

1 Samuel



1 Samuel

Leaders' notes and sample studies

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Sample studies overview

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STUDY 1

1 Samuel 1 - 4

The Blind Leading the Blind

Kings, Queens, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Generals, Priests, Team Captains, Coaches, CEO's, Teachers... the list goes on and on. *Leaders* come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, and history has given us an array of good and bad ones. The old saying "power corrupts" rings all too true. We expect so much from our leaders and we become disappointed, disillusioned, even angry when they fail us or abuse their position. That's why we are often surprised when good leaders come along. We sometimes harbour a suspicion that they are hiding their true colours from us. We all have a vested interest in leaders for we are all directly affected by those in power over us. When a leader excels we prosper and flourish. When a leader fails to fulfil their duty we all suffer.

For Starters

Name some well known leaders, both good and bad. How have you been affected by people you identify as leaders?

So far...

The book of 1 Samuel is all about the leaders of God's chosen people, Israel. The story begins some 1100 years before Christ, but the grander story of God's dealings with humanity goes back even further to Israel's ancestor, Abram.

Investigate

1. Read Genesis 17.1-8. What are God's intentions with Abram and his offspring?

The Book of Judges

Out of Abram's offspring God made the nation of Israel. He brought the nation out of slavery in Egypt, renewed his promises to them and gave them the Law at Mount Sinai. God then led them to the promised land of Canaan. The Book of Judges describes the life of Israel in the land. However, they failed to rout the people of the land as God had commanded them (Jdg 2.1-4). As a result, the tribes of Israel were constantly enticed into idolatry by these (and other) peoples. God consistently showed his commitment to Israel, though, by rescuing them from their oppressors whenever they cried out to him. God did this through military rulers called judges. However, the situation of Israel deteriorated. Rather than fighting their enemies, the end of the Book of Judges sees the tribes of Israel fighting among themselves.

Investigate

2. What is particularly noteworthy of Israel's leadership at the end of the Book of Judges? (Jdg 21.25)

This last verse of the Book of Judges describes the perilous circumstances which Israel finds itself in at the beginning of 1 Samuel. Yet 1 Samuel opens not with Israel's leaders but with an ordinary family in a peculiar situation.

Hannah

Investigate

Read 1 Samuel 1-3.

3. What is Hannah's predicament? (1.2, 6-8)
4. What is Hannah's response? (1.9-16)
5. How does God answer Hannah's prayer? (1.19-20)
6. How does Hannah honour her vow? (1.24-28; 2.11)
7. Browse through Hannah's prayer (2.1-10). How does God use his power? Can you see a pattern here?

Looking forward

Considering that Israel has no human king at this time, it is surprising to hear Hannah saying that God will give strength to his king (2.10). Hannah seems to be looking forward to a time when God would rectify Israel's leadership woes with a king. Yet what does this mean for Israel's current leadership?

The House of Eli

Investigate

8. Who is Eli? (1.3, 9)

9. How is Eli's leadership reflected in:

- a. his sons' behaviour (2.12-17, 22-25, 29; 3.13)?
- b. his obedience to the commandments in Deuteronomy 6.4-12?
- c. the spiritual condition of the nation (3.1)?

10. How does Samuel compare to Eli and his sons (2.26; 3.19-21)?

11. How does God intend to deal with the poor leadership of his people?

- a. 2.25
- b. 2.30-36
- c. 3.12-14
- d. 3.19-21

The blind leading the blind

You may have heard the saying 'Justice is blind'. This popular saying points to the fact that true justice does not discriminate. In that instance, blindness is a good thing. However, in Eli's case, his blindness is disastrous. As the leader of God's people, Eli needs to be discriminating and discerning, but he simply is not. He is unable to restrain his immoral sons, and he cannot properly perceive God's interaction with his people. Ironically, he could perceive noble Hannah's lips moving while she prayed to God, but he mistakenly condemned her as a drunk (1.12-14). He is blind both physically and spiritually.

As a priest, Eli's role was to be the mediator in the relationship between God and humanity. He was to represent God in all his holiness to the people, and he was to represent the people to God by offering their sacrifices to God. If a priest failed in his role, then the relationship between God and his people would break down. Here at the beginning of 1 Samuel we see Eli and his sons failing dismally in their leadership. Eli is a blind man leading the blind.

God, though, is not satisfied with the breakdown in relationship with his people. It is for this reason that he acts upon the blind leadership of Eli's house.

Investigate

Read 1 Samuel 4.

12. Does God follow through with his threats? How does he do this?

Think it through

13. How do you see the theme of Hannah's prayer at work in chapter 4?

14. What is the mood at the end of chapter 4? (Think in terms of the promises to Abraham.)

Reversal of fortunes

Hannah's prayer sets the pattern for things to come. Hannah describes the LORD as a God who reverses fortunes: bringing the mighty low and exalting the humble. However, he does not do this randomly. He does it to preserve his relationship with his people. In the rest of 1 Samuel, keep an eye out to see whether the LORD follows this pattern.

