



# 1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

## OVERVIEW

**Study: 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**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

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



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

# INTRODUCTION

## Author

The books of Samuel do not name their author. Jewish tradition credits Samuel with the early chapters and the prophets Nathan and Gad with the rest, since “the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer” told the events of David’s reign (1 Chronicles 29:29). Chronicles is also anonymous; Jewish tradition attributes it to Ezra the priest and scribe, and its author is often simply called “the Chronicler.”

## Audience

First Samuel was written for the people of Israel to explain how God gave them a king and why David, “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), replaced Saul. Chronicles retells Israel’s history for the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon, reminding them of God’s promises to David and of God’s presence among his people in Jerusalem.

## Date

The events in this study span from the last days of Samuel’s judgeship to the reign of Solomon—roughly 1050 to 960 BC. David reigned about 1010–970 BC. First Samuel was likely written after Israel divided into two kingdoms (note the mention of “the kings of Judah” in 1 Samuel 27:6), and Chronicles was written after the exile, around 450–400 BC.

## Setting

Israel was emerging from the turbulent era of the judges, when “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25), and was under constant pressure from the

Philistines. The lessons move from Samuel’s home at Ramah to Saul’s battles at Michmash and against the Amalekites, the Valley of Elah where David faced Goliath, the caves of En Gedi where David spared Saul, and finally Jerusalem, the city of David, where the ark of the covenant came to rest.

## Theme

The Lord is Israel’s true King. When the people demanded a king “such as all the other nations have” (1 Samuel 8:5), God gave them Saul, whose disobedience cost him his throne. God then chose David, looking not at outward appearance but at the heart (16:7). David’s courage, mercy, and humility point forward to the true Son of David, Jesus Christ, whose kingdom will never end.

## Why Study 1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles?

Israel’s history is a prologue to our own walk with God. This study calls believers to seek God’s plan rather than man’s, to take care not to fall into disobedience, to take courage knowing the battle is the Lord’s, to offer mercy in humility, and to give thanks to the Lord for his presence with us.

## STUDY CONTENT

|                |                                                     |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>WEEK 1:</b> | 1 Samuel 8:4-22                                     |
| <b>WEEK 2:</b> | 1 Samuel 10:20-24; 13:13-14; 15:10-24               |
| <b>WEEK 3:</b> | 1 Samuel 16:7; 17:32-50                             |
| <b>WEEK 4:</b> | 1 Samuel 24:1-20                                    |
| <b>WEEK 5:</b> | 1 Chronicles 11:4-7; 15:28–16:9; 2 Chronicles 6:2-6 |

## WEEK ONE

**LESSON AIM:** **Seek God's plan rather than man's.**

**STUDY:** History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

**THEME:** A New King

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Samuel 8:4-22

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 12:12-25

## A CRY FOR KINGSHIP

BY MARK SCOTT

Sometimes people can't differentiate what they want from what they *really* want. In our Lord's parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), the workers hired early in the day got what they wanted (a full day's pay for a full day's work). But what they really wanted was more wages than other workers (20:11-15). The nation of Israel was similar. The Israelite elders said they wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations (a phrase that appears twice in the text). But they really wanted Yahweh not to be their king anymore.

The prophet Samuel was the bridge between the time of the judges and the time of the kings. The era of judges was characterized by anarchy (Judges 2:16-23; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). In part, this anarchy continued during the era of kings due to the enemy known as the Philistines. But Israel had its best political days during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon.

**Rejecting the King**

1 Samuel 8:4-9

Samuel was a devout and holy leader. Unfortunately his sons, Joel and Abijah, did not follow their father's lead (1 Samuel 8:1-3). So as not to tailspin back into the time of the judges, the elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah (a town five miles from Jerusalem) and asked him to *appoint* (set, make, or place) a king . . . *such as all the other nations have*. The people wanted someone to *lead* (a word occurring three times in our text and meaning "to judge") them.

Samuel was *displeased* (a form of the word for "evil") with this request because he knew it constituted a rejection of Yahweh as their king. He did what godly leaders do. He took it to the Lord in prayer. Perhaps he was shocked when the Lord told him to *listen* (a word God uses three times in our text and is the word *shama*—i.e., hear) to the people.

