

GRACE TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH OF LAWNSIDE
Wednesday Night Bible Study

1 SAMUEL 1-3
NEW BEGINNINGS

SUMMARY

Closing the door on the dark days of the judges, God is beginning something new—vindicating the afflicted, judging ungodly leaders, and speaking afresh to His people through a new young prophet, Samuel.

The first three chapters of 1 Samuel introduce us to a coming transition in Israel's leadership. Eli was a judge and priest. His sons (also priests) were "worthless men" (2:12), and Eli "did not restrain" their scandalous behavior (3:13). God was about to judge the house of Eli and replace their leadership with a godly young man, Samuel, who would be a true prophet. Samuel would hear from God and speak God's words to all Israel (3:21–4:1). Chapter 1 begins by telling us of Samuel's miraculous birth, born to a godly, suffering, prayerful woman, Hannah. Her prayer of response (2:1–10) is more than her own personal thanks for a son, as it foreshadows the primary themes of 1–2 Samuel.

Hannah's struggle with barrenness (not to mention other difficulties in her home life) is, sadly, something that many women can relate to, even today. Her life of godliness and persistent prayer is certainly a model for anyone suffering similarly. However, much more than one woman's suffering and prayers is going on in these early chapters. Some of the greatest clues are in her prayer-song (2:1–10).

This little line from Hannah's prayer—"not by might" (1 Samuel 2:9)—is important for the narratives in 1–2 Samuel; it is a truth demonstrated again and again. God's way of working is not according to the world's wisdom. His power does not need to look powerful—in fact, He most often chooses to show His power through apparent weakness. This is a motif stretching through the whole Bible, with Jesus and the salvation He brings as consummate examples. Not only was the Messiah born into obscurity, poverty, and rejection; the message of "Christ crucified" is "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called" it is "the power of God" for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:23–24). The Cross proves that God saves in such a way that we can only "boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). In fact, this is how God continues to save us and work through us—His "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

One way of describing these early chapters of 1 Samuel is with the word reversal. Hannah receives a reversal of fortune—from marginalized and mocked to blessed and honored (chapter 1). Her prayer of response contains a string of various reversals the Lord brings about (2:4–8). These chapters also witness the beginning of a transition in the leadership of Israel, from the wayward house of Eli to godly young Samuel. But even now, through Samuel another great reversal takes place when God begins to speak afresh (chapter 3), marking the end of a word-less era and the dawn of a word-full era. Yet, as important as these events were in their day,

they foreshadow a greater series of reversals that takes place when the true and final King ends 400 years of prophetic silence as the incarnate Word (John 1:14), judging another era of ungodly spiritual leaders and ushering in a new priesthood with himself at the center.

Hannah's story of barrenness-to-birth is one of several in the Bible. All are significant and occur at key moments, with key people. Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren until, late in life, God opened her womb and gave them Isaac (Genesis 18–21). Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was barren until the Lord blessed her with Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25). Jacob's wife Rachel struggled with infertility, but eventually, the Lord provided Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 30; 35). Samson's mother was barren until an angel announced a coming son (Judges 13). In the New Testament, Elizabeth was past childbearing years when an angel announced the miraculous conception of one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1). And, of course, her cousin Mary, though not barren, encountered an angel who announced the even more significant conception of the Christ-child in her virgin womb. What is the significance of these similar events? God's promises have always centered on a seed, a son ("offspring"; Genesis 3:15). God was faithful to keep His plan moving along, even when hope seemed barren and impossible.

Hannah's important prayer-song seems to lean upon Moses' Song (Exodus 15). Similarly, Mary leans upon Hannah's prayer for her famous song in response to Gabriel's announcement (Luke 1:45–56). Not surprisingly, his announcement to Mary includes references to David and the Davidic covenant¹ (2 Samuel 7:4–17): "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33). As noted earlier, Hannah's prayer reverberates throughout the pages of 1–2 Samuel. But it has even farther-reaching implications—looking back to Moses and the exodus and reaching ahead through Mary to the virgin birth of the eternal Son of David.

