

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



I SAMUEL, *Chapters 1-19*
LUKE, *Chapters 19 & 14*

FEBRUARY: LARGE PRINT

21

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of 1 Samuel

FEBRUARY 7

21

REPENT, RESCUE, REMEMBER

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

1 SAMUEL 7:3-17

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD WANTS US TO REMEMBER THAT HE HEARS OUR REPENTANT CRY FOR HELP AND HAS COME TO OUR RESCUE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: IN THIS WORLD WHERE THREATS CONTINUE TO COME AT US, WE ARE HELPLESS APART FROM GOD'S SAVING GRACE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS GAVE UP HIS VERY LIFE TO RESCUE US WHEN WE WERE WANDERING, AND HE IS OUR HELP UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN TO TAKE US HOME.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Listen to the song, “Come Thou Fount.” [There are numerous versions on Spotify. Consider, for example, “Come Thou Fount,” Mercy Me, The Worship Sessions]. What lyrics do you relate to the most personally? Why?
- 2 Would you say that you are “prone to wander”? Why? Is that simply a statement of fact for all people or is there something that can be done so that we do not wander from the Lord?
- 3 The original hymn by Robert Robinson (1758) includes the lyric, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I’ve come.” Considering the context of the song, what do you think that means?

Sometimes we might sing lyrics to songs without understanding the words or meaning behind them. However, today’s Scripture passage is the basis for one old familiar hymn— “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”—and, in fact, contains lyrics that come directly from that passage.

In 1 Samuel 4–7, we find that Israel had, indeed, wandered from the Lord. They took the ark of the covenant into battle as if it were a good luck charm of sorts. In that battle, the Philistines defeated Israel and took the ark of the covenant. This news was so distressing that upon hearing it, Eli fell backwards in his chair, broke his neck, and died (4:18).

Still, after losing the ark of the covenant, Israel was not repentant. It took 20 years before they were ready to ask Samuel to lead them in a full return to the Lord. It is at this point in Israel’s history that today’s lesson begins.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ 1 SAMUEL 7:3-6.

Genuine, heartfelt repentance seemed to have arrived at last; however, Samuel knew Israel couldn't just give lip service. They needed to demonstrate their decision to return to the Lord.

- What "if . . . then" statement did Samuel give in verse 3? What specifically did Samuel indicate Israel's repentance would entail?
- If the people had put away their idols, then why did Samuel also lead them to pray and fast (vv. 5-6)?

God would rescue His people when they turned to Him, and turning to Him required true repentance. This involved a verbal confession of sins in prayer, an outward act of physically removing idols, and an inner turning from pride to humility before the Lord through fasting. Fasting acknowledged the seriousness of their sin and their sincere and desperate desire to be cleansed from it.

- Is it possible for a person to truly turn to the Lord and not fully repent? Explain.
- How might this idea of half-hearted relationship with God help us understand why it took Israel 20 years to get to this point?
- What might half-hearted relationship with God look like in the church today? In contrast, what would be involved in true repentance?

There is a marked difference between generally knowing who God is and truly believing Him for who He is and applying those truths to daily living. Israel had a storied history with God and knew full well who He was; however, they allowed their decisions to be directed by earthly circumstances and human feelings instead. They knew God, but their hearts were far from God. It wasn't until they confessed their infidelity to the Lord (7:6), put away their idols (7:4), came together in humble repentance (7:5), and fasted (7:6) that they truly returned to the Lord in faith.

> READ 1 SAMUEL 7:7-11.

- In light of verses 3-6, does verse 7 surprise you? Do you think Israel was surprised to find out that upon returning to the Lord they still had difficulties to face?
- Read 1 Samuel 4:3-4. How did Israel respond differently in 1 Samuel 7:8 to the difficult battle they faced? Why?
- What was the result of Israel's turning to the Lord for help in humble repentance?