God acknowledged the people's rejection and told Samuel it was a long-established pattern. In fact, their rebellion had followed them out of Egypt. They *forsook* (abandoned or loosed) God and served other gods. Samuel was to grant the people's request, but he was to warn them solemnly and make sure they knew there was a price to pay for having a king other than God.

**Accepting a King**

1 Samuel 8:10-22

Samuel painted an honest and bleak picture of what any king other than Yahweh would do. Human kings seem obsessed with their *rights* (a word that occurs twice in our text) and inflated egos. Samuel warned against kings drafting men to be his soldiers (v. 12), enlisting people to be his servants (vv. 12-14), and taxing the people heavily (vv. 15-17). In the end, their desire for a king would turn into enslavement. It would not take long for the first warning to come to fruition (1 Samuel 14:52). The very first king of Israel (Saul) drafted strong and valiant men.

Samuel warned the people that their desire for a king would soon turn to crying for relief from his heavy-handed ways. God made Israel an ugly promise. When the people cried out following their kingly oppression, the Lord would not answer them. Does God at times elect not to answer prayers? Evidently, especially when our motives are not as they should be (James 4:1-4a).

The people dug in their heels. They refused to listen to Samuel. They wanted a king in order to be like other nations; they wanted a king to judge them and to fight the Philistines. Even though Samuel represented the people's stubbornness to the Lord in prayer, the deal was done. God allowed Samuel to give them a king (outlined in the next chapter). Then Samuel—no doubt with a downcast spirit—sent everyone back to their respective homes.

The supplemental texts help us with this lesson. Previous to this moment in Israel's history, Moses taught in the law what kings should and should not do (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Kings should recognize that their authority comes from God (Daniel 2 and 4; John 19:11; Romans 13:1), they should avoid wives who would compromise their husband's faith (1 Kings 11:1-4), they were not to give themselves to excessive money as Solomon did (1 Kings 10:14-22), and most importantly, they were to write out the law and read it all the days of their lives. Samuel's heart was heavy, but in his farewell speech, he told the people he would not sin against the Lord by not praying for them (1 Samuel 12:12-25).

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## SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER WHEN GOD SAYS NO

BY DAVID FAUST

First Samuel 8 puzzles me. Something in the human heart wants to follow the crowd, so it's not surprising that Israel's elders wanted a king like other nations. What puzzles me is that God gave them what they wanted.

Their request was a slap in the face to the Lord, and rejecting God as their true king would bring negative repercussions for generations to come. The prophet Samuel predicted that cruel rulers would oppress Israel's citizens and govern them harshly, but the pleas persisted and God relented. In the centuries that followed, Israel's succession of kings produced strife and division more than prosperity and peace.

We often wonder why God says no to our prayers, but this incident raises a different question: Why would the Lord say yes to a foolish request?

### How God Answers—and How We Respond

In *What the Bible Says About Prayer* (College Press, 1987), Mitch Simpson lists four ways the Lord responds to our requests:

1. **Direct granting.** We receive what we ask for.
2. **Delayed granting.** God says yes, but we have to wait for the answer.
3. **Different granting.** God provides something different than what we ask for.
4. **Denial.** God says no.

Do we react to God's answers with grateful acceptance or with frustrated second-guessing? The Hebrews begged for relief from Egyptian bondage, but once freed, they griped about the food. They demanded a king like other nations, but evil kings led to disaster. They longed for the Messiah, but when he came, "his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). Prayer isn't just about getting what we want; it's more about aligning ourselves with God whose ways are higher than our ways.

### Appreciating God's Denials

James and John (with their mom along for backup!) came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." Now, that's a bold request! In response, Jesus told them, "You don't know what you are asking" (Mark 10:35-38). Like James and John, we don't know the full implications of our requests. God loves us too much to give us everything we ask for. I love my 4-year-old granddaughter dearly. If she asks me for ice cream, I will usually say yes—but not every day. If she asks for the keys to my car, I definitely will say no until she's old enough to drive.

