

1 Samuel

Student's Copy

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First Samuel introduces one of the most romantic and heroic figures in all of Scripture: David, the man of faith. Yet the book is about so much more than the life of David. It would be better to say that the main purpose of the books of Samuel is to provide a key guide to one of God's great redemptive acts in history: establishing his covenant with David to erect the eternal throne on which his Son and David's heir, Jesus Christ, now sits.

The First Book of Samuel

INTRODUCTION

The books of First and Second Samuel were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible, known as the “Book of Samuel” or simply “Samuel.” This name has been variously translated “The Name of God,” “His Name is God,” “Heard of God,” and “Asked of God.”

After the Israelites settled into the Promised Land, a series of judges led the people for more than four hundred years. However, the Israelites eventually grew bored with that system—even though it had been the Lord’s design. As the people looked around at the pagan nations of Canaan, they saw that everybody else had a king—and they wanted one of their own. Eventually, the Lord would grant their demands, but He would also warn that a king would bring with him a great deal of suffering for the nation.

In these studies, we will examine the biblical events depicted in the book of 1 Samuel. We will become acquainted with the high priest Eli, and his two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas. We will meet Eli’s young protégé, named Samuel, and examine his faithfulness. We will get to know Samuel’s mother, Hannah, and learn why the young boy was brought up by a priest in the temple rather than by his family at home. We will be introduced to Saul, Israel’s first king, and watch his sad decline. Finally, we will meet Saul’s successor, David, who stood in marked contrast to his predecessor. Through it all, we will learn some precious truths about the character of God, and we will see His great faithfulness in keeping His promises. We will learn, as did the prophet Samuel and King David, what it means to walk by faith.

TITLE

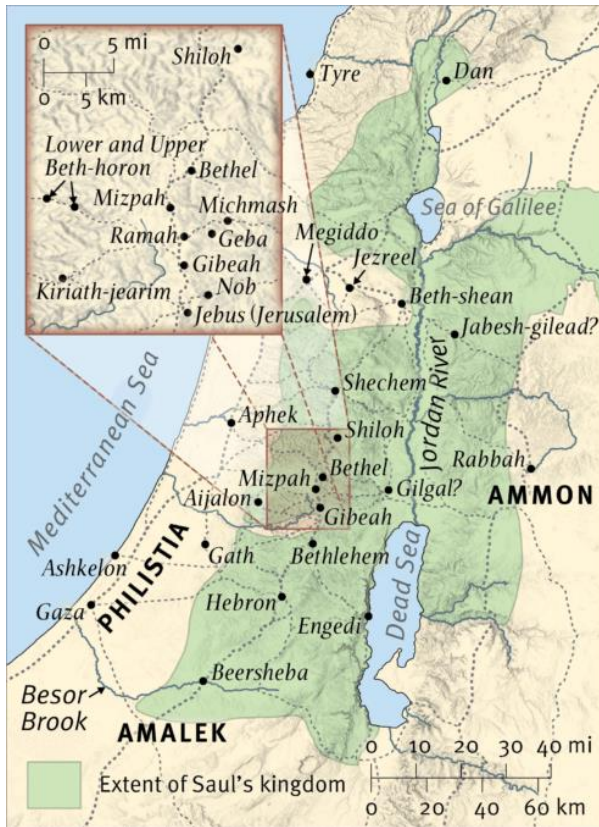
First and Second Samuel were considered one book in the earliest Hebrew manuscripts. They were later divided into two books by the translators of the Greek version, known as the Septuagint. This division was later followed by the Latin Vulgate, English translations, and modern Hebrew Bibles. The earliest Hebrew manuscripts titled the one book Samuel, after the man God used to establish the kingship in Israel.

AUTHOR AND DATE

Jewish tradition ascribed the writing of Samuel to the prophet himself or to Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (based on 1 Chronicles 29:29). However, Samuel cannot be the writer, because his death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1, before the events associated with David’s reign take place. Further, Nathan and Gad were prophets of the Lord during David’s lifetime and would not have been alive when the book was written. Thus, though the written records of these three prophets could have been used for information in the writing of 1 and 2 Samuel, the human author of these

books is unknown. The work comes to the reader as an anonymous writing. The books of Samuel contain no clear indication of the date of composition. However, it is clear the author wrote them after the division of the kingdom between Israel and Judah in 931 BC due to the many references to Israel and Judah as distinct entities. Also, the statement concerning Ziklag's belonging "to the kings of Judah to this day" in 1 Samuel 27:6 gives clear evidence of a post-Solomonic date of writing. There is no such clarity concerning how late the date of writing could be, but most likely it was penned before the exile during the period of the divided kingdom (c. 931–722 BC).

Setting



The Setting of 1 Samuel

c. 1050 B.C.

The book of 1 Samuel is set in Israel during the time of transition between the period of the judges and the period of the monarchy. It opens with Samuel's birth and then describes his role as judge over Israel. When the people ask for a king, the Lord instructs Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel's first king.