We know from experience that God's responses to prayer can be rather mysterious. God knows infinitely more than we do. He does not have only our happiness or personal fulfillment in mind but also our eternal good, linked to a grand plan involving countless interrelated people, events, purposes, and problems. James teaches that, sometimes, "You do not have, because you do not ask," while other times, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:2–3). God sometimes says no to our petitions for our own good, however mysterious that may be to us. On the other hand, God does seem to be attuned particularly to fervent prayers of the righteous (James 5:16–18). He can be honored by persistence in prayer, especially when one prays for something such as justice, as in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8). These and other passages shed some light on God's answer to Hannah's godly, persistent prayers (1 Samuel 1). But they do not provide a foolproof recipe for always getting what we ask for. Remember that when Jesus—even Jesus!—petitioned His Father in the garden, He added, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). We should follow His lead.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Which of Elkanah's wives had children first? (1:2)
2. Why was Hannah so downhearted? (1:6-1:8)
3. What did Hannah vow when she prayed? (1:11)
4. What did Eli think as he observed Hannah pray? (1:13)
5. What did Hannah do with Samuel after he was weaned? (1:24-28)
6. How many children did Hannah have after Samuel? (2:21)
7. What did Eli hear that his sons were doing? (2:22)
8. What did the man of God prophecy against the House of Eli? (2:31-34)
9. Who would the LORD raise up? (2:35)
10. What did Eli tell Samuel to say when he realized it was the LORD calling? (3:8-9)

11. What did the LORD say to Samuel? (3:11-14)

12. Who recognized that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD? (3:20)

1 SAMUEL 4–7

ISRAEL DEFEATED, GOD DEFEATING

SUMMARY

Although the Word of the Lord has returned to Israel (1 Samuel 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 (chapter 5). The Philistines, and later the Israelites, learn that the presence of God is no trifling matter (chapter 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).

Adam and Eve were created to experience and enjoy the presence of God, but when they sinned, they rightly felt guilt, shame, and estrangement from Him. They covered themselves; they fled and hid. Of course, God came to them and spoke words of judgment and hope (Genesis 3:16–19). But since all of their offspring (save one) have been born as sinners, their offspring are in a similar position of estrangement from God—even enmity with Him. There is a path to hope, indeed, but it starts with recognition that God’s presence is actually a problem for sinners. God is completely pure; evil “may not dwell” with him (Psalm 5:4). This is what the Philistines learn when they take the ark home. Wherever it goes, judgment is severe, even deadly (1 Samuel 5:11–12). The question asked by the men of Beth–shemesh summarizes the problem for every sinner: “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?” (1 Samuel 6:20). The answer, of course, is that none of us can. Tragically, when left to ourselves, we flee from God and stay in hiding from Him; or worse—if we could, we would actually send God away.

The problem of God’s presence among sinners is not something that can be covered over with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7) or passed off to someone else (1 Samuel 5:8, 10). But when we bring our sin before the Lord openly, confess it, and desire to turn from it (1 Samuel 7:3–6), our sin and guilt can be covered. As David testified, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.” But “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:3, 5). Indeed, how happy “is the one . . . whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). For those who have so confessed their sin and turned to God for forgiveness, His presence can then actually be a sweet “hiding place” as He surrounds His people with “shouts of deliverance” (Psalm 32:7).

The ark was the symbol of God’s mediated presence, by which God makes His presence known among his people. Angels adorned the sides, signifying that the top was like God’s throne or footstool. It was also on top of the ark that sacrificial blood was poured out on the Day of Atonement, signifying the covering of the people’s sin and guilt. God has never forgiven sin by sweeping it under some cosmic rug. We read in Hebrews, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). This principle was demonstrated in the coverings God made for Adam and Eve after the fall (Genesis 3:21), in the blood applied to doorposts on the

night of the Passover (Exodus 12), and in the many blood sacrifices made by priests throughout the time of the old covenant. Yet, although these rituals taught Israel much about sin and sacrifice, they could not completely take away sin; they were merely foreshadows of the perfect, final sacrifice of Jesus. Only His blood can cover sin once and for all and provide access to God's presence.