Think it through

15. Is God vindictive? Read Romans 8.29 and think about how this verse affects the way you view God's actions.

16. The thoughts of Hannah's prayer were still being echoed 1100 years later in Mary's day. Read Luke 1.39-55. What was God going to do for Israel in her day?

STUDY 2

1 Samuel 5.1 - 7.14

Putting God in a box

Israel's loss

We left Israel in deep trouble. The armies of Israel are defeated. Eli and his sons are dead. The nation is without leadership. And the Philistines have captured the Ark of the Covenant. We are left wondering whether Israel can ever recover from such a national disaster. Was Hannah's song merely wishful thinking?

The Ark of the Covenant

Nations today take pride in their flag, their coat of arms and their national anthem. For Israel the Ark of the Covenant was all this and more. It was the throne of God himself—a symbol of God's holy presence and command over Israel. Only Levites (the tribe of priests) were allowed to carry the Ark, and they did this with long poles so as to avoid direct contact with it. To touch it was to desecrate the throne of God and risk death.

Regional gods

In ancient times each people had its own national god. This national god's domain was thought to end at the nation's border. War between nations was seen as a battle between their gods as much as their armies. The Philistines were a pagan people living in the Promised Land who worshiped a god called Dagon. God had commanded Israel to dispossess them, but Israel had failed to do this.

Just for starters

1. What remarkable 'coincidences' do you know about or have personally experienced?

Raiders of the Lost Ark

Read 1 Samuel 5.1-12

Investigate

2. What did the Philistines do with the Ark of God once it was captured? (5.2)

3. What happened to Dagon in the presence of the Ark of God and how does this reflect on Dagon? (5.3-5)

4. What happened to the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Gath and Ekron in the presence of the Ark of God? How did they try and resolve their problems?

Read 1 Samuel 6.1-12

Think it through

5. Why did the Philistines make it so hard for the Ark to return to the Israelites? (6.9)

6. What does the behaviour of the cows imply?

Triumphant return

Read 1 Samuel 6.13 - 7.2

Investigate

7. What was the response of the following Israelites to the Ark? How appropriate was their response?
 - a. the people of Beth Shemesh? (6.13-16,19-20)

 - b. the Levites (6.15)

 - c. the men of Kiriath Jearim (7.1-2)

Think it through

8. What does the Ark's return mean for Israel? (Remember, it is the Ark of the Covenant.)

9. What does this episode tell us about ...

a. The Kingship of God

b. Manipulating God

c. The concept of coincidence (cf. Proverbs 16.9)

A Free Agent

By afflicting the Philistines with haemorrhoids (that's the real translation of the word 'boils!') and toppling the statue of Dagon, the LORD had humiliated and overcome the Philistines. In these episodes, the LORD shows that no national border and no box could ever contain him. Nor could either the people of Israel, the armies of the Philistines, or other so-called gods contain him. He is a totally free agent and he is able to demonstrate this even when it seems he has lost control.

Humble Return

Read 1 Samuel 7.3-17

10. What does Samuel lead Israel to do? (7.3-6)

11. How does Israel defeat the Philistines? (7.7-14)

Think it through

12. What are some of the ways we "put God in a box" today?

13. What is the proper response to the kingship of God?

STUDY 3

1 Samuel 7.15 - 10.27

The People's Choice

A hereditary problem

In the last study we saw how God took vengeance on the Philistines and returned to his people Israel. Now under the leadership of Samuel, God's purposes for a repentant Israel could continue.

Samuel, though, had a daunting task ahead of him: Israel was still not in full possession of the land, they were surrounded by their enemies, and Samuel (their only remaining leader) was not getting any younger. Furthermore, Israel was haunted by the problems of hereditary rule. Judges could not pass their rule onto the sons, because Judges were appointed directly by God. The last time a Judge's son had tried to rule, there had been a civil war (see Judges 9). And while priests could pass their office onto their sons, Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas proved how this often bred corruption; there was no guarantee of competence or moral integrity in leadership. So what was ahead for Israel?

Just for starters

What qualities do judges normally look for in contestants at a beauty pageant?
What would you look for?

Israel's demand

Read 1 Samuel 7.15 - 8.22

Investigate

1. How does Samuel try to secure Israel's future leadership? How successful is he? (7.15 - 8.3)

2. How do Israel's elders try to secure the nation's future leadership? What motivates them to pursue this course of action? (8.4-5)

Think it through

3. How would you evaluate the motivations of Israel's elders? (1 Samuel 8.7, 19-20; see also Joshua 23.4-8)

The request of Israel's elders does not take God by surprise. In fact God had promised Abram that kings would come from his family line (see Genesis 17.4-6). He had also made provision for a king in the Law of Moses.