Outline

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- Lesson 4** Capture of the Ark (1 Samuel 4:1b-22) Return of the Ark (1 Samuel 6:1-7:1)
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- Lesson 18** Summary/Reflections

Lesson 1

Birth and Dedication of Samuel (1 Samuel 1-3) New Beginnings

THE BIG PICTURE

As you begin your study of the book of 1 Samuel, it will be important for you to remember the most immediate historical context for the narrative that is beginning to unfold. God's people have been enduring the era of the judges—a messy and dark season that has involved some positive deliverance . . . along with much sin, idolatry, and rebellion. It has become clear that God's people need someone to lead them well in the areas of worship, obedience, and covenant faithfulness to their God. In a way, the predicament that Hannah faces as a barren woman represents the predicament of Israel as a whole: God's people suffer through the barrenness of leaderless chaos, spiritual darkness, and rampant wickedness. The passage that you will study today, though, points to how God faithfully provides for his people. He will ultimately provide them a king—but before he does that, he will raise up a final, godly judge: Samuel. Just as the barren Hannah gives birth to a son who has been given to her by God, so the barren Israel will receive a king who has been chosen and anointed by God. Today you will meet Hannah, who lives with a kind and loving husband and yet longs for a son (1:1–8). She pleads to God for the gift of a child and vows that she will commit him to the Lord's service for all the days of his life, and God grants her petition (1:9–20). After committing her son Samuel to service in the temple under the leadership of Eli the priest, Hannah responds to God with a great song of praise (1:21–2:10).

1. Why is it significant for us to remember the historical context of this passage (i.e., the time of the judges)? What does knowing that context contribute to our understanding of the situation that God's people were in during these days?
2. Read Judges 21:25. How does this verse clarify the barren situation that characterized the people of Israel during the days of Hannah and Elkanah? What was the result of Israel's not having a king during this time?
3. What hints might this passage be offering us about what will happen in the rest of the book? What might cause the reader to expect that Samuel will be significant to the nation of Israel?

4. What does the author do to emphasize Hannah's poignant pain in 1:1–8? How would you describe the character of her husband, Elkanah?

5. What does the author want us to notice about Hannah's situation? How does the text help to make her a truly human character with whom we can identify?

6. What makes Hannah's prayer to God bold and specific (1:9–11)? What does the initial response that Eli gives Hannah in verses 12–14 tell you about the spiritual state of Israel during this time? What words of truth and assurance does he ultimately speak to comfort her (1:15–18)?

7. What does Hannah reveal about her character and integrity by committing Samuel to the Lord (1:21–28)? What would have made this extremely difficult for Hannah—as it would have for any mother? What truths about God and his purposes might have been guiding her when she did this?

Lesson 2

Hannah's Song (1 Samuel 2:1-10)

1. What are the main themes of the prayer of praise that Hannah offers to God in 2:1–10? What actions does she attribute to God? What does she say about his character? How do the themes of this prayer show us glimpses of the God of the gospel, who sends his Son to be the great Savior for his people (note especially verse 10 and its mention of the “anointed”)?
2. List some of the elements of her prayer that seem surprisingly grand and far-reaching, considering the occasion.
3. Some have suggested that Hannah's prayer (2:1–10) functions almost as a thematic table of contents for 1–2 Samuel. What themes do you see emphasized in Hannah's prayer?
4. Another prayer-song is found in these books: 2 Samuel 22:1–51, written by King David. What do Hannah's and David's prayers have in common? Compare especially the beginning and ending of the two prayers.

5. Answer 98 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines prayer in this way: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” How do you see Hannah serving as a faithful model of this approach to prayer? What can you learn from this brief and clear description of Christian prayer?

6. Monica, the mother of the great St. Augustine, prayed for years for her son’s conversion while he was living for pleasure, sin, and his own selfish desires—before he finally turned to Christ in faith. In what way can both Monica and Hannah serve as models for us of how to persist in prayer? What must we remember about God’s character, sovereignty, and perfect timing as we appeal to him in earnest prayer?

7. How does the provision that God makes for Hannah—and for Israel—remind us of the sovereign purposes he has for the good of his people? In what way do you hear “echoes” of the gospel within this passage? How does it foreshadow the coming of an even greater child who would be set apart for God’s purposes?

Lesson 3

Eli's Two Sons (1 Samuel 2:11-36)

Call of Samuel as a Prophet (1 Samuel 3:1-4)

THE BIG PICTURE

As our last lesson concluded, Hannah kept her vow to the Lord and offered her young son, Samuel, to the full-time service of God. Today we will consider the call that young Samuel receives, which we will see sharply contrasted with God's condemnation of Eli's wicked sons. Hophni and Phineas, though they serve as priests of the people, are consumed with sexual sin and greed—despite the rebuke that they receive from their father (2:11–26). In response to this, God sends a prophet to Eli to inform him of the coming downfall of his house and line of priests: his sons will die on the same day, and God will raise up another, more faithful priest to serve him and lead his people (2:27–36). As we move on to 1 Samuel 3, we begin to see God fulfilling this prophetic word through the life of the young boy Samuel, who is growing up in the house of the Lord with Eli. God calls out to Samuel in the night; when Samuel finally invites him to speak, God tells him of the judgment that is coming to both Eli and his sons, who have desecrated the priesthood and abandoned their fear of God (3:1–21). The passage for today's lesson concludes with the words of the Lord coming to Samuel with power and then going out from him to “all Israel” (4:1). The contrast that this passage portrays is devastating and striking: the sons of Eli live for sin, self, and pleasure, while God raises up for himself a priest and prophet who will live under the authority of the perfect word that he speaks to his people and will lead the people with holiness and truth.