The Philistines think they have beaten Israel's God. They take the ark and put it in the temple of their god Dagon, as if the ark were his trophy. But God will not be mocked—in fact, He makes a mockery of such idol-foolery. The next morning, the statue of Dagon is face down before the ark, as if bowing before the true God (5:3). The Philistines have to “put [Dagon] back in his place,” proving that their “god” is utterly helpless. This is even clearer the next morning when Dagon is again found face down, but this time without hands or head. We are to flee idols in part by remembering that idols in every form and every age are a senseless thing to trust in.

Romans 11 ends with words that could well summarize the roller-coaster ride of 1 Samuel 4–7: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” (Romans 11:33–34). God had promised victory over the enemy and for His presence to remain with His people. Yet, in 1 Samuel 4:10, thirty thousand Israelites are slain, and the ark is taken away by pagan enemies. This seems unthinkable. But God is up to more than anyone could imagine. He is teaching his people painfully not to presume upon their God, nor to trust the ark as if it were a lucky rabbit's foot. He is also fulfilling the promise of judgment on Eli and his wicked sons, replacing their weak, wicked leadership with a true prophet of God, Samuel. The ark's capture and relocation to Philistine land provides a profound example of the Lord's fierce power and confounding ways. Like a terrifying game of hot potato, the ark is passed from one city to the next until the Philistines rightly send it back to Israel. God is always doing many things at once. We do not get to see it all, but 1 Samuel 4–7 provides a window into his mysterious, multifaceted ways.

Please answer the following questions:

1. What did Israel do when they brought the Ark of the Covenant into camp? (4:5)
2. Who was killed when the Philistines captured the ark? (4:10-11)
3. What happened to Eli when he heard that the ark was captured? (4:18)
4. What happened when the ark was set beside Dagon? (5:2-4)
5. What did the people of Ekron decide to do with the ark? (5:11)
6. What did the Philistines send with the ark as a guilt offering? (6:4)
7. Why did God strike down 50,700 men of Bethshemesh? (6:19)
8. Who was asked to come and get the ark? (6:21)
9. How long did the ark remain at Kiriath-Jearim? (7:1-2)
10. How did the LORD help Israel in battle against the Philistines? (7:10)

11. What did Samuel call the stone he set up near Mizpeh? (7:12)

12. Where did Samuel judge Israel? (7:15-17)

1 SAMUEL 8–15

SAUL'S RISE, THEN REJECTION

SUMMARY

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 (chapters 9–11), it is soon clear that he is neither faithful nor full of faith (chapters 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.

We must distinguish worldly sorrow, which leads to death, from godly sorrow, which leads to true repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). In 1 Samuel 13, Saul is confronted by the prophet but is obviously not repentant. In chapter 15, when confronted he responds with some sorrowful language, but also makes excuses, blames others (vv. 21, 24), and seems concerned to save face above anything else (v. 30). With these clues, along with Samuel’s reactions to them, it seems clear that Saul is displaying worldly sorrow, not true repentance. The difference is of utter importance. Repentance is required of all who would bring their sin to Jesus for forgiveness (Mark 1:15). It is required, but this requirement is also a gracious invitation.

As it goes with God’s king, so it will go with His people. This principle can be observed throughout redemptive history, particularly in 1 Samuel 8–15. When Saul is obedient, courageous, and merciful, all goes well for Israel (chapter 11). But when he is selfish, fearful, proud, and disobedient, he brings upheaval upon the whole kingdom (chapter 15). This is what the kings of the nations are like: self-willed, self-serving, and self-reliant, even though they may look impressive (8:10–18). Jesus is a king most unlike the kings of this world. He is indeed a king (the King), even though He did not look like a king in the world’s eyes. He came “not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The kings of this world take and take and take, but King Jesus gives and gives and gives. Sinners who place themselves under this humble, righteous King not only receive grace but also are transformed by His glory (Mark 10:42–44; Philippians 2:3–11).