Israel's previous defeat and shame of the previous 20 years turned to joyful victory. This was not accomplished in and of themselves, nor was it accomplished by the worship of a holy artifact. God alone is worthy of our worship, and when we turn to Him in full faith, He is ready and fully able to generously rescue us in a way that is above and beyond what we could even ask or imagine.

> READ 1 SAMUEL 7:12-17.

- Ebenezer means "stone of help." Recall the lyrics in "Come Thou Fount." How does the context of verse 12 aid in your understanding of the hymn lyric, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I've come"?

- Why do you think Samuel said “Thus far”? What was he wanting Israel to know about their present and their future?
- Why did Samuel feel it necessary to set up a stone to commemorate this moment in Israel’s history? Why is it important to remember how God has rescued us in the past? What are some ways He has done that for all of us, and what are some ways we can always remember and praise Him for it?

Samuel wanted God’s people to always remember God’s intervention on their behalf when they humbled themselves and turned to Him in repentance and belief. They had been unfaithful and did not deserve for God to rescue them, but He heard their honest cry and intervened. This was no slim margin of victory; God fully rescued them from their enemies and gave them peace in the land.

- Considering what Israel had done with the ark of the covenant in chapter 4, how might the people have reacted wrongly in regard to the stone? What does it look like to idolize the memory of a past victory? In contrast, what does it look like to remember and praise God alone for past victories?

God has rescued us above and beyond what we can ask or imagine, too, through His Son Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. That rescue has impact for today. It impacts our inner thoughts, the words we articulate, and our outward behaviors. God wants us to remember that He hears our repentant cry for help and has come to our rescue. His rescue doesn’t mean we won’t do battle in this world, but in our battles we can turn to God in faith and obedience, recognizing that we are truly helpless apart from His saving grace.

APPLICATION

- Today's passage can be outlined this way: repent (vv. 3-6), rescue (vv. 7-11), and remember (vv. 12-17). Which of those three words stands out to you the most personally in your own relationship with the Lord? Explain.
- Oftentimes, we move on to whatever is next all too quickly. What is something God has done in your life lately for which you need to take some time to remember and praise Him? Outside of confessing that need to this group, what would that look like?
- As Israel had done with the ark of the covenant, what might be some good things we, as a group and as a church, might be tempted to turn to or idolize in place of the Lord Himself? How can we guard against it?

PRAY

Praise God for rescuing you from death and giving you eternal life through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. Confess your tendency to ignore or forget His past work on your behalf and to rely on other things besides simple faith and reliance on Him.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of 1 Samuel

FEBRUARY 14

21

ISRAEL DEMANDS A KING

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

1 SAMUEL 8:1-21

FEBRUARY 14, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: ONLY GOD IS WORTHY OF BEING LOOKED TO AS THE RULER OF HIS PEOPLE AND OF HIS CREATION.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WHEN WE SEE THE WHOLE WORLD OPERATING A DIFFERENT WAY, WE STRUGGLE TO CHOOSE GOD'S WAY AND TRUST HIM IN THAT CHOICE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: IN THE MIDST OF THEIR SIN, GOD PROMISED HIS PEOPLE A COMING KING FROM THE LINE OF DAVID WHO WOULD RULE OVER THEM WITH JUSTICE, MERCY, AND HOLINESS (2 SAMUEL 7:8-15; LUKE 1:30-33; MATTHEW 1:1-17).

INTRODUCTION

- 1 When in your life have you wanted something, only to be disappointed once you finally got it (i.e. a certain job, the latest piece of technology, or a particular type of car). What led to your disappointment?
- 2 What do our desires to have what isn't ours teach us about our hearts?

God had called His people to be unique among the peoples of the earth. While nations had kings that ruled over them, God's people did not need an earthly king (Lev. 20:26). God Himself ruled over them and led them. However, God's people looked at the nations around them, envied their kings, and demanded to have one for themselves. They wanted a human ruler so they could be like other nations.