Investigate

4. What kind of king does God approve of? (See Deut 17.14-20)

5. What kind of king does Samuel tell Israel to expect? Why? (8.10-18)

Enter Saul

Read 1 Samuel 9.1 - 10.16

Town of Renown

While we may have mixed emotions about Israel's request for a king, we are still hopeful for their future. After all, God has consented to give them the king they ask for. But as God rolls out the red carpet for Israel's new king, we discover that, of all places in Israel, he comes from Gibeah of Benjamin. Judges 19 - 21 recounts how the residents of Gibeah had raped a Levite's concubine and left her to die. This appalling crime had led to a civil war in which the tribe of Benjamin was nearly annihilated. We are left wondering whether Israel's king-to-be actually has anything going for him.

Investigate

6. What makes Saul stand out from the rest of the Israelites? (9.2)

7. Who takes initiative during the search for the donkeys? (9.5-10)

Think it through

8. Give Saul a score out of 10 for the following qualities:

- a. Determination
- b. Creative thinking
- c. Speaking ability
- d. Ability to instruct others

9. In light of this how would you rate Saul's competency to rule as king?

10. What role does the Spirit of God play in this episode? (10.6, 10) What does this tell us about effective leadership?

And the winner is...

Read 1 Samuel 10:17-27

Mizpah

Mizpah was a town located in the centre of the promised land. It held special significance for the Israelites because it was a place of national assembly (Jdg 20.1; 1 Sam 7.5-6). So when Samuel calls the people together to the LORD at Mizpah we can expect that a momentous event will occur which affects the entire nation of Israel.

Think it through

11. How is God's description of himself relevant to Israel's current leadership crisis? (10.17-19)

12. How does 'the baggage incident' (10.20-24) reflect on Saul's character? (See also 30.24.)

13. Evaluate the responses of the following people to Saul's kingship?

- a. Samuel
- b. the people
- c. the worthless fellows

14. What are some of the qualities we should look for in the leaders of God's people?

15. What enables people to be effective leaders of God's people today? Consider the following verses:

- a. Acts 6.8-10
- b. 2 Timothy 1.5-7
- c. 2 Timothy 2.24-25a
- d. Titus 1.5-9

STUDY 4

1 Samuel 11 - 12

An eye-catching king

Ammonstocity

Ammonites

The Ammonites were relatives of the Israelites, being descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot (Gen 19.38). Despite this the Ammonites had a history of hostility towards the Israelites (Jdg 3.13; 10.9; 11.4), and God had warned the Israelites to steer clear of them (Deut 2.19).

Jabesh-Gilead

God had allowed some of Israel's tribes to settle east of the Jordan River, even though the land promised to Israel was on the west side. As a result, the tribes on the west side of the Jordan looked down on them as their 'country cousins'. Jabesh-Gilead was a distant outpost of the eastern tribes, situated on the dusty fringe of Israelite territory. As such, it was vulnerable to attack from marauders and invaders.

Just for starters

What great rescue attempts can you recall? Were they successful?

Read 1 Samuel 11

Investigate

1. How do the people of Jabesh-Gilead try to resolve the threat of Nahash, king of the Ammonites? (11.1-3)
2. How do the people of Gibeah react to the news of the Ammonite attack? (11.4)
3. What happens to Saul when he hears of the Ammonite attack? What does he do? (11.5-11)

4. How did Samuel and the people respond to Saul's victory? (11.12-14)

Gilgal

Gilgal was a site oozing with significance for the nation of Israel. It was where Joshua had erected a monument commemorating Israel's entry into the Promised Land (Josh 4.19-24), and where the nation first camped in it (Josh 5.10). It was where Israel had come of age as a nation. To the common Israelite, Gilgal evoked a sense of pride and national identity, much like Gallipoli does today for Australians and New Zealanders, and the Statue of Liberty does for Americans.

Think it through

5. For what two things do the worthless fellows from 10.27 have to be grateful? In light of this episode, was their distrust merited?

6. How has your impression of Saul changed from the last study?

7. What is the significance of God's Spirit in this episode?

Samuel's reminder

Read 1 Samuel 12

Investigate

8. How are the following people characterised in Samuel's speech?

a. Samuel

b. The Israelites

c. The LORD

9. Does Israel's demand for a king represent a rejection of the LORD? (12.12-13, 17)

10. Whose choice of king is Saul? (12.13)

11. Will the nation now succeed? Why or why not? (12.14-15, 20-25)

Think it through

12. Why does Samuel remind the Israelites of the LORD's righteous deeds? (12.7)

13. In what ways is the king distinguished from the people? (cf. 10.9-10; 11.6)

14. How is the giving of God's Spirit different today? (Acts 5.30-32, Eph 1.13-14)

The Spirit

In Old Testament times God put his Spirit only on select individuals for the purpose of performing a special task. The Spirit was given to priests, prophets and judges. God gives Saul the Spirit to fulfil his role as king. God could, therefore, take his Spirit away once the task was completed.