When God denies our requests, it might be because we lack wisdom, understanding, and maturity (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-5). Or perhaps we're harboring doubt in our hearts (James 1:6-7). Or we're asking with wrong motives so we can indulge selfish pleasures (James 4:1-3). Or there are broken relationships God wants us to mend first (1 Peter 3:7; Matthew 5:23-24). Or there are lessons we can learn only by developing patience and perseverance (Galatians 6:9). Or maybe someone else's choices stand in the way of our desires (Matthew 23:37).

The apostle Paul asked repeatedly for the thorn in his flesh to be removed. The thorn remained, but God's grace proved sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Even when we don't understand why God answers prayer the way he does, we can trust he always knows what is best and does what is right. There's grace to be found whether the Lord says yes or no.

### Personal Challenge:

Think of a time when you requested something in prayer and God said no. What did you learn from this experience? How did it impact your faith and your relationship with the Lord?

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Whom and how did you serve others last week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced over the past week?

Ask three people—two readers and one reteller—to help. Ask the readers to read **1 Samuel 8:4-22** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask the third person to retell the story in their own words.

3. What most stands out to you in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What motivations (or excuses) are voiced by the Israelite elders and people?
  - What words would you use to describe their attitudes?
  - How would you characterize Samuel's response to the people?
  - How would you characterize God's response?
  - The word *listen* is repeated four times in this passage. Of what significance is listening?
  - In what ways would a human king "reign over" the people and "claim his [own] rights"?
  - God's "permissive will" is defined basically as what God permits even though it is not his perfect will and may not have his full blessings. How do you see his permissive will at work in this passage?
5. What do you learn about God, especially about his sovereignty, from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. In what practical ways can you live with God as your king?
8. How would you describe your kingdom purpose?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge do you anticipate this week as you serve others?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Samuel 10:20-24; 13:13-14; 15:10-24**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

## WEEK TWO

**LESSON AIM:** **Take care not to fall into disobedience.**

**STUDY:** History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

**THEME:** A New King

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Samuel 10:20-24; 13:13-14; 15:10-24

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** 1 Samuel 13:1-12; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 119:29-36;  
Luke 11:28

## A KINGSHIP OF DISOBEDIENCE

BY MARK SCOTT

Retired Lincoln Christian University professor Tom Ewald said, “Hell is truth known too late.” Israel’s first king learned that lesson the hard way. And we learn a good lesson from his bad example. While Saul ruled Israel for 40 years and had many military successes, his reign was checkered with disobedience and neuroses.

Samuel acquiesced to the people’s desire for a king (1 Samuel 8). Saul’s mission to find his father’s donkeys was the means for Samuel to meet up with Saul and anoint him as king (1 Samuel 9). Saul did prophesy (1 Samuel 10:1-19) and (in his impatience) played the role of priest, but he did not fulfill his role as king nobly.

**Tall King**

1 Samuel 10:20-24

When the Old Testament mentions physical features (e.g., Judges 3:15), there is usually a reason. Saul was tall. But he was “small in [his] own eyes” (1 Samuel 15:17). It may be like the people of Babel—they had to climb so high because they felt so low (from *What the Bible Says About Self-Esteem*, by Bruce Parmenter).

Samuel had already anointed Saul king. When the time came to formally introduce him to the nation, a ceremony involving the casting of lots was conducted. To us it might look like a game of chance, but the Lord guided the process (Proverbs 16:33). First the tribes came forward one by one. Then the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. (Was not the king to come from the line of Judah—Genesis 49:10?) Next the *clans* (kinds or families) came forward one by one. Next Matri’s family was chosen. Finally Kish’s son Saul was chosen.

But would the king miss his inauguration? Saul could not be found. The Lord himself ruined Saul’s game of hide-and-seek by revealing to the people that Saul was among the *supplies* (baggage or receptacles). Saul’s height may have made it hard for him to hide. When Samuel identified him, the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

**Foolish King**

1 Samuel 13:13-14

Not everyone was exuberant about the new king (1 Samuel 10:27). But Saul’s first military victory over the Ammonites delivered the city of Jabesh Gilead and solidified his reign. Saul’s reign was renewed in Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:14-15). Things were looking good for the tall king until Samuel gave his farewell speech (1 Samuel 12). From that moment, things went south for Saul.