- 3 What are your expectations of a leader? What are the qualities of a leader that inspire your trust?

While most of the judges led the nation in battle, Samuel's ministry as a judge demonstrated what Israel truly needed: righteousness, repentance, and a return to the Lord. The Lord God could be all the King that His people ever needed. Unfortunately, the Israelites were blind to such a vision. God warned His people of the troubles that would come from putting their hopes in earthly kings, but they did not relent. God gave the people over to their own selfish desires, and the results were disastrous. Of the kings that ruled over Israel, few honored the Lord with their leadership.

UNDERSTANDING

> Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

- Who were the judges (see Deut. 16:18-20)? What function did the judges serve in the life of the people of Israel?

- First Samuel 8:1-3 describes the poor leadership of Samuel's sons during their time as judges. What insight do these verses give us into the struggles the Israelites faced under the judges?
- Now read verses 4-5 and 19-20. What reasons did Israel's elders give in their request for a king? What was their real reason, according to verse 7?
- How did Samuel respond to the elders? What is the key difference between Samuel's response to the elders and the elders' response to their situation?
- What was wrong with Israel's desire to have a king?

The judges were leaders in the tribes of Israel who were given the task of judging the people of Israel with equity and righteousness. These leaders were to have exemplary character and pursue justice in the land that God had promised them. At the point we pick up this story, Samuel, who was a righteous judge, handed over leadership to his sons. After their appointment, his sons did not model his leadership and the people of Israel grumbled for a king like the other nations around them. Israel wanted what everyone else had. In wanting what the nations had, they exposed the sin in their hearts. God's people were to be different and separate from all the nations of the earth. While nations had kings, God alone was Creator and ruler over Israel. The people of Israel rejected God as their King and demanded another. God would answer their request.

- Describe a time when you rejected God's rule because you thought you knew best. What happened as a result, and what finally opened your eyes to the problem?
- What are some ways we continue to reject God's plans in favor of a life that looks more like the world around us?

A fundamental principle of God's Word is that God, and God alone, was Israel's King (Ex. 15:18; Ps. 10:16; 24:10; 93:1). The people of Israel rejected their true leader for a leader they could see, who they foolishly believed would secure their borders and lead to their national prosperity. What they did not realize is that any real security and prosperity they had ultimately came from God. When God made Israel, He desired for them to live with Him forever, yet the people rejected God's rule.

Any time we choose our way over God's, we embrace a life that is less than God's best for us. In wanting what everyone else had, the people of Israel missed what made them unique. Our need to rebel against God and pursue our own way shows us the deep need each of us have to have our hearts, desires, and wills redeemed. Our desire for a king can only be fulfilled by the One True King.

> Read 1 Samuel 8:10-22.

- What warnings did Samuel give the people of Israel about the king they sought?

- Why were the people willing to ignore these warnings?

- Why does God seem to "give in" to their request? What does this teach us about Him?

- When are you inclined to do something just to be "like everyone else"? What does that desire communicate to God?

God listens to His people, and in this case, He gave them over to the sinful desires of their heart. When the people demanded a king, it was a rejection of all that God had called them to be. As in the past, the people of Israel were more interested in what they wanted in the moment than the place that God was leading them.

Before the gospel can be “good news” to us, there has to be bad news. Reaffirming the truth of Psalm 14, Paul wrote that “no one is righteous” and there is “no one who seeks God.” He said that “all have turned away” (Rom. 3:10-12). The gospel teaches us that we are more sinful than we ever dared imagine. All people are alike in their rejection of God. Yet in His grace, God used the people’s sinful desire to have a king to point them to the perfect and true coming king through His servant David—Jesus the Messiah.

APPLICATION

- What does your desire for more teach you about your attitude toward God? How can you learn to be content with what God has given you?
- All people are either pursuing the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world. Which have you been living for? What needs to change?
- The people of Israel gathered together and demanded a king. The church has been called together to remember and praise the true and rightful king. As we live together as followers of Christ, what are some ways we can express our appreciation for King Jesus?
- How does living under the lordship of Jesus change the way you relate to the world around you on a daily basis?