“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). This question put to Jesus by John the Baptist’s disciples could have been asked of many figures throughout the Old Testament as well. In previous lessons, God’s people had long awaited a seed, a son, a ruler (Genesis 3:15; 15:4; 49:10). As Balaam prophesied, a star would rise out of the line of Jacob to crush the enemy and establish dominion (Numbers 24:17–19). First Samuel opens with Hannah’s speaking of a future king (2:10). Despite Israel’s sinful demand for a king (chapter 8), Saul is, for a time, a king used of God to unite God’s people and defeat their enemies (chapter 11). But in the next few chapters, it becomes increasingly clear that Saul is not the long-awaited promised king, not even a decent king. First Samuel 16 will introduce us to another, soon-to-be

king who in many ways will (for a time) fulfill properly the old promise of a righteous ruler. And yet, King David is neither perfect nor eternal. Only Jesus, the eternal, perfect son of David was and is “the One.” Praise God we no longer have to wonder or wait.

The prophet Samuel was used mightily of the Lord (3:19; 7:15). He delivered God’s word judicially and led the nation spiritually. And he did so “all the days of his life” (7:15). Note those words carefully. They highlight God’s kindness through Samuel’s fidelity and longevity while also subtly reminding us that Samuel, too, was a sinner whose days would come to an end. More tragically, his sons (and successors) were wicked (8:3). Succession of leadership can be a real problem. While God may raise up a godly leader for a time, His sons might be wicked. That is why Jesus’ perfect, eternal, unchanging, unthreatened kingdom is so utterly unique and important. Indeed, this is heaven’s chorus: “And he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

Twice God states that he regretted Saul’s kingship (15:11, 35). These statements come in the same chapter in which Samuel claims that God is “not a man that he should have regret” (v. 29). The same Hebrew word is found in all three instances, but it can be rightly translated as either “regretted” or “grieved”. While God is never surprised by turns of events, nor wishes to go back in time to do things differently, he is genuinely grieved by human sin and its effects. On the other hand, because God knows and plans all things (Isaiah 46:9–10), He is not like human beings, who frequently regret, change their minds, and wish to go back and do things differently. Mysteriously, God truly grieves sin but does not regret His all-wise decisions.

Saul’s greatest sin in these chapters is holding back from destroying all of the Amalekites. God commanded, “Do not spare them” (15:3). But how can a righteous and compassionate God decree such actions? This is a difficult question, but a number of related matters must be kept in mind. (1) God is the righteous and just creator of all, even when we question it. (2) Everyone is born in rebellion against God, deserving His full and immediate judgment; no one deserves mercy. (3) The Amalekites were an especially wicked people whom God had promised long ago to “blot out” (Deuteronomy 25:19); thus, He was remarkably patient with their judgment. (4) God intended to use Israel as an imperfect instrument of judgment on the Amalekites in order to restrain evil in the world and provide his people with a sacred land for His presence and blessing. (5) Foreshadowings of the final, end-time judgment (and blessing) is found throughout history. In the end, all of humanity will be separated into heaven and hell. (6) Jesus came to deal with the deeper problems of sin, Satan, and death. Because He has conquered these foes through His death and resurrection, His followers are not called to fight with swords (John 18:36), let alone wipe out whole nations, but to take good news (and warnings) to all peoples (Colossians 1:28).

