is the covenant that God made with the Israelites. The covenant agreement was set up similarly to a Suzerian-Vassal covenant, a format that kings in that time period implemented to make agreements with their vassals. The general idea was that the king provided protection and in return the vassals provided loyalty to that king alone and tribute (there are lots of similar covenants throughout the ages, like the lords and the serfs in the middle ages). The book of Deuteronomy was set up similarly as a covenant, but with God as the King providing protection in exchange for loyalty (“thou shalt have no other gods before me”). Pretty much every people group back in the day was trying to get a really strong king and/or god to protect them. They wanted to make themselves attractive to the gods, so the gods would provide for their needs.

In this section, we'll have students create a mini town out of whatever materials you provide (cards, Legos, blocks, sticks and tape, etc.) The main objective is to make the superhero (you) pick their town to protect, so they'll want to show off why they would be good candidates to have a superhero in THEIR town. It's a contest! They'll create their town, and then share with the larger group why a superhero should choose THEM

- Put the students in groups of about 4-5
- Pass out the “building” materials
- Instruct the students to make a mini-town (houses, other buildings, stables, water towers, walls, moats, whatever they think they'll need...like a Bible times town, not modern day)
- Tell them that you are the superhero that will protect just ONE town, and they need to try to build their town in such a way as to entice you to pick THEIR town to protect.
- Tell them that they will have about 10 mins to build their towns, and 2 mins to explain how it's built and convince you (the superhero) why you should be THEIR town's hero
- After everyone has had a chance to share about their town, pick a winner! You can tell the group why. If any of the groups make promises of loyalty, it might further the point of the lesson to choose that group as the one you'll protect.

Transition: The people of the Old Testament, both Israelites and non-Israelites, lived in a crazy time where there were many things out of their control and lots of wars, and they needed protection. So they were always looking for someone really strong to protect them. When a group of people made an agreement with someone who was really strong (like a powerful king), they would promise that king loyalty and tribute, in exchange for protection. This type of agreement was called a Suzerian-Vassal covenant, and it's the basis for lots of agreements between peoples and countries throughout the ages (like the serfs and lords in the middle ages). The covenant between God and the Israelites is set up in the same format as a Suzerian-Vassal covenant, but with God as the King. Let's look a little more closely at that covenant, which is contained in the first 5 books of the Bible, but especially in Deuteronomy.

Overview of Deuteronomy (Book, 10 mins)

In this section, we'll have the students briefly learn about types of covenants in the Old Testament, and then really look closely at the conditions of the Suzerian-Vassal type of covenant contained in Deuteronomy (zooming in on ch 28).

➤ **LEADER TIP:** *You will want to look over the Mini-Lecture in advance to be familiar with what all is in Deuteronomy.*

Mini-Lecture (3 mins)

There are three main types of covenants recorded in the Bible.

- **A Royal Grant** was an UNCONDITIONAL covenant where God granted something to someone/the people. An example of this is the when God promises not to flood the whole earth, or to give Abraham descendants. God's love is also unconditional.
- **A Parity** is a covenant between equals (so NOT God, since God doesn't have an equal), but there are lots of covenants recorded in the Bible between people groups or friends (David and Jonathan)
- **A Suzerian-Vassal covenant** is a CONDITIONAL covenant where God provides something on the conditions of loyalty and obedience. God is not obligated to provide it if the people don't hold up their end of the bargain. The experience of God's blessings are conditional (up to us...our choice). If we listen to God and live as God instructs, it will go well for us, since God wants what's best for us (see Deut 30:19-20 where God entreats the people through Moses to choose LIFE!). Let's take a look at the conditions of the covenant.

Quick Observations (7 mins)

- Put students into pairs. Assign half of the pairs to look up Deut 28:1-14. Assign the other half of the pairs to look up Deut 28:15-37
- Give them about 3 mins to look over the passage and make quick mental list of the blessings/curses they get from upholding the covenant
- On a flip chart/white board write "Blessings" on one side and "Curses" on the other
- Have them call out some blessings and curses to add beneath each heading.
- Example of what it may look like, for your reference:

<u>Blessings</u>	<u>Curses</u>
Kids	No kids
Crops	No crops
Herds and Livestock	No herd and livestock
Enemies defeated	Sudden ruin
Barns and work blessed	Plagues and diseases (boils, nastiness)
Rain	Drought, heat, famine
Holy	Defeated by enemies
Abundant prosperity	Unsuccessful, robbed, oppressed
	Driven out of the land