1. Why is the moral failure and downfall of religious leaders so demoralizing for Christians? What negative or harmful effects have you seen the fall of Christian leaders have on the lives of followers of Jesus whom you know and love?

2. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good leader in general? What other characteristics would you add to that list if you were describing a good Christian leader, specifically? Explain your answer.

3. Chapter 2 repeatedly contrasts Samuel with Eli's sons. What are these contrasts, and what do they signify?

4. What does the narrator of this passage want the reader to notice about Hophni and Phineas? What does he do to make clear the egregious nature of their sin and corruption?

5. How would you describe Samuel's character, based on this first description we have of him as a young boy? What does he seem to value most? What drives him?

6. Why did the Lord come to Samuel and stand before him? Why did the Lord call Samuel multiple times? What does this reveal about God's nature and His desire to save?

7. Compare and contrast the beginning (3:1) and end (3:20–4:1a) of Samuel's calling. In a few words, describe what this section is really about. What change takes place between 3:1 and 3:20–4:1a, and what significance might this change have?

Lesson 4

Capture of the Ark (1 Samuel 4:1b-22)

Return of the Ark (1 Samuel 6:1-7:1)

The Big Picture

Although the word of the Lord has returned to Israel (1 Sam. 3:19–20), the glory of Israel is about to depart (4:21). Trusting in the ark of the covenant as a good-luck charm, Israel is trounced by the Philistines, who also steal the ark. Eli and his sons die, fulfilling the judgment foretold (3:13–14). God is breaking to pieces his enemies (2:10)—enemies abroad and at home. But the capture of the ark is far from a defeat of God, who can defeat thousands of Philistines without the help of a single Israelite (ch. 5). The Philistines, and later the Israelites, learn that the presence of God is no trifling matter (ch. 6). While Israel can find no immediate solution for the problems caused by the ark’s dwelling among them (6:19–21), Samuel leads the nation in repentance, restoration, and renewal of their covenant with God (7:3–17).

1. It was suggested that when the elders call for the ark to go before them in battle, they are trusting in the ark as something like a good-luck charm. This was not always the case; sometimes the ark rightly led the way into battle (e.g., [Joshua 6](#)). But read 1 Samuel 4:3 carefully. What in this verse suggests that the elders trust the ark of God more than the God of the ark?
2. Giving the name “Ichabod” to a newborn child (4:19–22) indicates how devastating the capture of the ark is for Israel. Based on your present knowledge of the ark, why is its capture and removal so significant?
3. While Israel’s defeat and the ark’s capture seem like setbacks, even embarrassments, it is soon clear that God is orchestrating it all. There are at least four statements in chapter 5 that make God’s sovereign purposes explicit. Where are those statements?

4. In 1–2 Samuel God often reveals himself in ironic or surprising ways. List some of the ironic elements of the incident with Dagon in 5:1–5.

5. Dagon’s loss of hands (5:4) is one such irony, particularly in light of the rest of the chapter. How are Dagon’s severed hands contrasted with another’s “hand” in 5:6–11?

6. The men of Beth-shemesh rejoiced to see the ark returning (6:13), but their joy turned quickly to mourning when some “looked upon” the ark and were struck dead (6:19). Why was a mere look so deadly? (See [Num. 4:19–20](#); 1 Sam. 6:20a; 2 Sam. 6:7.)

7. In chapter 4, the elders sent for the ark so that “it” might save them (v. 3). But when the ark returns to Israel in chapter 6 and soon proves deadly, they soon wonder, “to whom shall he go up away from us?” (v. 20). What is so tragic about the different words (“it” in 4:3 and “he” in 6:20) in each context?

Lesson 5

Israel Defeated, God Defeating (1 Samuel 4-7)

The Big Picture

The Philistines were a commanding nation, and their armies were feared throughout Canaan. The Israelites were armed with slings and bows at best, and many fought with simple farm tools. They were no match for the iron weapons and chariots of the mighty Philistines, and their hearts were filled with fear when the enemy gathered in force on their borders. But their powerful foe could not stand before the wrath of God! He sent them into confusion simply by roaring out with a thunderous voice. The Israelites still had to participate in the battle on that occasion, just as the Lord still involves His people in spiritual warfare today, but ultimately the victory belonged to Him alone. God's people continue to face many foes today, whether from the open hostility of the world or from spiritual attacks of Satan. Yet the same principle applies: the Lord will defend and protect His people, and He can never lose. It is important to remember what God has done for us in the past, most notably in the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross at Calvary. As the apostle Paul rhetorically asked, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31–32). The Lord brought a tremendous victory against the Philistines, but not before His people repented of their pagan practices. The Israelites had been guilty of adulterating their worship with idolatry and immorality. As a result, they had been severely routed in battle against the Philistines—even to the point of losing the precious ark of the covenant. The Lord had removed His hand of blessing from His people because they were being unfaithful to Him. The same principle applies today. The Lord is always faithful to His people, but He expects His people also to be faithful to Him. He calls us to be obedient to the teachings of Scripture and keep our lives pure from sin. This does not mean God expects us to never fail, "for He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). It does mean, however, that we are to be quick to confess any sin and that our lives should be growing in the image of Christ. God's concern for our practical holiness begins on the home front, as He calls us to purify our lives and walk in obedience to Him.