Saul and his son Jonathan engaged the Philistines in battle in central Israel. But at Michmash (east of Bethel), the Philistines began to prevail. The Israelites ran scared into the caves, and Saul panicked. In Samuel’s absence, Saul presumptuously played the role of priest by offering a burnt offering. Whatever his motives, Saul was out of line. Samuel greeted him by saying, “You have done a foolish thing [i.e., played the fool].” Saul had disobeyed the Lord’s *command* (*mitsvah*, i.e., law). Saul’s kingship would now be compromised. He would be replaced by a *man after God’s own heart* and the next *ruler* of his people (prince, captain, or overseer). Disobedience to God is not only wrong; it is foolish.

**Lying King**

1 Samuel 15:10-24

Saul would sink deeper into this disobedience with the Amalekites, but that saga was interrupted by Jonathan’s battles with the Philistines (1 Samuel 14). The army got out of sorts by eating meat with blood still in it, and then Jonathan ate honey without knowing his father’s decree of a fast and incurred his father’s wrath. Saul opted for killing Jonathan, but the soldiers would not do it. Saul’s prayers for God’s help went unanswered.

The nation of Amalek had been very evil. God commanded that the Amalekites be destroyed. Saul thought he had a better way—spare the king (Agag) and save the livestock. God was grieved (cf. Genesis 6:6), and Samuel was mad—in fact, Samuel cried about it all night. Saul went to Carmel (not Mt. Carmel) and set up a monument in his own honor.

When Samuel arrived at Saul’s camp (in Gilgal) the next morning, Saul lied, “I have carried out the Lord’s *instructions*” (*dabar*, i.e., word). But Samuel heard the sheep bleating and the cattle lowing. Saul had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Even after Samuel confronted him, Saul tried to justify himself: “We were going to devote these things to God.” Sometimes disobedience can sound so rational.

Samuel reminded Saul (and us) in poetic language that jumping through religious hoops does not appease God. “To obey is better than sacrifice.” Saul recognized his sin, but also blamed the men to whom he gave in (compare this with Genesis 3:12). Saul learned truth too late.

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## UNDERCOVER LEADERS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever watch the TV show *Undercover Boss*? In each episode, high-level executives interact anonymously with their rank-and-file employees while disguised as ordinary workers trying to learn the ropes of the job. I wonder, *Why don't the employees recognize it's their boss wearing a wig and glasses? Isn't it a giveaway when TV cameras follow them around all day?*

In the “reveal” at the end of each episode, the workers discover that without realizing it, they were rubbing shoulders with the boss. Often the boss gives them generous gifts like promotions, vacations, or funds to pay for college costs. *Undercover Boss* touches a nerve because something in the human heart wants assurance that our leaders empathize with our plight. For over a decade the show has reminded bosses to get in touch with the real-life struggles faced by the ordinary people who work for them.

On a far grander scale, something similar happened in the incarnation of Christ. God went undercover when the King of kings and Lord of lords came to earth in human form—divinity disguised as a baby in a manger. The one who possesses all authority in heaven and earth looked helpless, wrapped in swaddling clothes. In the years that followed, he grew through adolescence, walked on dusty roads, wrestled with temptation, ate at peasant tables, and camped out with rough-edged disciples. Instead of using his position as God’s Son to shield himself from responsibility, “he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). He revealed himself to his disciples, and they were stunned to realize they had been rubbing shoulders with the Word who became flesh. He bestowed gracious gifts they used for years to come.

### Above the Rules?

It’s inspiring when leaders make the effort to understand the real-world challenges their followers face. And it’s demoralizing when leaders refuse to do so—or worse, when leaders consider themselves above the rules.

In some ways, King Saul appeared to be a natural leader. When God gave the Israelites the green light to appoint a king, Saul seemed the obvious choice. Tall and strong, Saul towered head and shoulders above his peers. Remember, this was a time in history when kings led soldiers into battle in hand-to-hand combat. Unfortunately, Saul struggled with character flaws that have brought down many leaders—a toxic mix of impatience, insecurity, and emotional instability. Worse, Saul was arrogant and sloppy about obeying God—as if he knew better than the Lord.

Saul’s failures as Israel’s first king overshadow his successes. He serves as a cautionary example about leadership, reminding us that

- character matters more than appearance;
- self-will must yield to God’s will;
- obedience to God matters more than religious rituals: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22);
- a self-assured, swaggering leader who insists “I’ll do it my way” might look impressive at first, but that leadership style doesn’t receive God’s blessing: “For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry” (v. 23); and
- eventually God will unseat unjust leaders: “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (v. 23).