Please answer the following questions:

1. For what two reasons did Israel want a king? (8:5)
2. What did Samuel warn the people that a king would do to them? (8:10-18)
3. How did Israel react to Samuel's warning? (8:19-20)
4. What can be said about Saul's physical stature? (9:2)
5. Why was Saul hesitant to receive the words of Samuel? (9:21)
6. Why did Samuel have Saul send his servant on ahead when they were leaving town? (9:27)
7. What did Samuel do to Saul? (10:1)
8. What did Samuel prophesy would happen to Saul? (10:2-7)
9. Where was Saul when Samuel wanted to present him to the people at Mizpah? (10:21-22)
10. What did the people shout when Samuel presented Saul? (10:24)

11. What did Nahash the Ammonite threaten to do? (11:1-2)

12. By what means did Saul gather his army? (11:7)

13. What would happen to Israel if they did not obey, they voice of the LORD? (12:15)

14. Why did God send thunder and rain during the wheat harvest? (12:17)

15. What did Samuel consider would be sin for him? (12:23)

16. What did Saul do when he became impatient regarding the arrival of Samuel? (13:8-12)

17. Who were the only ones in Israel with swords? (13:22)

18. What did Jonathan and his armor-bearer do without telling Saul? (14:1-14)

19. Why did Saul want to kill his son Jonathan? (14:27,43-44)

20. Who was commander of Saul's army? (14:50)

21. How did Saul lie to Samuel? (15:13)

22. What is better than sacrifice? (15:22)

23. What is like the sin of witchcraft? (15:23)

24. What did Samuel say regarding Saul as king? (15:26-28)

25. When did Samuel again see Saul? (15:35)

1 SAMUEL 16-20

DAVID'S RISE, SAUL'S RESENTMENT

SUMMARY

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 (chapter 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 (chapter 17). As David’s success, fame, and alliances grow, so do Saul’s envy, fear, and schemes against David (chapter 18). His murderous intentions force David to flee, a drama played out in the rest of 1 Samuel.

1 Samuel 17 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 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.

Jonathan willingly abdicates his future right to the throne because he recognizes David as God’s true anointed. Giving David his robe, armor, and sword (emblems of his position as crown prince) is an act of great faith, with great risk. He is identifying himself with David over his own father. This is the only proper thing to do, but it is remarkable. This situation is almost like a parable¹ for how Jesus calls would-be followers into his kingdom: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). Homes will be divided on account of Christ. However, “Everyone who has left houses . . . or father . . . , for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).

Like Hannah’s prayer, Psalm 2 is another passage that reverberates throughout Scripture. It was written for the installment of Davidic kings based on the promises God gives to David in 2 Samuel 7:4–17 concerning his throne and offspring. Although the composition of Psalm 2 came after the events of our chapters in Samuel, its truths are ever-present. “The kings of the earth [like Saul] set themselves . . . against the Lord and against his Anointed” (Psalm 2:2). But “He who sits in the heavens laughs”; God will “set [His] King on Zion” (Psalm 2:4, 6). So, all would-be rulers must either “kiss the Son” (a symbol of allegiance and honor) and find blessed refuge in him, or “perish” (Psalm 2:12). Jonathan chooses the former, while his father seems to be

heading headlong toward the latter. Of course, Psalm 2 reverberates throughout Scripture in the other direction, too. Its crescendo is found in the great Son of David and Son of God, Jesus. Psalm 2 explains the wicked rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. But that Cross was also the very means by which God would install his king and provide refuge for all who recognize Jesus as the true King.

It may be alarming to read that a “harmful spirit from the Lord tormented” Saul (16:14). This raises a number of questions concerning God’s sovereignty, some of which cannot be answered fully. But a number of biblical truths can help to clarify what this does and does not mean. God himself does no evil, and he does not tempt (James 1:13). But mysteriously, he does use various forces of evil to accomplish his purposes without himself tempting or doing evil. The Cross was the ultimate example of this (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Judas’s betrayal of Jesus is in a similar vein (John 13:18–19). Sinners and demons are responsible for their sin, but the Lord plans their sin for His wise, righteous purposes.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Where did Samuel go to anoint the next king? (16:1)
2. What did Samuel do to David? (16:13)
3. Why did Saul want David at his house? (16:16)
4. How big was Goliath? (17:4)
5. How did Goliath challenge Israel? (17:8-10)
6. How did David happen to be at the battle scene? (17:17-18)
7. What did Saul offer to the man who killed Goliath? (17:25)
8. What did Saul provide David for the battle? (17:38-39)
9. What did David instead use as weapons? (17:40)
10. How did David attack Goliath? (17:45-50)