PRAY

Praise God for the coming kingdom and the coming King. Pray that He would give you a desire for this King and His kingdom in your heart, that you would live every day eagerly awaiting the joy that is to come when He comes and brings the kingdom to us in its fullness.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of 1 Samuel

FEBRUARY 21

21

A RELUCTANT KING

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

1 SAMUEL 10:17-27

FEBRUARY 21, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD IS OUR ULTIMATE LEADER, AND HE GIVES US EARTHLY LEADERS TO HELP US FOLLOW HIM.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE LIVE IN A CULTURE OF SPIRITUAL FANDOM. WE FOLLOW CERTAIN SPIRITUAL LEADERS AND ARE TEMPTED TO DEPEND ON THEM TO DO THE WORK GOD IS CALLING US EACH TO STEP UP AND DO IN THE CHURCH, IN THE WORLD, AND EVEN IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: GOD PROMISED HIS PEOPLE A COMING KING FROM THE LINE OF DAVID WHO WOULD RULE OVER THEM WITH JUSTICE, MERCY, AND HOLINESS (2 SAM. 7:8-15; LUKE 1:30-33; MATT. 1:1-17).

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Have you ever had a new opportunity to serve or lead and felt ill equipped or even afraid to do so? What happened?
- 2 Who is someone you admire as a leader? Why?
- 3 In what areas of life do you think you most need someone to lead you?

As we saw in last week's lesson, God's people wanted a king to lead them. Though God warned them they did not need an earthly king but needed to trust Him—the One Eternal King—to continue to lead them, their hearts and minds were set. Even though it was sinful to ask God for an earthly king, God showed His love and grace by directing Samuel to anoint a king who would be given every help and opportunity to honor Him as Israel's leader.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ 1 SAMUEL 10:17-19.

Israel had demanded a king, and now God would give them one. Not coincidentally, Samuel directed the people to gather together at Mizpah, the site where they had previously renewed their covenant to God (7:5).

- What did God want to remind the people before He chose a king for them? Why?

Israel had never needed a king. God was their King! He had lovingly led them and provided for all their needs. He had miraculously brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from every nation that had threatened them on their way to Canaan. And He continued to lead

and provide for them as enemies were still challenging their right to the Promised Land.

- In your own words, what was God saying to the people in verse 19?

Samuel made it clear the people had sinned by asking for a king at this point in their history. However, God would not force Himself on them. He would allow them to reject Him and suffer the consequences.

- Why is God qualified to be our king?
- Why do we reject Him as our king and look, instead, to earthly leaders to do for us what only God can do?
- How might this passage speak to us now in 2021?

> READ 1 SAMUEL 10:20-24.

- What might God have been wanting to communicate by announcing the identity of Israel's king by lot instead of through some form of a democratic process?

God's guidance of the process of casting lots would verify to the people and again to Saul what He had already made clear—Saul was His choice for Israel's king.

- Why were the people so excited when they found out that Saul was their new king?

- Read the description of Jesus in Isaiah 53:2. Considering this, does it seem strange to you that in this instance, God chose someone who stood out physically among the people? Why might He have done this?
- Based on verses 17-19, why might Saul have been hiding, reluctant to be recognized as Israel's first king?

Saul did not become king because of personal ambition. In fact, he seemed to resist the call of God to serve Israel in this capacity. He was humble and embarrassed to be pulled into the limelight. This was a stark contrast to his physical appearance, which was apparently so impressive that it instilled an expectation and confidence in the people they had been lacking. Though strange to consider, it is much like we act today. We often demonstrate that we long more for leadership from God's people we deem impressive than from God Himself.