In the New Testament God anoints Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1.10, Acts 10.38). Jesus fulfils the role of priest, prophet, judge and king (Heb 5.1-10; Mark 6.1-4; 2 Tim 4.1; Luke 1.31-33). Since then, God has given the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus (Acts 2.32-33; Acts 5.32; Eph 1.13-14). This permanent blessing of God's Spirit puts believers in a more privileged position than even the priests, prophets, judges and kings of the Old Testament (Rom 8.14-17; Heb 11.39-40).

STUDY 5

1 Samuel 13-15

Mishmash at Michmash and Dismissal at Gilgal

The Beginning of the End

Read 1 Samuel 13.1-23

Saul's Reign

We do not know exactly how old Saul was when he became king, or for how long he reigned. The Hebrew text of the Bible that we have today has lost these particular details at 1 Sam 13.1. We can, however, make some good guesses. When Samuel anoints Saul in chapter 9, he is described as a 'man'. This means that Saul was probably at least 20 years old, because 'man' usually refers to males of fighting age (over 20 years); and, after all, the elders of Israel had demanded a king who could lead them into battle. We also know that Saul eventually had four sons, and that at least three of them were of fighting age while he was still alive (Saul also had two daughters). Thus, by chapter 13, Saul had probably been king for a little over 20 years.

Just for starters

Think of some famous leaders who "fell from grace"? What caused their downfall?

Investigate

1. What factors lead to Israel's fear? (13.5-7, 19-23)

Think it through

2. Do you think Saul is wise or foolish in offering the sacrifices? (13.8-13)

King and Prophet

Israel was a nation that was ruled by the word of the LORD. As such, the prophet, who delivered the word of the LORD, had the most important office in the nation. Even the king was to be subject to the word of the LORD's prophet. In Deuteronomy 18.15-22, the LORD had promised to raise up a prophet like Moses to guide the nation of Israel, and the nation was to show complete obedience to the prophet's word. Although this promise ultimately finds its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, the LORD did indeed raise up numerous prophets to bring His word to Israel. Samuel was one such prophet. For Saul, this presented a dilemma. Saul took a course of action that to him seemed perfectly logical—it made good sense. And clear, logical thinking is what any nation would want from their leader. However, Saul also had to contend with the direct word of the prophet. Thus, for Saul, we have a problem: to what extent could he himself follow his own logical instincts? How much authority did his own good ideas and commands carry? In other words, did Saul have the authority of a prophet? Was Saul also among the prophets?

A Turn of Events

Read 1 Samuel 14

Investigate

3. How does Jonathan's behaviour contrast with Saul's? (14.1-7)?
4. What is Jonathan's reasoning for his actions? What is the result? (14.6-7, 14-23)

Urim and Thummim

We are not exactly sure what the Urim and Thummim were. We do know that they were commissioned by the LORD to be carried on the breastplate of the High Priest (Exod 28.30) and only the priests handled them for determining divine decisions (Num 27.21; Deut 33.8; Ezra 2.63). Some have thought that 'Urim and Thummim' was the term given to the twelve precious stones that were inlaid into the High Priest's breastplate (Exod 28.17-21). However, that is just a guess. It is reasonable to assume, however, that whenever an 'ephod' (the priestly garment) appears in a narrative, it is mentioned because it has the Urim and Thummim with it (1 Sam 14.3).

Think it through

5. Why was Saul's vow foolish? (14.30, 32-34)
6. What does God's Law say about broken vows (Deut 5.11, 23.21-23)? How does this reflect on Saul and his vow?

A Turn for the Worse

Read 1 Samuel 15

Investigate

7. What does Samuel instruct Saul to do? Why? (15.2-3, 18)
8. Does Saul follow through on God's instructions given through Samuel? Why or why not? (15.7-9, 14-15)

Sacred Ban

The LORD brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to give them the land of Canaan, just as he had promised to Abraham. God gave Israel the land by pouring out his fearsome judgement on the pagan inhabitants of Canaan for their terrible sinfulness. He used Israel to do this by having them execute a 'sacred ban'—that is, God demanded that Israel devote the inhabitants to him for destruction: men, women, children and all their possessions (Deut 7).

To us today this sounds like a harsh and even criminal measure, similar to the atrocity of ethnic cleansing. However, God takes sin very seriously (compare Jesus' shocking words in Mat 5.29-30) and demanded that Israel be a holy nation—that is, an especially distinguished nation. As such, he ordered a thorough purge of sin from Israel's midst. A sacred ban was not so much 'ethnic cleansing' as 'sin cleansing'. And by annihilating absolutely everything, the LORD made sure that there was nothing left over to lead his people Israel into pagan sinfulness.

Furthermore, to allow anyone or anything to survive a sacred ban was to stifle God's righteous judgement—in effect, to obstruct justice. Anyone who failed to carry out a sacred ban was guilty of obstructing justice and being in contempt of the LORD. When Israel first entered Canaan, an Israelite named Achan kept some of the spoil from a sacred ban (Josh 7). As such, he tainted all of Israel with sin and obstructed God's righteous judgement. As a consequence, the LORD's righteous judgement fell on Achan and his entire clan—in other words, the sacred ban fell on Achan and all that was his. He and his family were stoned to death and their bodies and possessions were burned.