Leaders aren’t above the rules, and the best leaders don’t see themselves as exceptions. Instead, they are examples of obedience to God and service to others.

### Personal Challenge:

On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write a list of qualities you respect and admire in those who lead in the church, government, and the marketplace. Then go back over the list and circle the areas where you personally need to improve.

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### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what practical ways did you live with God as your king over the past week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read **1 Samuel 10:20-24** aloud, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to each read **1 Samuel 13:13-14**. Repeat the process with **1 Samuel 15:10-24**. Ask a third person to retell the entire story in their own words. (Remind them to keep the retelling simple, in about a minute or less.)

3. What traits of Saul demonstrate his potential to be a good leader?
  - What character traits expose him as a poor, or foolish, leader?
  - (For both of these questions, think in terms of both worldly and godly attributes.)
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - What do you see in these passages that makes someone a godly leader?
  - How would you characterize both God and Samuel's responses and feelings toward Saul's foolish choices?
  - Look through the passage and identify instances of Saul's
    - arrogance
    - lying
    - blaming others
 Then discuss how each of these behaviors are forms of rebellion and rejection of God's word.
  - What connections do you see between foolishness, disobedience, and evil?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Let's examine how we can apply Samuel's response in 1 Samuel 15:22: "To obey is better than sacrifice." Look up and read each of the following verses and discuss what they reveal to you about the significance of obedience: Proverbs 21:3; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:20; 12:7; John 14:15; 1 John 2:4.
8. In what specific way will you commit to obeying God in fulfilling the mission on which he has sent you?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenge do you anticipate this week as you obey God?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Samuel 16:7; 17:32-50**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

### WEEK THREE

**LESSON AIM:** **Take courage, knowing  
the battle is the Lord's.**

**STUDY:** History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

**THEME:** A New King

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Samuel 16:7; 17:32-50

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** 1 Samuel 13:13-14; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Psalm  
26:1-3; Acts 13:22; Philippians 1:20

## KINGLY CHARACTER: COURAGE AND HEART

BY MARK SCOTT

King Saul had gone AWOL (1 Samuel 13 and 15). Israel desperately needed a new king. But anointing one would be risky for Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). It would need to be done under the radar. Two events would propel David forward so the nation could begin to emotionally embrace him as their new king—attending to Saul by calming the king with his music (1 Samuel 16:14-23) and fighting Goliath the giant (1 Samuel 17). (The order of these events is debated—cf. 1 Samuel 17:55-58.)

**A Track Record of Courage**

1 Samuel 16:7; 17:32-37

Samuel made it safely to Jesse's place in Bethlehem. The parade of potential kings began. How about Eliab the eldest? What about Abinadab or Shammah or the other brothers? God made it clear to Samuel that God's choice differed from man's choice. Humans consider *appearance* (countenance) or height. But God puts a tape measure around a leader's *heart*—the center of the inner person.

The battle line was drawn between Israel and the Philistines. Goliath taunted Israel twice per day for 40 days, and the Israelites shook in their sandals. Jesse sent David on a food run to his brothers who were in Saul's army. David witnessed the intimidation and asked what would be done for the person who "removes this disgrace from Israel" (1 Samuel 17:26). Eliab was angry at David's presumption, but David pressed forward to volunteer. He did not want anyone in Israel to *lose heart*. Even Saul objected. David was just a *young man* (boy).

But David cited his successes. As a good shepherd, David had *rescued* (delivered) his father's sheep when they were being attacked by a lion or a bear. If need be, he would *seize it by its hair . . . and kill it*. David was willing to fight this *uncircumcised Philistine*. Goliath had *defied* (upbraided or blasphemed—a key term in this whole narrative) Israel. David knew the veracity of God's name was at stake. Saul was impressed with his courage and gave him permission.

**An Armor of Heart**

1 Samuel 17:38-40

Saul outfitted David with his own armor for protection and victory. It was ill-fitting and too stiff. David was *not used to them*—maybe actually better rendered "he had not tested them" (*English Standard Version*). David had something better than Saul's tunic. He had the armor of his heart.