- Do you think God still calls people today who don't bother to show up to answer that call? Explain.
- How does the church suffer when we don't step into the unique gifts and calling God has placed on each of our lives?

> READ 1 SAMUEL 10:25-27.

Samuel telling the people the rights and duties of the king was a reminder of his warning about the cost of having a king (8:11-18). This was a major turning point in Israel's history. Samuel wrote these rights of kingship on a scroll as a lasting testimony or covenant between the people and their king. Then he placed them in the tabernacle to demonstrate God's authority and oversight of the process. God would hold His people accountable for their decision.

- With what sort of mood or attitude do you imagine most of the people headed back home after hearing the duties of kingship?

- How would you characterize Saul at the beginning of his reign as king? What sort of men had God placed around him (v. 26)?

The Lord provided for Saul a godly army of men to help him as he began to rule Israel. Not everyone was a source of encouragement, however. There were some wicked men who did not approve of Saul as king, likely because of his timidity in accepting the position. Saul ignored their objections, though others would remember it (11:12).

APPLICATION

- How do we balance knowing that God does call us to follow the spiritual leaders He gives us with knowing that He alone is truly our King? What struggles, if any, are there for you in that?
- How are we doing at First Woodway in this area as a whole? Do we depend too much on the leaders God has given us here to do the work we are each called to do? Generally speaking, are we eager or reluctant servants?
- What are some tasks God has called each one of us to as servants in His kingdom? How can we encourage each other in that?

PRAY

Thank God for His lovingkindness in continuing to lead you. Thank Him also for the people He has put in your life to help you follow Him. Ask Him to show you where you have been reluctant to step up and fulfill the calling He has placed on your life and to give you the wisdom and courage to step into that calling.

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of 1 Samuel

FEBRUARY 28

21

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL SPEECH

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

1 SAMUEL 12:1-25

FEBRUARY 28, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD'S CHARACTER AND POWER DEMAND REVERENTIAL FEAR.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE SOMETIMES MAKE VERY BAD DECISIONS, DECISIONS THAT CAN NEVER BE FULLY UNDONE. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND HOW GOD WANTS US TO RELATE TO HIM IN THOSE BAD DECISIONS.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: GOD FORGIVES. THE clearest picture of his heart of forgiveness is seen in the crucifixion of his son, Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 What is a memorable farewell speech you have heard?
- 2 If you were preparing a farewell speech, what would you most want people to know?

What at first appeared to be the public inauguration of Saul as king became Samuel's farewell address to the nation and includes his lengthiest speech. As one might expect, Samuel's last words to the people touched on what was most important. Samuel called on Israel to renew their covenant with God. Part of their responsibility in this covenant was to fear God.

- 3 What is the difference between fearing the Lord and fearing people or things?

UNDERSTANDING

> READ 1 SAMUEL 12:1-12.

This chapter marks one of Israel's most significant moments—the end of the loose confederation of judges and the beginning of the Israelite monarchy. From this point forward, the nation would be evaluated in terms of whether the king did good or evil in the eyes of the Lord (see 1 Kings 11:6; 15:26; 16:25; 2 Kings 8:18; 10:30).

- From verses 1-5, what did Samuel want the people to know about him? Why?

Samuel established his credentials first by asking if anyone had cause to accuse him of having abused his power. If he had behaved in such a manner, he would have had no moral authority to rebuke them or to lay down God's requirements. Since no one could make such a charge, he told them to brace themselves for what he had to say.

- From verses 5-12, what did Samuel want the people to know about God? Why?
- From verse 12, what did Samuel want his audience to know about themselves? Why?

God had always saved Israel from their troubles. For hundreds of years God had proven that He could save Israel from any foe, as long as they put aside their idols and turned to Him for help. But now they were placing their hope in an earthly king.

> READ 1 SAMUEL 12:12-18.

- What role did fear play in the demand for a king?
- Identify the directives given in these verses. How does obeying these directives show trust in God?
- How would having a king change the relationship between God and His people? How would it be different? How would it be the same? How do you see God at work in your life despite the times when you have failed to follow Him?