The Dismis-Saul

9. With what does Saul seem to be preoccupied? (15.12, 30)
10. How does the LORD respond to Saul's actions? (15.10-11, 22-23, 26-28)

Robes and cloaks

In ancient time, robes and cloaks were symbols of authority (much as they are today). The High Priest had special robes to signify his authority to act as priest. The fact that Samuel's mother made him a robe when he was a little boy was symbolic of the authority that Samuel was to have (1 Sam 2.19). When the prophet Ahijah signalled the split of the Kingdom of Israel, he symbolically tore up a new garment (1 Kgs 11.30-32). With his cloak, the prophet Elijah parted the waters of the Jordan River, and when he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, he left his cloak behind for Elisha to carry on as his successor (2 Kgs 2.8-13). Here, in 1 Sam 15, the tearing of Samuel's robe is symbolic of the tearing away of Saul's kingdom.

Does God regret his own actions?

After Saul's failure to carry out the sacred ban on Amalek, God expresses his regret to Samuel for having made Saul king (1 Sam 15.10). However, Saul was the king that the people of Israel wanted—not whom the LORD wanted. Popularity is not a sign of God's approval. When Israel asked for a king, they rejected the LORD. Therefore, the LORD chose to give them a reject-king. The regret that the LORD expresses over Saul is, in many ways, the regret he planned to have. It is like the LORD saying, "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to reject Saul." As such, Samuel is fully justified in saying that God 'is not a man, that he should have regret' (1 Sam 15.29). God had given Saul the opportunities to obey him and so prosper as king: Samuel had written down the king's obligations and God's Spirit had come on Saul at crucial moments. However, Saul turns out to be the defiant people's defiant king. Saul had the appearance of a good king. However, appearances can be deceptive.

Think it through

11. Has Saul's kingship been doomed from the start? (Consider 8.18; 10.19; 12.14-15; 13.13-14)

12. At this point, how are things looking for God's people and God's promises to Abraham? (12.22; 13.14; 15.28)

13. What place do the following characteristics have in leadership?

a. Obedience

b. Popularity

c. Rationality

d. Initiative

14. How does the picture of God seen throughout this study compare with popular perceptions of God today?

STUDY 6

1 Samuel 16 - 17

The LORD's choice

Just for starters

As a child did you ever make a bold claim? How close was it to the truth?

Enter the shepherd boy

Read 1 Samuel 16

Samuel's regard for Saul

When the elders of Israel asked for a king Samuel was grieved, for the people had rejected his sons and the LORD (1 Sam 8.1-9). However, when Saul was chosen as king, Samuel was just as impressed by his appearance as the rest of the people (10.24). Samuel was particularly fond of Saul; not only did he clearly specify Saul's duties as king (10.25), but when the LORD rejected Saul, Samuel took it hard. He cried to the LORD all night (15.11), and even went along with Saul when he sought the people's approval (15.30-31), thus keeping Saul's rejection from public knowledge. We can understand, therefore, why Samuel feels dejected at the beginning of chapter 16.

1. What was Samuel's purpose in going to Bethlehem? Why was he afraid? (16.1-5)
2. Why does the LORD rebuke Samuel? (16.6-7)
3. How does David compare with Saul? (16.10-13, see also 13.14; 15.28)

'After God's own heart'

The LORD gave Saul to the people of Israel as the king they were looking for. In 1 Sam 13.14, however, Samuel contrasts Saul with the man who was to succeed him. David is the king whom the LORD is looking for. The phrase 'a man after God's own heart' almost sounds like David can take all the credit for his own choice. However, the original Hebrew phrase implies that David is a man of God's heart's liking. In other words, when the LORD chooses David, he does not go along with popular choice, but with his own personal preference.

Think it through

4. What is the role of God's Spirit in 16.13-14? How is this significant?

The Boy Wonder

Read 1 Samuel 17.1-58

Field of Blood

At the beginning of chapter 17, the Philistines and the Israelites have come head to head on their common border. The fact that the Philistines are still a problem reflects poorly on Saul's leadership. The two nations confront each other at a place called Ephes Dammim, which literally means 'field of blood'—a very suggestive name.

Investigate

5. Who is the logical choice to fight Goliath? Why? (1 Sam 10.23-24; 17.4-7)

6. What action does Saul take in response to the situation? (17.25, 38-39)

7. What action does David take in response to the situation? (17.32, 39-40, 48-51)

Think it through

8. What motivates Saul's actions throughout this episode? How would you characterise him? (17.11, 25, 38; see also 15.30)

9. What motivates David's actions throughout this episode? How would you characterise him? (17.26, 37, 45-47)

10. Compare the two 'baggage incidents' in 10.22-24 and 17.22. What do these tell us about Saul and David?

The Good Shepherd

The LORD chose David while he was a shepherd looking after his father's sheep. David's commitment to the flock is shown by the lengths he went to in order to protect it—he even fought off lions and bears. No ordinary shepherd would have gone to such lengths.