11. What was David carrying when he was brought before Saul? (17:57)
12. Who made a covenant with David? (18:3)
13. What made Saul so jealous of David? (18:6-9)
14. With what did Saul try to kill David? (18:10-11)
15. Why was Saul afraid of David? (18:12-15)
16. Who did Saul ask to kill David? (19:1)
17. Who let David down through a window that he might escape? (19:12)
18. To whom did David go when he escaped? (19:18)
19. What did Jonathan want David to promise? (20:14-16)
20. What was the sign that Jonathan would give David if he should flee from Saul? (20:18-22)

1 SAMUEL 21-26

SAUL'S PURSUIT, DAVID'S PROTECTION

SUMMARY

With Saul's murderous intentions now undeniable (1 Samuel 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 (chapter 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.

Those who join David at the cave of Adullam are people "in distress, . . . in debt, and . . . bitter in soul" (1 Samuel 22:2). It is not explicit in the text, but in context it seems likely that these are people disenfranchised and disillusioned by Saul's kingship. Samuel warned the people that the kind of king they sought ("a king like the nations") would take and take and take for himself (8:11–17). In contrast, David is a king who welcomes the lowly and needy. Such people find refuge in him. This trait is, of course, found in a later king as well: Jesus, a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34) who announced, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

In the eyes of many, it would seem wiser and safer to be in Saul's company as he sits regally under a tamarisk tree with soldiers arrayed about (1 Samuel 22:6) than to join the hunted David in the wilderness. In fact, David grieves that the gruesome massacre of a whole priestly city resulted, in part, from his visit with Ahimelech (v. 22). But it is just then that David utters these curious words: "Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping" (22:23). Is it safe to be with David? Yes and no. He is "public enemy number one," with a whole army on his tail. But he is also truly the Lord's anointed. The Lord is with him, so to be with him is about as safe as it gets. And so, it is with Jesus. We flee to the true King even though he does not look like a king, and even when it does not seem safe to identify with him. Paradoxically, Jesus promised, "You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. . . . But not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:16–18). Even through betrayal and death, God is sovereignly watching over the very hairs of our head. If we are with Jesus, we are safe, no matter what.

Roughly a dozen psalms can be tied to specific events in 1–2 Samuel. Such psalms not only provide a personal, experiential window into events in 1–2 Samuel but also can help us to interpret such events. This is certainly the case with 1 Samuel 21 and its related psalms, Psalms 34 and 56. Why does David flee to Philistine land? These psalms make clear that the circumstances are just that desperate—and desperate times call for desperate measures. Though he is afraid (Psalm 56:3), David clearly puts his trust in the Lord (vv. 4ff.). Likewise, it may be tempting to assess David's feigned insanity as a lack of faith, but Psalm 34 makes clear that David sees his escape as nothing less than an answer to prayer and the Lord's rescue. Therefore, the lesson from Gath is that the Lord does not always save with sword or spear; He

may even use spittle (1 Samuel 21:13) to prove that he works in surprising, seemingly upside-down ways.

Saul's downward spiral is instructive for us. Sin creates a vortex, always taking us deeper than we want or plan to go. Early on, Saul appeared as a man with potential but also weakness. At first, his self-focus and fears seemed fairly harmless. Soon, however, Saul's rebellious self-centeredness manifests itself more blatantly (chapters 13–15). Not long after this, his appreciation for David's successes turns to jealousy, then murderous tantrums (chapter 18). He conspires against David in the most duplicitous of ways (chapters 18–19). By chapter 22 Saul fully occupies himself and his whole army with a relentless manhunt. Surely one of the darkest moments is the gruesome execution of every living creature in Nob. Remember how Saul once refused to obey God's command to obliterate the wicked Amalekites (chapter 15)? Now he holds nothing back against his own priests, simply because one of them has aided David. Saul's close encounters with David (chapters 24; 26) show a man riddled with guilt but ultimately unrepentant. And this downward spiral is not finished.