Seemingly unprepared and with minimal resources (cf. Matthew 10:9-10), David headed into the Valley of Elah to confront Goliath—a mass of a man and an experienced soldier with impressive armor. David had only a shepherd's staff, five smooth stones he had picked up at the stream in the valley, his shepherd's bag, and his sling. David used unconventional weapons (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

**The Defense of God's Honor**

1 Samuel 17:41-50

Goliath was not impressed. He sized David "down" and felt mocked by being made to fight a boy, *glowing with health* (ruddy or red) and *handsome*. Goliath *despised* (regarded with contempt) David and called him a *dog* (probably just a metaphor emphasizing his small size but possibly a reference to a boy cult prostitute, as it is used at times in the Old Testament). Goliath cursed David and intended to kill him.

David answered the giant's taunts by defending God's honor. Sword, spear, and javelin are puny in the face of the *Lord Almighty* (Lord of hosts). David predicted what he would do to Goliath—strike him down, cut off his head, and give the giant's carcass to the birds and beasts. David believed this would make the whole world acknowledge that *there is a God in Israel*.

David ran toward Goliath and did as he promised. David triumphed over the Philistine. He defeated the giant with a sling and a stone. He even took Goliath's own sword and cut the giant's head off. Israel pursued the Philistines into their fortified cities.

It is tempting to spiritualize the story (i.e., assign meaning the author did not intend) by talking about how God helps us defeat the giants in our lives. Those lessons will get a hearing, but our Jewish forefathers probably would be surprised at such applications. It is more than a story about the underdog winning. It is even more than Israel identifying its new king. More likely, it is a story about God's promise to save the world not being compromised and the messianic line being preserved near the "house of bread" where, one day, the Good Shepherd will protect all of his sheep (Genesis 12:1-3; Luke 2:1-7; John 10:7-15).

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## FAITH TO FACE DEFIANT GIANTS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do your problems look too big to overcome? The Israelites faced a towering foe so terrifying that his name, Goliath, has come to symbolize something huge and intimidating. For 40 days straight, the taunts of the defiant giant rang in the soldiers' ears every morning when they got up and every night when they went to bed.

In a classic mismatch, a young shepherd stepped forward. David, looking naïve and vulnerable, strode into battle dressed like a farmhand and armed with a sling and five smooth stones. By contrast, well-armed Goliath clanked like an unstoppable tank when he walked, and a shield bearer stood in front to protect him. If they were taking bets in Las Vegas, David faced overwhelming odds. But this battle wasn't just about swords and spears.

### The Difference Faith Makes

David's victory over Goliath compels us to examine our faith. How will we face the challenges that confront us in the church, in our culture, and in our personal lives? Will we walk into battle armed merely with human resources and advice, or with the wisdom and power of God?

**Faith risks failure when the world says, "Play it safe."**

**Faith focuses on character when the world says, "Keep up appearances."** "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

**Faith perseveres when the world says, "Give up."** If you feel crushed by the load you're carrying at work, a health problem that won't go away, or a heavy leadership responsibility you bear, don't despair. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

**Faith steps out when the world says, "Stay put."** Abraham left his home when God told him to move.

Joshua and Caleb insisted, "We can conquer the Promised Land," while faithless others warned, "No, we're like grasshoppers compared to the giants who live over there!" Faith in God stirred David to fight Goliath. It motivated James and John to leave their fishing boat and follow Jesus. Faith isn't reckless, but when God's call is clear, it gives us the boldness to step out.

**Faith dreams about tomorrow when the world says, "Live for today."** At the end of your life, what will matter most? "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

**Faith thinks about others when the world says, "Focus on yourself."** Paul commended the Macedonian Christians because, despite their own severe trials and extreme poverty, they considered it a privilege to share with God's people (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). Instead of giving up, they upped their giving!

**Faith relies on God's power when the world says, "Do it yourself."** God does more than we can measure, ask, or imagine—not by human ingenuity, but "according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). Not so we will gain recognition for ourselves, but so he will be glorified—and not just today, but "throughout all generations, for ever and ever" (3:21).

Jesus wore the messianic title "Son of David." With the shepherd boy's blood flowing through his veins, he declared that faith can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). And that includes the molehills we face today.