Interestingly, the leaders of Israel, especially the kings, are called 'shepherds' of God's people throughout the Old Testament. The state of the 'flock' depended on how well they shepherded them (see Ezek 34). In the New Testament, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd (John 10.11). But he goes one better than David. Not only does Jesus defend the flock, but he even lays down his life for his sheep.

Investigate

11. What is threatening about David's appearance before Goliath? (17.41-44)

12. What is threatening about David's words to Goliath? (17.45-47)

13. What is the outcome of this duel? (17.50)

Think it through

14. What should the Israelites learn from David's victory?

Someone to emulate?

For centuries Christians have been called on to emulate David and his bold faith against Goliath—to show confidence in God in the face of such terrible circumstances. However, while Christians should certainly display faith in God in any situation, this misses the point of the David and Goliath story.

David is the LORD's anointed. God had chosen him for the express purpose of saving God's people from the hands of their enemies. This is not an example that any Christian can live up to. Every Christian is a helpless sinner who, on their own, is unable to help themselves, let alone defeat their enemies—the world, sin and the death.

Jesus, however, fits the bill perfectly. He is the one whom God anointed to save his people (Matt 1.21); he is the one who has bravely overcome the world (John 16.33), all sin (Heb 4.15) and death (2 Tim 1.10), granting victory to his otherwise helpless people. If anything, Christians are called on to emulate the Israelites sitting on the hill—watching and enjoying the spoils of the victory (cf. 1 John 5.5). As such, David is not necessarily the example for all Christians to follow; rather, he is a Christ-figure. Through David's actions, we come to understand and appreciate exactly who Jesus (a descendant of David) is and what he has done.

15. When we face life's challenges, our response can be quite extreme, from feeble passivity to commando-like control freak. In light of your last personal struggle, where do you sit on this spectrum? What can you learn from the Israelites' response to David's victory (17.52-53)?

STUDY 7

1 Samuel 18 - 20

Loyalty and disloyalty amongst the royalty

Just for starters

What makes an opinion worth listening to?

The opinion poll

Read 1 Samuel 18.1 - 20.1

Investigate

1. What is the difference between David and Saul's situation? (18.12, cf. 16.13-14)

2. Fill out the following table to determine the opinion that various figures have of David.

Passage	Who	Opinion of David (for / against)	Proof of their opinion
18.1-4 19.1-7	Jonathan		
18.6-7	The women of Israel		
18.14	The Lord		
18.16	All Israel and Judah		
18.20, 28-29 19.11-17	Michal		
19.18	Samuel		
18.7-9 18.10-15 18.17, 20-29 19.9-10 19.11, 14-15	Saul		

3. How does Saul follow through with his promises?

(a) 17.25 and 18.17-19

(b) 19.6 and 19.15

Saul's frustration

Despite numerous attempts on David's life, Saul fails to lay even a finger on David. Saul's situation is becoming increasingly desperate. Not only has David won the hearts of Israel and Judah, but those whom Saul should have been able to depend upon let him down and they constantly foil his own plans: the LORD, Jonathan, Michal and Samuel. Saul is becoming more and more isolated as the LORD continues to frustrate him.

The Emperor's New Clothes

We saw back in chapter 13 that garments are symbols of authority. Here at the beginning of chapter 18 we see the Crown Prince Jonathan remove his own robe and armour, and give them to David. This was more than just a token of their tight friendship; it was a significant act recognising David as the future king of Israel. Jonathan was effectively abdicating his future authority as king in favour of the Lord's anointed—his friend, David.

At the end of chapter 19, Saul also disrobes and lies naked before the Lord. We have effectively returned to the situation in 10.10-12, where Samuel had anointed Saul but Saul had not been publicly acclaimed as king. Thus, yet again, Saul is a king without authority. The people's king has lost his people and now lies purely at the mercy of God.

Family feud

Read 1 Samuel 20.1-42

Investigate

4. Is David a loyal citizen of the kingdom?

5. How does Jonathan realise his father's intentions? (20.30-33)

6. What is so amazing about Jonathan's speech in 20.12-17?

Jonathan's slip up

David and Jonathan plan their alibi together. However, when it comes to telling the alibi to Saul, Jonathan makes a big slip up. Rather than saying that David had asked permission to hurry back to Bethlehem for the sacrifice, Jonathan says that David asked to 'get away'—that is, make his escape. It is at this point that Saul realises Jonathan is in league with David and explodes with anger, cursing his own son in no uncertain terms. Saul feels utterly betrayed. And yet, in the midst of his anger, his words make sense: as long as David is alive, Jonathan's inheritance of the throne is far from certain.

