



THE LOOKOUT

MAY 2021

UNIT: History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles) THEME: A New King

OVERVIEW:

William Shakespeare wrote, “What’s past is prologue.” We often must look backward to move forward. This month, students will learn from Israel’s past about the people’s desire for a king, what happens when that king goes AWOL, the need for a new king, and the establishment of his throne in Jerusalem.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

The screenshot shows a weekly lesson page titled "WEEK OF MAY 2, 2021". It includes tabs for "STUDY", "APPLICATION", and "DISCOVERY". The "STUDY" tab displays the "Seek God's plan rather than man's." section, which includes the "LESSON AIM", "UNIT", "THEME", and "SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT". The "APPLICATION" tab displays the "Asking for a King" section, and the "DISCOVERY" tab displays the "Answering a King" section.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

The screenshot shows a weekly lesson page titled "WEEK OF MAY 2, 2021". It includes tabs for "STUDY", "APPLICATION", and "DISCOVERY". The "APPLICATION" tab displays the "Sometimes it's Better When God Says No" section, which includes the "LESSON AIM", "UNIT", "THEME", and "SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT". The "DISCOVERY" tab displays the "By Michael C. Max" section, which includes a list of questions for study and discussion.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MAY 23, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Offer mercy
in humility.**

UNIT: History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

THEME: A New King

LESSON TEXT: 1 Samuel 24:1-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Zechariah 7:8-10; Matthew 5:3-9; 9:13

KINGLY CHARACTER: MERCY AND HUMILITY

BY MARK SCOTT

In his book *Between Two Worlds*, John R.W. Stott combined four important qualities for preachers into two chapters: courage and humility, sincerity and earnestness. Last week's lesson and this week's lesson do the same thing with King David. He showed courage and heart but also mercy and humility.

Since we left David last (1 Samuel 17), his and Jonathan's friendship have grown while his and Saul's friendship have shrunk—significantly. (If someone throws a spear at you, it diminishes the relationship.) Most of the previous literary context showed a cat-and-mouse game between Saul and David; fighting the Philistines remained a sidebar. Through everything, God protected David from Saul's pursuits.

The Action of Mercy and Humility

1 Samuel 24:1-4

The Philistines had derailed Saul's pursuit of David (1 Samuel 23:27-29). After that battle, Saul learned from his military informants that David was in the Desert of En Gedi. The Israelis have now made this desert oasis into a national park. It is located on the west-central side of the Dead Sea, near Qumran (think *Dead Sea Scrolls*). Fed by two springs, it provided excellent hiding places. The hills look like Swiss cheese or a honeycomb—lots of holes.

Saul and 3,000 soldiers came to this area in pursuit of David. Saul went into one of those caves (den or hole) to *relieve himself* (literally, to cover his feet). Ironically enough, *David and his men were far back* in that same cave. David's men looked at this as providence. God had delivered the enemy into their hands. David was indeed tempted. But mercy and humility took over. *David crept up unnoticed* (by stealth or secretly) and cut off a corner (extreme parts or feathers) of Saul's robe.

The Ambivalence of Mercy and Humility

1 Samuel 24:5-7

By law, David was more than justified to do what he did—in fact, he acted compassionately. But sometimes even doing what is right does not feel very good. David was conscience-stricken (smitten) that he had treated the Lord's anointed (the word for

"messiah," used three times in this text, and see 1 Samuel 10:1) in this way.

Even though Saul had compromised his kingship, David still had respect for the office. Evidently David's men were arguing with him about his mercy and humility because David sharply rebuked (persuaded or split and divided) them and kept them from attacking Saul and his army.

The Angst of Mercy and Humility

1 Samuel 24:8-20

Ambivalence can erode to angst. When Saul was a safe distance from the cave, David went to its mouth and *called out to Saul*. Assuming a reverent posture (bowing and laying prostrate) and using the mountains for his public address system, David pleaded his innocence. His mountaintop speech consisted of six parts. First, "Do not be misled by others." David did not want to harm (do "evil" to) Saul. Second, "The Lord delivered you into my hand." (Saul admitted as much in v. 18.) Third, "I did not kill you." David's men urged him to, but David spared (took pity upon or showed compassion to) Saul. The motivation for this grace was David's respect for the Lord's anointed.