1. Based on 1 Samuel 7:1–3, how would you describe the spiritual state of Israel at this time?

2. Based on the rest of chapter 7, how would you describe (a) the nation's response to Samuel's call to repentance and (b) the results that follow?

3. Remembering that Hannah's prayer foreshadowed many events to follow, reread 2:1–10 and write down connections you find there with chapters 4–7.

4. Why didn't the Lord simply defeat the Philistines miraculously without any fighting on the part of the Israelites? What does this suggest about your own spiritual battles?

5. Why did Samuel set up the memorial of Ebenezer? What purpose did it serve for the people of Israel? For Israel's neighbors?

6. What "Ebenezers" do you have to remind you of God's faithfulness? What kinds of memorials can you set up as future reminders?

Lesson 6

Saul's Rise and Rejection (1 Samuel 8) Part 1

The Big Picture

[First Samuel 7](#) ended with the summary, “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life” (v. 15). But the elders of Israel are worried about what might happen to the leadership of Israel after Samuel departs from the scene. And so, in chapter 8, they demand a king “like all the nations” (v. 5). In a response of judgment to this request, God gives them exactly what they desire: a king like those of the other nations. Although this king—Saul—looks somewhat promising at first ([chs. 9–11](#)), it is soon clear that he is neither faithful nor full of faith ([chs. 13–15](#)). Thus God will “tear” the kingdom from Saul and give it to another, “a man after his own heart” (13:14; 15:28). This begins Saul’s downward spiral into self and sin, charted in the rest of 1 Samuel.

Israel’s first king, Saul, is not the long-awaited promised king (see [Gen. 49:10](#)) but rather one who reflects Israel’s weak faith in the Lord.

1. Are the concerns stated by the elders about the future leadership of Israel legitimate (8:1–3)? How might the elders have dealt better with their concerns? (Language from ch.7 will be useful here.)
2. Read [Deuteronomy 17:14–20](#) with 1 Samuel 8 in mind. What is wrong about Israel’s demand for a king? What contrasts do you see between these two passages?
3. What do you think is meant by these statements: “a king . . . like all the nations” (v. 5), “that we also may be like all the nations,” and “that our king may . . . go out before us and fight our battles” (v. 20)? Why is this tantamount to rejecting God (v. 7)?
4. Samuel’s warning about the kind of king they demand (vv. 10–18) repeats a key word six times. What is this word, and what is its significance here?

5. How should we understand God's granting Israel's desire for a king? (Read [Rom. 1:24, 26, 28](#) before you answer.)

Lesson 7

Saul's Rise and Rejection (1 Samuel 9-15) Part II

The Big Picture

Chapters 9–10 comprise a long, winding road leading to Saul's anointing and public announcement as king. The details are at times confusing, but the primary point is God's sovereign orchestration. Reread 9:15–10:16 and note explicit mentions of God's sovereign control.

1. Our first introduction to Saul emphasizes his appearance: he is the most handsome, tallest Israelite (9:2). Even Samuel finds Saul's appearance impressive (10:23–24). But why is this emphasized? How might chapter 8 and Hannah's prayer (2:1–11) shed light on the emphasis on Saul's stature?
2. It is curious that Saul will not tell his uncle about his anointing (10:16), and it is curious that he is hiding among the baggage before his public announcement as king (10:22). What might these small details suggest about Saul?
3. Chapter 11 is surprisingly optimistic. But should we consider Samuel's warnings of 8:10–18 to now be moot? Based on 9:16 and chapter 11, how do you see God showing mercy to his people even amid his discipline of them?
4. Chapter 13 begins with a successful battle against the Philistines. Who is responsible, humanly speaking, for leading the victory? Who takes credit for the victory?
5. A contrast between Saul and his son Jonathan continues throughout chapters 13–14. What contrasts do you notice?

6. What is wrong with Saul's offering a sacrifice in 13:8-9? What motivates his decision to make a sacrifice before Samuel's arrival?

7. While chapter 14 continues to expose Saul's foolishness and tyrant-like behavior, chapter 15 is the breaking point. According to 15:1-19, what is Saul's failure that leads to the final judgment against his kingship?

8. What should we make of Saul's response to Samuel's confrontation (15:20-21)? Do you take Saul's confessions in 15:24-30 to be genuine repentance? Are there any indications concerning its genuineness in the context?

Lesson 8

David's Rise, Saul's Resentment (1 Samuel 16-20)

The Big Picture

Twice the prophet Samuel has told Saul that God has rejected him because of his sin; his kingdom will be “torn” from him and given to “a man after [God’s] own heart” (13:13–14; 15:28). Now we are introduced to this coming, better king (ch. 16). Unlike the outwardly impressive Saul, David is the last-born and likely the smallest of his brothers. But “the Lord is with him” (16:18), as is evident in his courageous stand for the Lord against the giant Philistine (ch. 17). As David’s success, fame, and alliances grow, so do Saul’s envy, fear, and schemes against David (ch. 18). His murderous intentions force David to flee, a drama played out in the rest of 1 Samuel.