### Personal Challenge:

What giant-sized problem confronts you right now? What difficult situation looks too large to overcome on your own? Ask God to increase your courage and help you to face the challenge with the strength he provides.

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### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what specific way did you obey God in fulfilling the mission on which he has sent you during the past week?
2. What was the biggest challenge you faced last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Samuel 16:7 and 17:32-50** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Ask a third person to retell the story in their own words.

3. What would you say is the key word in these passages, and why?
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - In your own words, what does God look for in spiritual leaders?
  - How is that different from the kinds of things people generally look for in leaders?
  - Compare the words of Saul and David. What main differences do you see in their perspectives and attitudes?
  - Now compare David and Goliath. What was each one depending on to bring about victory? (Try to move beyond the obvious.)
  - Fill in the blanks with your own response for this phrase, and then share your sentence with the group: *The Lord who rescued me from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will rescue me from \_\_\_\_\_.* (Leader, respond to each sentence by saying, "Go, and the Lord be with you.")
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about obedience from David in these passages? How is it related to a conviction that "the battle is the Lord's"?
8. What do you learn from David about what it takes to let the whole world know about our God?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What battle do you anticipate facing this week?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **1 Samuel 24:1-20**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

## WEEK FOUR

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

**STUDY:** 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 has grown while his and Saul's friendship has 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 Israelites 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 lying 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* (wailed). 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).

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## 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."

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### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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.

## WEEK FIVE

**LESSON AIM:** **Give thanks to the Lord,  
for his presence is with  
us.**

**STUDY:** History of Israel (1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles)

**THEME:** A New King

**LESSON TEXT:** 1 Chronicles 11:4-7; 15:28-16:9; 2 Chronicles  
6:2-6

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** 2 Samuel 6:12-15; 1 Chronicles 16:10-36;  
Zechariah 8:1-8; Acts 7:45-49

## CITY OF DAVID FOUNDED

BY MARK SCOTT

On the uphill drive from Jericho to Jerusalem, the tour guide will have the song “The Holy City” played on the bus speakers. It’s very emotional to round a turn, see the temple, and hear, “Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Lift up your gates and sing; Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to your King!” Jerusalem is the city of stone, the envy of the whole earth, and the highest joy (Psalm 137:6).

How are we to think about sacred space? God is omnipresent (i.e., there is no place he is not), yet not all places are created equal. God had invaded Jacob’s space, but only later did Jacob know it (Genesis 28:16). The Israelites saw God’s glory come into the tabernacle in a special way and yet God routinely guided the people through the wilderness day and night (Exodus 40:35, 38). David’s reign would be centralized in Jerusalem and the presence of God would be located there as in no other city.

**The City**

*1 Chronicles 11:4-7*

Before David could operate out of Jerusalem, he would have to conquer it. He marched his soldiers to the ancient site of Jebus and captured it. The Jebusites (descendants of the third son of Canaan) thought they were safe in their *fortress* (stronghold). After all, the banana-shaped ancient city of David had mountains to the east with a deep ravine between. It was also well protected to the south and west, even if perhaps a bit vulnerable to the north.

Joab (one of David’s most loyal men for most of the king’s reign) led the charge. His reward was becoming *commander-in-chief* (ruler or prince) of David’s forces. So David took up residence in this place and it became known as his city. It was known as *Zion* (a term that can refer to a mountain, a city, or a people).

**The Ark**

*1 Chronicles 15:28–16:9*

It was one thing for David to dwell in Jerusalem, but for God’s presence to dwell in Jerusalem would demand special furniture and ceremony. How would David solidify his permanent residence in Jerusalem and secure God’s presence in the city? With the help of his “mighty men” to secure his reign there (1 Chronicles 11–12), David attempted to move the precious “ark box” (a symbol of God’s presence and redemption) to the holy city from Kiriath Jearim, where it had been for some time (1 Chronicles 13). Two things delayed the ceremony. The people did not follow God’s instructions about moving the

ark (1 Chronicles 13:5-14) and the Philistines invaded (1 Chronicles 14:8-17).