Transitional Statement: The Sinaitic covenant (the covenant God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai after they came out of Egypt, which is recorded in the first 5 books of the Bible) was formatted like a Suzerian-Vassal covenant. God promised to provide protection when they were in the Promised Land (the land would give them good crops, no famine, drought, plagues, or wars) on the CONDITION that they would be obedient to the covenant (which is summed up famously in the 10 commandments, but there was a little more detail to it than JUST that). If they didn't adhere to the covenant, they did not experience blessings, and God was not obligated to provide protection (so the land might not produce fruit, there might be droughts and famines and plagues and wars). God never withdrew love or faithfulness from them; God always hung in there with them to work with them to get them on track, but God did allow them to experience the consequences of disobedience.

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No Marketing Needed (Look, 15 mins)

In this part, students will have a small group discussion about the Israelites, their covenant, and what they think about it. What we hope the discussion will underscore is that we don't have to convince God to help us like the nations back in the day had to convince the powerful kings to protect them (God's already promised to do that); that's NOT why we make a covenant with God. We make a covenant with God because we see and we are drawn to God's love, and we want to be in a loving relationship with God, not out of guilt or obligation, but out of seeing the abundance of God's love.

- Put the students into groups of about 4-5
- Pass out or project small group questions
- Allow about 10 mins for students to discuss

Small Group Questions:

1. Why did the people need someone strong to protect them back in those crazy days?
2. What do you think of that deal (protection/blessing in exchange for obedience)? Would you take it?
3. How do you think it affected the Israelites to know that God offered protection to them without needing any convincing to do so (especially since that was outside the norm of how the world of their day usually worked)? Positive or negative effect? Why do you think that?
4. What motivation did the Israelites have to obey God? Why (or why not) do you think that would be enough?
5. Read Eph 1:3-14 and make a list of spiritual blessings we have under the New Covenant in Christ.
6. Read John 4:10, 18, and 19. What should be our motivation for making a covenant with God?

Transitional Statement

Our main motivation for making a covenant with God is LOVE. We are drawn by God's amazing love shown to us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Imagine! God love us that much! That's why we make a covenant/relationship with God. Not just to get stuff, but because God is amazing, and we want to be near God!

The good news is that the Israelites didn't ever have to convince God to help them or be their Hero in their times of need, and neither do we. God had already offered to do that. God is UNCONDITIONALLY faithful and loving. As soon as they turned to God and asked for help, God gave it. Same for us, through Jesus. But the bad news was that God did allow them to experience the consequences of their disobedience. Sometimes we experience the consequences for our poor choices, too. But the even better news is that in the New Covenant, blessings weren't physical or temporary, but spiritual and eternal...not tied to the land, but tied to being "in Christ." Like, in Christ, God has freely offered us adoption as God's beloved children, holiness, redemption, forgiveness, grace, the Holy Spirit, being able to know God's will, purpose, unity, eternal life in heaven! Yep, those are great benefits to making a covenant with God. But the main motivation is LOVE. God's love is amazing, and that's what draws us to be a part of a covenant with God. So now, I invite you to make or renew our covenant with God (which you made in your baptism) because of God's amazing love that is made known to us through Christ!

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Renewing the Covenant (Took, 5 mins)

Now that we know why we make covenants with God (LOVE) and what the benefits are (every spiritual blessing in Christ), we will invite the students to be part of that love relationship (covenant) with God.

- Direct students to turn to page 302 of the Book of Common Prayer
- This is the promises/covenant with God we make in our baptisms. You will start on the first renunciation “Do you renounce...” halfway down the page on 302. There are 3 renunciations and 3 affirmations, and after the last affirmation (at the top of 303), skip ahead to page 304.
- Have a leader ask the questions, and let the group respond.
- After the last Baptismal vow on the top of page 305, appoint a leader (you?) to pray for the group starting with “Deliver them...”
- End with the prayer on the top of page 306 starting “Grant...”
- If you have a baptismal font with blessed water in it, you can do this part around it, and have everyone cross themselves with the water as a sign of their renewed covenant. Or if you’ve got a priest around (or authorized person) with an aspergillum, you can have them sprinkle the group with water.