The Lord’s anointed (see 2:10) finally comes on the scene, with glad recognition by some (especially Jonathan) but with great opposition from others (especially Saul).

1. According to 16:6–7, why did Samuel assume that Jesse’s son Eliab would be the one he should anoint as king? Where have we seen a similar dynamic earlier in 1 Samuel?
2. What does it say about Jesse’s estimation of David that he is not brought in from the fields for this momentous occasion (16:10–11)? Note that Jesse seems a bit dismissive of Samuel’s inquiry as to whether he has another son.
3. What in Hannah’s prayer (2:1–10) helps to illuminate this scene of anointing in Bethlehem?
4. God’s Spirit “rushed upon” Saul in earlier chapters (10:10; 11:6), but something more is said about the Spirit’s presence in regard to David (16:13). What is it?

Lesson 9

Slaying a Giant (1 Samuel 17:1-54)

The Big Picture

Chapter 17 of 1 Samuel is not so much about David's great faith, let alone about how one overcomes social and physical obstacles. It is rather about David's great God overcoming his enemies for his name's sake. But God does so, in this case, through a future king who will lead and rescue his people. First Samuel began with a visionary prayer for God to judge the proud, break the bows of the mighty, and bring down and raise up (2:3–6). It is not by might that a man prevails; the Lord will thunder against his enemies as he gives strength to his king and exalts his anointed (2:9–10). These hopes are beginning to be realized in God's work through his servant David. David's zealous faith is impressive, but before we can ever begin to imitate it (even in small ways) we must first come to recognize our more appropriate place in the story. We are often like the soldiers, David's brothers, and Saul—cowering in fear, frozen in our unbelief. We, too, need a Savior to come, to conquer, to rescue. David's greater son, Jesus, has done just that—stepping in on our behalf to conquer the giant threats of Satan, sin, and death (see [Heb. 2:14–15](#)). “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord” (1 Cor. 15:57).

1. While David's famous battle with the Philistine giant is what we might remember most from this chapter, it is described only briefly (vv. 48–51). Three speeches given by David (vv. 26, 32–37, 45–47) provide the interpretive key to these events. What do the speeches have in common? What is at the heart of David's willingness to fight the giant?
2. Throughout this chapter, David's confidence in the Lord is contrasted with others' paralyzing fear. According to verses 11 and 24, who is afraid? According to verse 16, for how many days had Goliath challenged and taunted the Israelites?
3. King Saul should have been the one to fight Goliath (see 8:20; 9:16; 10:23). What does it say about Saul that he is so quickly willing to let a young, small shepherd go out to fight a giant (vv. 33–37)? How does this relate to Saul's putting his armor on David (vv. 38–39)?

4. Why did David refuse to take the weapons and armor that Saul wanted to give to him?

5. Why did God allow David to defeat Goliath? What lesson does this teach us about God?

6. In David's final speech (vv. 46–47) he explains that there will be two audiences for the spectacle of Goliath's coming defeat, and a specific message for each audience. Who are the audiences, and what is the message for each?

Lesson 10

Saul, Jonathan, and David (1 Samuel 17:55-18:5)

The Big Picture

With Saul's murderous intentions now undeniable ([1 Sam. 19:1; 20:33](#)), David is on the run for his life. Saul's manhunt is menacing but ultimately futile, for God faithfully protects and provides for his anointed. In fact, by extension, David will soon protect and provide for God's people (ch. 22). In great contrast, Saul ravages them. This contrast between two "kings" will grow starker throughout the rest of 1 Samuel: Saul's self-focus, fear, and jealousy take him deeper into sin and spiritual darkness, while David's trust in God shines brightly amid the darkest of these circumstances.

God's chosen and anointed one, David, is opposed and in constant danger, but God is with him—a truth increasingly recognized in Israel but more severely opposed by a desperate Saul.

1. While Saul technically remains king, he looks increasingly less like Israel's ideal king, while David increasingly demonstrates the traits of a godly king. Provide examples of each from chapter 18.
2. As heir apparent to his father's throne, Jonathan provides significant gifts to David in 18:4. What do they signify? (See 20:13–17, 30 for help.)
3. Saul's emotional state is referenced a number of times (see 18:8, 10, 12, 15, 29). Do you see any pattern or trajectory in these verses?
4. Multiple times we are told that Saul "had his spear in his hand" (18:10; 19:9; also 22:6), but in each case, Saul is not on a battlefield. What might this signify about Saul?

5. Read [Psalm 59](#), which is David's poetic reflection upon the dangers recounted in 1 Samuel 19. What in the psalm strikes you as particularly relevant or illuminating for understanding the events of 1 Samuel 19?