The celebration of bringing the *ark of the covenant* (also called the *ark of the covenant of the Lord* and the *ark of God*) was grand. It was highly celebrative with volume (shouts), musical instruments (horns, trumpets, cymbals, lyres, and harps), Levitical offerings (burnt offerings and fellowship offerings), food (bread, dates, and raisins), leaders (11 are mentioned by name), and praise that was off the charts. To perpetuate this celebration, David *appointed* (assigned) Levites and priests to ensure that God’s praise would be made known among the nations. Jerusalem was clearly intended to be a city on a hill that could not be hidden. The last two verses of this text are part of David’s larger “Song of Thanks” (16:8-36).

Only one sour note was sounded in this celebration, and that came from David’s wife, Michal. The daughter of King Saul, Michal had been given to David as a prize for defeating the Philistines (1 Samuel 18:25-29). Something about David’s exuberance embarrassed her. She watched David *dancing* (skipping) and *celebrating* (playing or laughing). She *despised* (held in contempt) David. The result was that the marriage was pretty well over (2 Samuel 6:23).

**The Name**

*2 Chronicles 6:2-6*

We fast-forward to David’s son Solomon, who built the temple after his father’s death. The resulting celebration outstripped the earlier celebration of bringing the ark into the city. The sacrifices offered were innumerable, and the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (2 Chronicles 5:6, 14).

Solomon told God he had built a *magnificent temple* (exalted house) for him to dwell in forever. Then he turned to bless the people and praised God. He acknowledged God’s faithfulness, his redemption of his people, his election of Israel, and the choice God made to have his *Name* dwell in Jerusalem. For God’s name to dwell there meant his presence would be there.

The “Hound of Heaven” finds ways to be with us. While heaven and earth cannot contain him (Acts 7:48-49), he can make Zion come to us (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2).

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## LEARNING TO PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

When people ask, “Where is God?” they’re not looking for a road map. You can’t locate the Lord with a GPS. The question “Where is God?” is about relationship, not geography.

David asked the Lord, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7). Travel with astronauts to the moon or descend in a submarine to the ocean floor, and God is already there. Wander away like a stray sheep, and the Good Shepherd searches for you. Sink into despair, and he reaches for you. As Jonah discovered, God can even hear the prayer of a hopeless rebel sloshing around in a fish’s belly.

### Aware of God’s Presence

A cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night guided the Hebrews while they wandered in the desert. In Jerusalem they built a temple where they could celebrate his presence with singing and sacrifices. But God “does not live in temples built by human hands” (Acts 17:24). No building can contain him, and no cathedral can fully capture his glory. Paul reminded first-century believers, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

God is omnipresent and inescapable. The trouble is, we can be oblivious and distractible. We are like Jacob, who awoke from sleep and thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it” (Genesis 28:16). The problem isn’t God’s availability, but our awareness.

When have you been especially mindful of the presence of God? Several years ago I stood in Wyoming’s Grand Teton National Park gazing across a canyon, amazed by the Creator’s artistry. It was as if God had painted a beautiful canvas, covering it with mountains, boulders, trees, wildflowers, streams, birds, and wildlife under a clear blue sky. I sensed the presence of God amid the mountain grandeur.

In a very different setting, one evening my wife and I stood by the bedside of a dying minister who had devoted his entire adult life—more than half a century—to the Lord’s service. As the three of us quietly read Scripture, sang hymns, and prayed, that lonely hospital room became holy ground. It was the last time we saw our friend on this side of Heaven, but our little bedside prayer meeting provided a foretaste of glory divine.

### Come Near

Brother Lawrence was a 17th-century monk who described himself as “a great awkward fellow who broke everything.” He labored in the kitchen and repaired sandals, but during his daily tasks he learned to pray without ceasing. After he died, his spiritual reflections were collected in a short book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. If your mind tends to wander when you pray, Brother Lawrence suggested a solution: Don’t let it wander too far at other times. If you think of God often, he said, “you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.”

James 4:8 exhorts us, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” Do we intentionally recognize and pursue the presence of God? Christ came to earth as Immanuel—“God with us.” The question is, Are we with him?

### Personal Challenge:

Create two lists on a piece of paper that answer these questions: (1) What makes you aware of the presence of God? (2) What prevents you from recognizing God’s presence? Write down as many answers as you can to those questions, and discuss your lists with a trusted friend.

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