7. What is the outcome of David and Jonathan's plan? (20.41-42)

Think it through

8. Is Jonathan a loyal citizen of the kingdom?

9. What do Jonathan's actions in this chapter teach us about:

a) loyalty to friends

b) loyalty to family

c) loyalty to God

d) priorities in relationships

10. Jonathan's loyalty to the Lord's anointed comes at great personal cost. What has following Christ cost you? What does Jesus have to say about the cost in Mark 10.28-30?

STUDY 8

1 Samuel 21 - 24 **Seek and destroy**

Just for starters

Have you ever been stuck in a situation where you thought there was no way out? What happened?

Wild goose chase

Read 1 Samuel 21.1 - 22.23 and 23.15-28

Investigate

1. Chapters 21-23 depict David fleeing from Saul. Fill in the following table about these incidents.

Place of refuge	Who assists David?	Dilemma	Outcome
Nob (21.1)	21.4-9	21.3-6	22.9-10
		21.7	22.16-23
Gath (21.10)	21.13	21.11-12	21.15 - 22.1
The Cave of Adullam (22.1)	22.1	—	22.2
Mizpeh of Moab (22.3)	22.4	22.3	22.4
	22.5		22.5
Wilderness of Ziph (23.14)	23.14	23.14	23.14
Horesh (23.15)	23.16-17	23.15	23.16, 18
The Wilderness of Maon (23.24-25)	23.25	23.26	23.27-29

2. How does Saul's treatment of Nob compare with his treatment of the Amalekites? (15.15-16; 22.18-19)

Against the Lord's Anointed

In the midst of his rage against David, Saul commits a heinous crime: he has 85 anointed priests and their families killed (1 Sam 22.16-19). The scandal of this massacre is not just the loss of life, but that Saul lays his hand against men anointed to mediate the relationship between the Lord and his people. Rather than leading the nation under God, Saul has assaulted God himself by murdering his anointed ones. He has just jeopardised God's covenant with Israel.

What's more, Saul is now hunting another anointed one: David.

To the Rescue

Read 1 Samuel 23.1-14

Investigate

3. What crisis does Keilah face? (23.1)
4. What is David's purpose in coming to Keilah (23.2-4)? What is Saul's purpose in coming to Keilah? (23.8)

Think it through

5. How do David and Saul each relate to God in this episode? What does this tell us about relating to God?
6. In what ways are you like David when you relate to God? In what ways are you like Saul?

A close call

Read 1 Samuel 24.1-22

Investigate

8. How determined is Saul to capture David? (Compare 23.13 with 24.1-2.)

9. How do David's men react when they see Saul in David's cave? (24.4)

10. How does David treat Saul and why (24.6-13, cf. 22.17-19)?

11. What does Saul finally realise? (24.16-22; cf. 15.28)

Think it through

12. What is the significance of David cutting Saul's robe? (See 15.27-28)

13. When Jesus was crucified, the soldiers gambled for his clothing (John 19.23-24). In doing this, they unwittingly fulfilled Psalm 22.18. When it came to Jesus' tunic, the soldiers did not tear it. Although this fulfilment is widely recognised by readers of the Bible, many forget to ask what exactly is the meaning of the garments. Thinking about the role garments play in 1 Samuel, what might be the significance of the fact that Jesus' tunic remained untoned?

14. Throughout this study we have seen various people reading God's hand into their specific circumstances (e.g. Saul at Keilah, David's men in the cave). Is it right for us to read God into our circumstances? How do David's actions in this study help us to answer this? (see also 1Thess 5.15-22, Rom 8.28-29).

15. Certain Psalms are set during this part of David's life. They are Psalms 18, 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 63 and 142. These Psalms give us a glimpse into David's thoughts and emotions, much like a diary. Read Psalm 57. What is the context of the Psalm (in the title)? What is David's attitude to God and his own enemies?

STUDY 9

1 Samuel 25 - 27

Friend or fiend?

Just for starters

Have you ever made a "fool of yourself"? What happened?

The rich fool

Read 1 Samuel 25.1-44

Investigate

1. What major event happens in 1 Samuel 25.1? What does this now mean for the nation of Israel?
2. How is Nabal and his wife, Abigail described? (25.3) How do they each show their character in this episode (25.9-12, 14-23)
3. What do Abigail's words (25.23-31) imply about:
 - a. The LORD?
 - b. David?
 - c. Nabal?
 - d. Saul?
4. Why is David grateful to Abigail? (25.32-34)

5. What happens after Abigail's meeting David? (25.36-42)

Think it through

6. What significance does the phrase 'like a king' (25.36) have?

The Royal Fool

Read 1 Samuel 26.1 - 27.1

Investigate

7. What obstacles does David face as he enters Saul's camp (26.5-7)?

8. Why does David refuse to attack Saul? (26.8-11, 23-24)

9. What is Saul's response to David when he finds out that David spared his life again (26.21)?

Think it through

10. Was David foolish for not killing Saul?

Opposing the Chosen King

David had no need to attack Nabal since God himself struck Nabal dead. Nabal had been acting 'like a king' with total contempt for David. He serves as a warning of how God will deal with those who do not acknowledge the LORD's chosen king, but rather set themselves up in opposition to him. This sounds a sombre note for Saul (26.10).