Lesson 11

Saul becomes David's enemy (1 Samuel 18:6-30)

The Big Picture

1 Samuel 17 has brought us to a high point in the book's narrative, as the young anointed one David has achieved victory for Israel over the enemy champion Goliath. God's chosen king has proven his worth through the zeal he has displayed for God's glory and the representative victory he has won for God's people. Yet David will now experience a long period of suffering and trial that will precede his exaltation to the throne of Israel—a period that we will see beginning in our lesson for today. As David enters the service of Saul, he is surrounded by the love and adulation of the people of Israel, who sing songs in his honor that celebrate his military victories (18:6–7). This almost immediately leads Saul to nurse a growing envy and hatred of David in his heart as he begins to view him as a rival and a threat to his power and rule (18:8–9). After making an unsuccessful attempt on David's life in a fit of rage (18:10–11), Saul devises a plan to send him out to battle and then to arrange for him to be killed at the hands of the Philistines by promising his daughter Michal to David in marriage for the price of one hundred dead Philistines (18:12–30). This attempt is unsuccessful as well, as David slays two hundred Philistines and continues to win the admiration and respect of all Israel. In the next chapter, Saul seeks to enlist the help of his own family members in order to destroy David, only to find that both Jonathan and Michal are loyal to his new son-in-law. Jonathan refuses to kill David, and he makes Saul promise not to harm him either (19:1–7). Saul's daughter Michal arranges for David to escape from Saul's men—which ultimately leads to King Saul's humiliation by the Spirit of God (19:8–24). Jonathan and David strengthen their friendship in 1 Samuel 20 by making a covenant, through which the son of King Saul humbly supports God's anointed one—even though doing so will mean his own abdication of the throne (20:1–42). Even through danger and trial, God is preserving his anointed one—and preparing him to lead his people Israel.

1. What situations or occurrences that you have encountered have made you feel the most insecure? In those instances, have you also struggled with feeling envious of others—and why?
2. Notice how Saul's attitude regarding David quickly changes as this passage begins (and contrast this attitude with the one we saw in (1 Samuel 18:1–5). What seems to prompt this change in his perception of David? What does he fear? What might be causing his fear to turn to anger and violence?

3. Consider the ways in which Jonathan, Michal, and the people of Israel respond to David throughout this passage. How do the attitudes and actions of these characters contrast with Saul's?

4. What are these chapters teaching us about David's character? How does he respond to others throughout the events that they describe?

5. How do the people of Israel respond to David's military victories—and what might have made their songs particularly painful for King Saul (18:6–7)?

6. What attitudes and actions of Saul's does the narrator describe in 18:8–15?

7. What is Saul's deceitful plan regarding David—and in what way does David's humility help him (18:17–19)? How does Saul seek to use his daughter Michal, as well as the enemy Philistines, to bring about David's downfall (18:20–30)?

Lesson 12

Saul attempts to kill David (1 Samuel 19:1-20:42)

The Big Picture

As today's passage opens, Saul, the near-mad king, was still holding the throne in Israel, but David had already been anointed as God's chosen ruler. This situation was naturally bringing a degree of conflict—a nation cannot have two kings, and one of the two men would have to go. Saul therefore set about getting rid of David in the vain hope that he could hold on to the kingship himself and pass it on to his son. Meanwhile, David had been completely faithful to King Saul and was serving him valiantly as a soldier. Yet this only served to increase the tension for Saul as he became conflicted about whether to murder the young man who had been so devoted to him. Saul began to slip into dangerous instability, one minute swearing loyalty to David and the next minute throwing spears at his head. Into this deadly situation stepped Jonathan, Saul's son and heir to the throne. Because David was Jonathan's main rival to the throne, one would expect Jonathan to take matters into his own hands and kill David himself. Jonathan was an important leader in Israel's army—a fighting man with great power and skill (see 1 Samuel 14). He would be the next king as long as David was not around. But that is not what Jonathan chose to do. He knew the Lord had chosen David to be king, not him. So instead of joining Saul in his attempts to eliminate David, he opted to remain loyal to his closest friend. These two great men of valor shared a deep love for God, and that forged their devotion to each other.

1. What is surprising and ironic about what happens to Saul when he pursues David to Ramah (19:18–24)? What might God be communicating to Saul about himself through this—as well as about his sinful and murderous pursuit of David?
2. What behavior does Jonathan exhibit toward his father (20:34) and toward David (20:35–42)? How do you see him continuing to model the right response to the Lord's anointed one? What does the Lord seem to have in store for David before the time that he will bring him to the throne?

3. How does Jonathan begin to act as an advocate for David (19:1–7)?

4. In what way do we see Saul’s murderous hatred rising up again, however, in 19:8–10?

5. What does Michal do to side with David against her father Saul’s murderous pursuit of him (19:11–17)?

6. What is surprising and ironic about what happens to Saul when he pursues David to Ramah (19:18–24)? What might God be communicating to Saul about himself through this—as well as about his sinful and murderous pursuit of David?