We should keep noting the contrast between Saul and David—one man sinful and going further astray; the other man righteous and reliant on the Lord—but a subtler matter should also be noted. David is righteous, but he is not perfect. He can at times fly off the handle and head out for needless conflict (1 Samuel 25:13, 34). Thankfully, in God's providence, Abigail steps in, and David relents. But no sooner is that crisis avoided than a new one subtly creeps into the picture: by the end of chapter 25, David has multiple wives.

We are not explicitly told here that this is sin. But we should recall a passage that David surely knew, one in which God warned Israel's future king, "He shall not acquire many wives for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17). So, both his quick temper against Nabal and his multiple wives remind us subtly that David is a good king but far from a perfect one. But praise God that the final son of David, the true King, is not merely perfectly righteous, but perfectly righteous on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Please answer the following questions:

1. What kind of bread did the priest of Nob give David? (21:6)
2. Who was there with Abimelech the priest that day? (21:7)
3. What else did Abimelech give David? (21:8-9)
4. Why did David pretend to be a mad man in the presence of the king of Gath? (21:10-15)
5. What kind of bread did the priest of Nob give David? (22:6)
6. Who was there with Abimelech the priest that day? (22:7)
7. What else did Abimelech give David? (22:8-9)
8. Why did David pretend to be a mad man in the presence of the king of Gath? (22:10-15)
9. Who became David's followers at the cave of Adullam? (22:2)
10. Who did Saul command Doeg to kill? (22:18)

11. Who escaped and fled to David? (22:20)
12. What did David and his men do for the people of Keilah? (23:5)
13. Who was willing to turn David over to Saul? (23:12, 19-20)
14. How often did Saul seek to kill David? (23:14)
15. What did David do to Saul in the cave? (24:3-4)
16. Why didn't David kill Saul? (24:6)
17. What did Saul acknowledge? (24:16-20)
18. What did David promise to Saul? (24:21-22)
19. What did Nabal refuse to give David's servants? (25:11)
20. What did Abigail do to avoid disaster? (25:18,23-31)
21. What happened to Nabal? (25:36-38)

22. What did Abigail become? (25:42)

23. What did Abishai ask permission to do when he and David went into Saul's camp at night?
(26:7-8)

24. What did David take from near Saul's head? (26:12)

25. What did Saul admit after realizing that David had spared his life again? (26:21)

1 SAMUEL 27-31

SAUL'S UNDOING, DAVID'S DELIVERANCE

SUMMARY

Desperation leads David into Philistine land once again, but this time compromises (1 Samuel 27:8–12) lead to multiplied complications. Nevertheless, God sovereignly intervenes, protecting his anointed from greater sin (chapter 29). Meanwhile, Saul's doubts and fears lead to deeper depths of darkness. Desperate for supernatural insight, he turns to a medium, a witch (chapter 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 and the other spiraling off of the throne in spectacular disgrace.

David's time in Philistia (1 Samuel 27, 29) seems to be a season of faltering faith. David does not seek the Lord; in fact, the only mentions of the Lord at all in these chapters are on the lips of the pagan king Achish (29:6, 9). Indeed, David's words at the outset seem to betray a measure of spiritual weakness: "David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul'" (27:1). On one level, this is proper skepticism that Saul's promise to relent (26:21) would be kept. On another level, David is calling into question his very anointing (chapter 16). He is doubting God's promises, which have been recounted to him recently by Jonathan (23:17), Abigail (25:28–31), and even Saul (24:20; 26:25). Doubt leads David to Philistia, leading to compromise and lies, followed by a collision course with Israel's army (28:1–2).