Fooling the Philistines

Read 1 Samuel 27.1-12

11. Does David trust Saul's words in 26.21? How does he indicate this? (27.1-4)

12. How does David gain the trust of Achish? (27.8-12)

Think it through

13. This is now the second time that David acts with apparent deceit towards the Philistines. How should we evaluate David's behaviour in chapter 27? To what extent can it serve as a model for us?

STUDY 10

1 Samuel 28 - 31

The LORD Keeps His Word

Just for starters

Name a movie where the ending didn't feel quite right. What was wrong with it?

In the Hands of the Enemy

Read 1 Samuel 28-29

1. What does the news in 28.1 mean for David (28.1-2)? How do the lords of the Philistines respond? (20.1-11)

Think it through

2. What does Achish understand David to be saying (29.8)? Is this what David actually means (cf. 24.8; 26.17, 19)?

Investigate

3. What is Saul's predicament and how does he try to resolve it (28.3-8)? What light does Deuteronomy 18.9-12 shed on Saul's course of action?
4. Compare the relationship between Saul and the LORD and David and the LORD? (1 Sam 22.5; 23.4; 23.10-12; 28.6, 15; 30.8)

Grave news

Saul goes to extreme measures to extract some scrap of guidance from God, but God is completely silent. This is dramatically different to God's prompt and precise answers to David's enquiries. Just when it appears that some morsel of guidance is about to come his way, Saul instead receives grave news.

5. What does the spirit of Samuel tell Saul? (28.16-19)

Think it through

6. Do you feel any sympathy for Saul and Israel? Why or why not?

The craft of mediums and necromancers involved subtle acts of trickery. It is little wonder, therefore, that the medium is shocked when the spirit of Samuel actually appears (28.12). Her response reinforces the enormity of the message.

In confronting Saul Samuel pronounces that God is Saul's enemy (28.16). The Hebrew word here implies a persistent and ever-present enemy—a 'nemesis'. Samuel confirms that God has deliberately allied himself against Saul because he failed to wipe out Amalek. The Lord's unspent judgement on Amalek is diverted onto Saul. The armies of Israel are inevitably caught up in the fate of their leader.

'They're ba-ack!'

Read 1 Samuel 30

7. Who does David defeat? How does this victory reflect on Saul?

Day of Infamy

Read 1 Samuel 31

Investigate

8. What is particularly tragic about this battle? (31.1-6)

9. Why do the people of Jabesh recover Saul's remains? (31.8-13, cf. 11.1-11)

Loose ends

The Israelites did not ordinarily cremate their dead. This was a custom reserved for people who breached a sacred ban (cf., Josh 7.24-25). Thus, even in death we see Saul paying the price for his failure to carry out the LORD's demands against Amalek. Ironically it is an Amalekite who takes the credit for Saul's death (2 Samuel 1.1-16).

Saul's failure to fulfil his foolish vow while pursuing the Philistines (14.24-30,36-45) revisits him. His vow in the LORD's name demanded the death of Jonathan his son but it was not carried out. Tragically the vow is fulfilled by the Philistines themselves on Mount Gilboa.

King Saul, who had held court under the tamarisk tree on the height of Gibeah with spear in hand (1 Sam 22.6), is laid to rest under a tamarisk tree in Jabesh (31.13).

Throughout 1 Samuel David had numerous opportunities to cease the kingship yet refused to do so. Even now with Saul dead David holds back. Instead David mourns the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in the moving lament of 2 Samuel 1.17-27.

Investigate

10. What situation does the nation of Israel now find itself in? (31.7; Compare Genesis 17.1-8)

Think it through

11. What hope is there for Israel?

12. Re-read the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2.1-10). Where have you seen the reversal of fortunes in 1 Samuel?

13. In light of 1 Samuel, is it possible that God deliberately raises bad leaders and governments? (Consider Acts 4.24-30; 1 Peter 2.13-14).

The LORD's anointed

More to come

1 Samuel ends on a tragic note. The king is dead, Israel's land is being over-run, they have rejected God as their king and God seems very far away. David presents a ray of hope but despite his merits he still has a flawed character. We have seen how Israel's fortunes are closely tied to its king's destiny. They need a king who is not merely popular by their standards but one who obeys God. He must be favoured by God and promote the LORD as the true king. Only with such a king will the promises of God and the hopes of Israel be fulfilled.

Think it through

14. Read the following verses and note what they say about Jesus. How does Jesus compare with Saul and David as the LORD's anointed?

- a. Luke 1.26-33
- b. Luke 23.35-41
- c. Acts 10.36-43
- d. Acts 13.17-23, 32-37
- e. Romans 1.1-4
- f. Philippians 2.5-11
- g. Revelation 19.11-16

15. In light of these passages how should the kingship of Jesus affect your thinking and your actions? Are there areas in which you need to change?