Lesson 13

David Escapes from Saul (1 Samuel 21:1-23:29)

The Big Picture

As we saw in our last lesson, the crippling envy and murderous rage that Saul feels toward David has been intensifying. Despite the deep covenantal friendship that David has with Saul's son Jonathan, Saul's dangerous hatred drives him to the wilderness as he runs and hides out of fear for his life. The passage that we will study today begins with David barging in on Ahimelech the priest and demanding consecrated bread for his men along with the sword of Goliath (21:1–9). He then barely escapes from Gath with his life—after pretending to be insane (21:10–15). Chapter 22 opens with the moving scene of outcasts and outlaws from all over the land of Israel gathering to David for safety and care as he is at the cave of Adullam (22:1–5). As a stark contrast to this picture, the rest of the chapter reveals how ruthless and evil King Saul's heart has become. Following a report from Doeg the Edomite, who witnessed the aid that Ahimelech offered to David, Saul oversees the brutal murder of eighty-five priests of God (22:6–19). Only Abiathar escapes, and he goes on to find safety with David (22:20–23). David, even while on the run, delivers the city of Keilah from the attacking Philistines—only to be attacked by Saul and his army just after the battle ends (23:1–14). He continues fleeing from Saul into the wilderness, where Jonathan visits him and offers him encouragement (23:15–18). Saul is called away to a battle against the Philistines just as he is closing in on David's location (23:19–29). God's anointed king is on the run—but God's hand is preserving him and preparing him for the throne.

1. Some have wondered whether David's actions in Nob are biblically permissible, since only priests are to eat the holy bread ([Lev. 24:9](#)). However, Jesus comments on this very scene. Read [Mark 2:23–28](#). How does Jesus' commentary affect our understanding of David's receiving the holy bread?
2. In recent chapters, David has more than once "fled" the scene because of Saul's threats (1 Sam. 19:10, 18; 20:1, 42). Now in 21:10 he flees to Gath. Look back to 1 Samuel 17:4 to recall the significance of this town. How desperate must David be to flee from Saul to Gath?

3. Do you think David is sinfully distrusting the Lord when he feigns insanity before the king of Gath (21:13)? Read [Psalm 56](#) (written by David about his capture in Gath) and [Psalm 34](#) (written about his feigned insanity and escape). How do these psalms help us to understand the scene in Gath?

4. In 22:1 David flees again, now to a cave in the wilderness. This once again shows how desperate and alone he truly is (see [Psalm 142](#)). But he is soon joined by family (1 Sam. 22:1), then by 400 others (v. 2). How are these 400 described, and what significance might this have for understanding the differing leadership styles of Saul and David?

5. Sandwiched between scenes in the cave with David and his men (22:1–5, 20–23) is a horrific scene of Saul’s brutal execution of the priests of Nob and their families via his henchman, Doeg the Edomite (vv. 16–19). This provides an important contrast between the two “kings.” What contrasts do you see between Saul and David in chapter 22?

6. Echoes from earlier in 1 Samuel ring out in chapter 22 (perhaps foremost is 15:18–19). In what ways can you compare and contrast these stories?

Lesson 14

David Spares Saul at Engedi (1 Samuel 24-26)

The Big Picture

In the three chapters we will study for this lesson, David is given two separate opportunities to kill Saul—and during both of them he restrains himself from doing so and instead trusts God to accomplish His will in His time. First, he spares Saul’s life in a cave as the king unwittingly relieves himself near the very place where David is hiding (24:1–21)! Saul retreats with words of apology and swears to cease his murderous pursuit of David (24:22). Before long, though, he is on David’s heels again and is chasing him with the help of his soldiers. In an account that echoes the one in the cave that we have just seen two chapters earlier, David creeps unnoticed into Saul’s camp as he sleeps, where he finds himself again with an opportunity to take the life of his enemy (26:1–20). Again, he shows restraint, which leads Saul to once again confess the “sin” of his pursuit of David and to speak words of blessing to him (26:21–25). Thus David, the anointed one, demonstrates the Christlike qualities of humility, restraint, and trust in God as he refuses to return evil for evil.

1. The contrasts between these two “kings” will become even starker as this book progresses. How do David’s actions in 23:1–5 add further contrast to the results of Saul’s leadership in the previous chapter?
2. One major contrast between Saul and David is that the latter seeks and hears from God. Where exactly in chapter 23 do we see David’s seeking and hearing from the Lord, and what difference does this make in chapters 22–23?
3. The people of Keilah are saved from the threat of the Philistines by David and his men, only to turn against David soon thereafter (23:8, 12). This is sad, indeed, but is it terribly surprising? How might [John 1:11](#) speak to this reality?

4. Twice David has had the opportunity to take Saul's life, but each time he has refused (24:1–15; 26:7–20). What reasons does David provide for sparing Saul? See specifically 24:6, 10, 12; 26:9–11, 23–24.

5. Saul expresses a kind of remorse in each of his close encounters with David (24:16–21; 26:21–25). Reading on, we soon realize that it is not genuine repentance that Saul expresses. However, he does make a request that David takes seriously and later honors. What is it?

Lesson 15

David Marries Abigail (1 Samuel 25:2-44)

The Big Picture

Wedge between the two accounts of David's sparing of Saul's life is the record of his meeting with Abigail—the wife of the foolish Nabal (25:1–44). In this episode, David nearly slaughters all the men of Nabal in a fit of rage, only to be restrained carefully by a wise and godly woman, who eventually becomes his wife. David is often Christlike, but he is no Christ! Abigail guides him, at a key moment, toward wisdom, restraint, and trust in God's plan.