It seems like a no-win situation—until God intervenes (29:4–7). Of course, we are not told explicitly that God intervenes. But there is no need for the narrator to restate the obvious. God is intervening in David's life to protect him as promised (2:9–10), this time from the consequences of his own weakness and sin. Praise God, he does this for all of his people (Romans 8:28). This does not mean that our sin will never have consequences. But it is true, and proven over and over, that "He does not deal with us according to our sins" (Psalm 103:10).

It is a very good thing when God speaks (1 Samuel 3:1, 21). Through Saul we have a window into the inverse: God's judgment through eerie silence. Saul is desperate to hear something from the Lord, but he receives silence (28:6)—only to hear the silence broken by a fresh pronouncement of judgment. This should remind us of a time much later, when God is silent for 400 years following the final Old Testament prophet. One prophet foretold, "'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord God, 'when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord'" (Amos 8:11). After 400 long years, this silence was broken: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). God has spoken uniquely in His Son, the heir and creator of all (Hebrews 1:2). And, praise God, He still speaks today through His living and active Word, the Holy Scriptures (Hebrews 4:12).

In 1 Samuel 27–30, enquiring of the Lord is done primarily for guidance concerning issues related mostly to warfare (23:2; 28:6; 30:8). The answers come in a variety of ways: dreams,

prophets, or the Urim and Thummim. And sometimes they do not come at all (28:6). Decision making in the Bible is often more complicated than flipping a coin or waiting for a voice from heaven. For instance, in Acts, Paul sometimes received a special word of guidance (Acts 9:6; 13:2; 16:7–9); however, many other times he or others simply “decided” (Acts 20:3), “resolved” (Acts 19:21), or concluded that an option “seemed good”. We cannot expect God always to provide us with miraculous guidance. We must always ask if Scripture commands or forbids a potential course of action. We should also seek godly counsel (Proverbs 11:14), pray for open doors (Colossians 4:3), and remember to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done” (Matthew 6:10).

Our God is astoundingly merciful and kind. He is also fearfully holy and just. The apostle Paul tells us to “note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off” (Romans 11:22). We are to note—take notice, behold, apprehend, marvel at—God’s mercy and his judgment. The books of Samuel are full of examples of mercy and judgment, not least in the chapters studied this week. Let us take note of God’s manifold kindnesses to David; let us note carefully his undeterred, righteous judgments against Saul. Let us not presume upon his grace; and let us not think that our sin is too great for him to overcome. Indeed, in the words of Paul, may we “continue in his kindness” by beholding his “kindness and . . . severity.”

As a “man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), David seeks the Lord for more than guidance, as his many psalms demonstrate powerfully. Saul seeks the Lord in a very different way. When we are told that Saul “inquired of the Lord, [but] the Lord did not answer him” (28:6), we should not assume that Saul has sought the Lord genuinely. With an increasingly seared conscience, Saul seeks inside information only to benefit himself. And when the Lord will not give him what he wants, he is willing to turn anywhere for it (v. 7). There is a big difference between seeking the Lord himself and seeking only what he can give in order to serve ourselves.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Where did David flee for one year and four months? (27:7)
2. Why didn't David leave a man or women alive from the cities he raided? (27:11)
3. Who did the Lord no longer answer by the prophets or by dreams? (28:6,15)
4. Who did Saul want the woman at Endor with a familiar spirit to bring up? (28:11)
5. What was going to happen to Saul and his sons? (28:19)
6. Why didn't the Philistine commanders want David fighting with them against the Israelites? (29:4)
7. What did Achish then ask David to do? (29:7,10)
8. What did David find when he returned to Ziklag? (30:1-5)
9. How did David encourage himself when he was distressed? (30:6)
10. What did David recover when he pursued after the Amalekites? (30:18-19)

11. What share of the plunder was given with those who stayed behind? (30:24)

12. Who else was given some of the plunder? (30:26-31)

13. Who was killed on Mount Gilboa? (31:1-6)

14. What did the Philistines do to the body of Saul? (31:9-10)

15. What did the men of Jabesh-gilead do? (31:11-13)