Fourth, the corner of the robe was evidence of David's mercy and humility. He was not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion (transgression). Even though Saul had hunted down David, David had not wronged (sinned against) Saul. Fifth, David pleaded for God to be the judge. Since vengeance belongs to the Lord, David essentially said, "Let's let the Lord handle this." Notice the covenantal wish, "May the Lord judge. . . ." People who are truly merciful and humble allow the Lord to be their justification. David knew the difference between being right and being righteous. Finally, David provided a glimpse of his own sense of self-esteem. In comparison to the Lord's anointed, David thought of himself as a dead dog or flea.

Saul's repentance ultimately was short-lived (1 Samuel 26), but for the moment he seemed contrite (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10). Saul wept aloud (waived). He affirmed David's character—being righteous, treating him well, and not killing him. Saul acknowledged that what David had done did not fit life in this world as people know it (secular proverbial wisdom). And Saul acquiesced by admitting that David would be king.

"Blessed are the merciful," said Jesus, "for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7). □

APPLICATION

BENDING LOW TO BEAR MORE FRUIT

BY DAVID FAUST

Leadership looks easy until you're the one in charge. After a couple of ugly losses, impatient fans cry, "Fire the coach." Employees grumble and imagine what they would do if they were the boss. Monday-morning quarterbacks shake their heads and insist, "I wouldn't have thrown that pass."

Second-guessing has always been common, but it's especially prevalent today because so many leaders have proved untrustworthy. That's why David's attitude toward King Saul strikes us as unusual. David was a loyal soldier, but Saul was overwhelmed by jealousy and he wanted David dead. When Saul sent his army to pursue the young hero, David evaded capture. On one occasion, Saul walked alone into a cave, unwittingly giving David the opportunity to kill him. But David refused to raise his hand against the one God had anointed to lead Israel.

God Can Handle It

What if you honestly believe you could do a better job than the person currently in charge? Should you assert yourself, or should you patiently wait your turn? The case of David and Saul demonstrates that there are times when, instead of taking direct action and rushing ahead, it's better to wait and trust God to open doors on his own timetable.

Rather than taking matters into his own hands, David told King Saul, "May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you" (1 Samuel 24:12). David's restraint toward Saul required as much courage as the faith that made him fight Goliath. Again, David said to Saul, "May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand" (v. 15). Do we trust God to vindicate us and deliver us from injustice when the time is right?

Smallification

James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." That verse doesn't say to let your problems knock you down or let other people drag you down (although that might happen). "Humble yourselves" sounds like a decision we make. Why wait to be humbled by circumstances when we can do it by choice? Humility requires making an intentional decision to step off the pedestal and stoop down in submission to God. Lee Eclov, a retired minister who writes for *Preaching Today*, calls this process *smallification*. Our egos drive us to look big, but life has a way of "smallifying" us—bringing us low and putting us in our rightful place.

James says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord." Worship puts matters into perspective. When we humble ourselves "before the Lord," we yield to his righteous judgment and trust his surpassing wisdom. James 4:10 adds, "and he will lift you up." Smallification leads to glorification! When the time was right, David eventually became king—not by pushing himself forward, but by trusting in the wisdom and timing of God.

Eclov writes, "When the fight has gone out of us, when our stiff neck finally bends to Jesus, and we release our white-knuckled grip on the hurts and the controls, we will be rightsized to maneuver in God's kingdom." An agricultural proverb puts it well: "The more grain on the stalk, the lower it bends."

Personal Challenge: In your circle of relationships, is there someone (a leader, perhaps) who makes you feel angry and frustrated? After reading Romans 12:17-21, decide on one way you will demonstrate mercy and humility toward that person this week and "overcome evil with good." □

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. In what specific way did you obey God, with assurance that “the battle is the Lord’s,” over the past week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Samuel 24:1-20** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions.

Ask a third person to retell the story in their own words.

3. What virtues does David display in this passage?
4. Let’s dig deeper:
 - In what specific ways does this story demonstrate that David was “a man after God’s own heart”?
 - How does David provide godly leadership?
 - What do you learn from David about when an occurrence is a providential opportunity and when we should wait on the Lord to act?
 - What are the differences between being “right” and being “righteous”?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. What do you learn about obedience from this passage?
 - How is obedience related to one’s character and integrity?
 - How is obedience related to humility?
 - How is obedience related to one’s relationship with and trust in God?
8. In what ways will you demonstrate mercy and humility to people in your circles of influence this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”
10. Do you have a decision you need to make this week? If so, would you like to discuss it with the group? (Could we ask God to provide you with wisdom in your decision?)

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Chronicles 11:4-7; 15:28-16:9;** and **2 Chronicles 6:2-6.** You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **L**