1. Between two scenes of David's sparing Saul, we read of another life spared under quite different circumstances (ch. 25). David initially plans to wipe out Nabal for refusing to extend the most basic cultural norms of hospitality. However, Abigail pleads with David on account of God's royal promises to him (vv. 26–31). The future king happily relents, and justice is once again entrusted to the Lord. What else do we learn about David from this rather peculiar chapter, especially in light of its position in this three-story-sandwich of chapters 24–26?
2. How does David's demeanor and attitude following the interaction he has with Nabal differ from the demeanor and attitude he displays during his interactions with Saul in 1 Samuel 24 and 26? Why do you think this is the case?
3. What makes the response Nabal gives to David's request so incredibly foolish (25:1–13)? How does David's response serve to make his fury obvious? What character faults might this response to Nabal's incendiary words be exposing within David?
4. Describe what you observe in 25:14–44 about the wisdom, character, and grace of Abigail. What makes her an exemplary character in this book of the Bible—one who even resembles Jesus Christ in many ways? In what way does she deliver David from rash sin and violence?

5. How does God's ultimate judgment fall on Nabal—and how does this serve to further validate the path that Abigail took rather than the one that David intended to take?

Lesson 16

David Flees to the Philistines (1 Samuel 27, 29)

The Big Picture

Desperation leads David into Philistine land once again, but this time compromises (1 Sam. 27:8–12) lead to multiplied complications. Nevertheless, God sovereignly intervenes, protecting his anointed from greater sin (ch. 29). Meanwhile, Saul's doubts and fears lead to deeper depths of darkness. Desperate for supernatural insight, he turns to a medium, a witch (ch. 28), only to receive another confirming word of his impending doom. The author turns attention repeatedly back and forth between David and Saul in order to highlight further a contrast of two "kings," one on a trajectory toward the throne (which plays out in 2 Samuel) and the other spiraling off of the throne in spectacular disgrace (which ends in 1 Samuel 31). This is the outworking of God's promises made long ago (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:10; 13:13–14; 15:28; 16:13).

Saul's life and kingship now has come to a prophesied disgraceful end because of his grave sin; David is protected from himself and his enemies because God's hand rests upon him.

1. The knot of issues in 1 Samuel 27 is notoriously difficult to untie. For example, how severely does David's faith falter? Which of his actions are sinful, and which are desperately shrewd? To appreciate the complexities, list both positive and negative observations concerning David's actions, looking for clues in the text itself.
2. It had been David's regular practice to seek the Lord's guidance (e.g., 23:2, 4) and to refer to the Lord in conversation (25:34; 26:10). Do we see the same in chapters 27–29? What might this answer suggest?
3. We come to a crucial crossroads at 28:1–2. Keeping the circumstances of chapter 27 in mind, list potential complexities that might be on the horizon.

4. How are these complexities averted in chapter 29? Who is responsible for this outcome?

5. Define the word necromancer.

6. Saul consults a necromancer in chapter 28. What circumstances lead him to do this, according to the text? What is he hoping to gain from this encounter? What should he have done instead?

Lesson 17

Saul's Death and David's Lament (1 Samuel 30–31)

The Big Picture

Saul's life and kingship now has come to a prophesied disgraceful end because of his grave sin; David is protected from himself and his enemies because God's hand rests upon him.

1. While a crisis seems to be averted in chapter 29, the next chapter introduces another crisis occurring elsewhere (30:1–5). This crisis reaches a boiling point in verse 6a, but in verse 6b there is a turn in the right direction. What is this turn, and what is its significance, in light of the last few chapters?
2. Both Saul and David are “strengthened” in a moment of crisis (28:22–25; 30:6), but quite differently. How so?
3. In 30:21–22 we see a controversy over spoils taken from the Amalekites. How does David handle this controversy (vv. 23–31), and what do these actions communicate about his leadership?
4. Saul's death is recorded in 1 Samuel 31. A slightly different version is told by an Amalekite in 2 Samuel 1. How do we explain these discrepancies? What do you think the Amalekite's intentions are?
5. Though already dead, Saul is decapitated by the Philistines (31:9). Two other figures are also decapitated in 1 Samuel (see 5:4; 17:51). Do you think this is mere coincidence? If not, what is the significance of this similarity? What do these three figures have in common?

Lesson 18

Summary/Reflections

1. Which of the concepts or principles in this study have you found to be the most encouraging? Why?
2. Which of the concepts or principles have you found most challenging? Why?
3. How do you respond to those who abuse their authority? How did David respond? How did Jesus respond?
4. Why did God allow Saul to persecute David for so long? What was He teaching Saul? What was He teaching David? What was He teaching the nation of Israel?
5. What was Saul's response to Samuel's dire warning? Is this what you expected from him? How is it in keeping with his character?
6. How did God use Saul's life for His purposes? How did Samuel's prophecy in 1 Samuel 8:11–18 prove to be true in Israel's first experience with a king?

7. How have you responded recently to people who have treated you badly? How can you imitate the humility of Christ this week?