Israel went from being a loose confederation with no central government to being a monarchy. Political and social life would be radically different. In another sense, nothing had changed. The terms that set the relationship between God and Israel were found in the Sinai Covenant (Ex. 19-24). Israel was to show devotion to God by

keeping His commands and especially by shunning idols and other gods. Doing this, they would love God with all their hearts. And Israel was to respect the rights, persons, and property of others. Doing this, they would love their neighbors. If they did these things, God would keep them safe and well. When Israel adopted a monarchy, they would still be judged by these terms. They would be under God's protection as long as they kept the covenant and stayed away from idols. Both the king and the people had to keep the covenant, and in that sense, being under a monarchy would make no difference in regard to how they related to God.

- What was the purpose of the thunderstorm in verses 16-18?
- Bearing in mind that even insurance companies often use the phrase "acts of God" to describe catastrophic weather events, why are people more likely to recognize God's power after an unexpected weather occurrence?
- What aspects of nature best represent God's power and character? Explain. How do these aspects cause us to revere Him?

When Samuel called down rain in the normally dry month of May, he was doing two things. First, he was demonstrating that the words he was about to speak truly came from God. Second, the rain at harvest time was a vivid metaphor. Storms in May implied that the harvest would be ruined; by analogy, Israel's request for a king would end badly. Samuel had warned the people that having a king would be economically ruinous for them. The king would seize their lands, their cattle, their servants, and even conscript their children (1 Sam. 8:11-18). Thus, their king would come down upon them and their fields like a storm out of season.

- What does it mean to fear the Lord? Read Exodus 20:20 and Proverbs 1:7; 2:5 for insight. What does fearing the Lord look like on a daily basis?

> READ 1 SAMUEL 12:19-25.

- What was the Israelites' plea? What was Samuel's response?
- How would you describe the difference between godly fear and sinful fear?

No one denied what Israel had done was wrong, and there was no taking it back. However, God is forgiving and redeems our bad decisions. The Israelites would need to do two things. First, they should remain loyal to God and not turn away from following Him. Sometimes, our sin can so discourage us that we give up entirely. People abandon the faith not because they are angry at God but because they are convinced that their guilt is so terrible that they cannot possibly come back. They should resolve to continue to serve God and to do what is right even though their actions make them feel unworthy. Second, they should shun all idols. If the people would simply place their trust in God, He would continue to watch over them and sustain them, king or no king.

- Read Psalm 112:7 and Proverbs 3:25-26. What does God say about the fear of bad news in these verses? How can we avoid succumbing to the fear of the unknown?
- Knowing Samuel was frustrated with the Israelites for demanding a king, consider Samuel's final remarks to the people of Israel. How did Samuel show grace to the Israelites?
- Describe the balance between God's judgment and His grace. When can they complement each other? When do we see both working simultaneously?

Even very big, very bad decisions do not mean that our relationship with God is forever ruined. To a great extent, it is not changed at all. God forgives, and the clearest picture of His heart of forgiveness is seen in the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ. What God wants both before and after our bad decisions is that we fear and serve Him, that we grow in faith and grace, and that we love one another.

The Israelites made a bad decision that changed their nation forever. Nevertheless, God's marching orders for them—that they keep the Sinai Covenant—remained the same. No matter what we have done, God's marching orders for us remain unchanged: that we should believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

No matter how many times we fail God, we should never be afraid to run to Him.

- Read again 1 Samuel 12:20. When has God helped you overcome something you greatly feared?
- In your present circumstances, what relationship is there between fear and trust?
- Regardless of your past sins, what are God's directives to you today? How can this group encourage you in that?

PRAY

Thank God for His everlasting covenant with you made through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Confess your sinfulness. Ask Him to forgive you and empower you to have a healthy fear of Him, living a God-honoring life.