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## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where it often seems as if people get away with all sorts of injustices. The proud, arrogant, and rebellious seem to be rewarded, while the poor, lowly and broken are crushed. The South African story is filled with examples of this. The writers of our history and daily news often give the impression that this is just how it is. In fact, we might even be tempted to believe that this is how we progress in life.

In 1 Samuel we are given a very different lens to look at our world. We might think that the politically powerful, wealthy, and influential on media are governing the events of this world. Yet, in 1 Samuel we will clearly see that *Yahweh is King* and ultimately that His Son: *“Jesus Christ is Lord”* (Phil. 2:11), governing all things: *“according to His purpose”* (Eph. 1:9). In 1 Samuel (through the establishment of the monarchy of Israel) we will see the continuation of the story of God restoring His people to their created purpose, having dominion over His creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8). Yet, it is only those who humbly trust in Yahweh’s Word and submit to Him in obedience (as the true King) that will enjoy this position (Deut. 17:18-19). The high point of this theme is found in 2 Samuel 7, finding its fulfillment in the Kingship of Jesus and His people (cf. Rev. 3:21).

In 1 Samuel, we will discover that God is busy turning our current world order upside down. God will resist the proud/arrogant/rebellious, but He will exalt the humble/lowly/obedient. Hannah’s prayer in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 is the lens through which we can read and appreciate the narrative of 1 Samuel. Ultimately, Hannah’s prayer will become the prayer of Mary in Luke 1:46-55. In Jesus and His people, God will orchestrate the ultimate reversal of the world order and turn evil upside-down.

It is our hope that as we journey through 1 Samuel, we will see our world from a different perspective: God’s perspective. We will understand God’s will and become what 1 Samuel was to its original audience: a prophetic voice to our generation. It is our prayer that our lives would be shaped by the upside-down message of 1 Samuel and that we as a church family will be the prophetic voice in our Valley to the Upside-Down Kingdom of God.

In Christ with much affection,  
Carel Pienaar  
Phil. 1:21

**SERMON NOTES ON 1 SAMUEL 1:1-2:11**

# The God who Reverses Fortunes



1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

## The God who Reverses Fortunes

### STUDY 1

*“Oh, no, no, no  
Stick to the stuff you know  
It is better by far to keep things as they are  
Don't mess with the flow, no no  
Stick to the status quo”*

The Chorus of 'Stick to the status quo' from High School Musical (2006)

1. What do you understand to mean by the term 'status quo'? Who benefits when the 'status quo' stays in place? Who benefits when it is reversed?

### Investigate

#### Read 1 Samuel 1:1-28...

1. What is the problem in the story? What are the different characters doing? (1:1-8)
2. How does Hannah respond to the situation? How did Eli interpret her response? (1:9-16)
3. What does the birth of Samuel signify to Hannah (1:20)? Any clues to what Samuel's name means?

#### Read 1 Samuel 2:1-11...

1. How is God described in 2:1-2?
2. From 2:3 Hannah turns to address a 'congregation' with her story. How is God described in vs. 3-9?
3. In 2:1 Hannah describes her own 'horn' as being lifted. Whose 'horn' is lifted in 2:10?



## Thinking & Living

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Stories about children being born are significant in the Bible (cf. Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Samson). They generally indicate a turning point in the story. Samuel's birth has the same significance. Considering this, discuss the following questions...

1. What does the inclusion of Samuel's birth suggest to us about the future role He will play? Does 2:10 give us any clues as to what change this might be?
2. Should we take Hannah's vow as a model of how to 'get what we want' from God? What does Hannah's barrenness (*"The LORD had closed Hannah's womb"*) and vow (*"Then I will give him to the LORD all his days"*) teach us about the way God works to bring about his plans?
3. Consider Hannah's Song. How does she see her own story as typical of the way that God works in the world?
4. In Luke 1:52-53, Mary also has a song. She sees the arrival of Jesus as bringing down the mighty and lifting the humble. In what ways does Jesus' life demonstrate a reversal of the status quo of this world?
5. If this pattern of reversal is God's way of working in the world, what does that mean for us? What does it mean for how we relate to the status quo of this world?
6. Parents, consider some of the things that you want your children to aspire to and achieve? Bearing in mind this passage, which will lead to them ultimately being exalted before King Jesus? Are there any changes you should be making in what you teach them to value?

## Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Praise God for His unique character: that He alone works to exalt the humble by becoming humble Himself: *"There is no one holy like the LORD, there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God"* (1 Samuel 2:2)
2. Thank God for His pattern of reversing the status quo in the world. Thank Him that the way things are now is not how they will always be: *"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour"* (1 Samuel 2:8)
3. Bring any requests that you might have regarding your own personal life. Remember Hannah's declaration in 1 Samuel 1:27 - *"The LORD hears"*.
4. Pray for those in leadership in our church. Pray that they would remember: *"that the Lord knows and by Him deeds are weighed"*. Pray that they would embody the humility that God promises to exalt rather than the pride which He will one day tear down (cf. 1 Samuel 2:3).



# Journeying from the Old Testament to the New Testament...

In the New Testament, Jesus makes multiple claims that the Old Testament pointed to Him as its fulfilment (cf. Matt. 5:17-20; John 5:39-47; Lk. 24:27, 44). This claim also applies to 1 Samuel (which we are looking at now).

To help you on your journey through 1 Samuel to Jesus, here are a number of things to consider when you read the Old Testament and begin to relate it to Jesus as its fulfilment...

## 1) FIRST PRINCIPLE: The original audience

Although 1 Samuel is also written for us (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12), it was originally written for his immediate audience first. Consequently, it is important to know when and to whom 1 Samuel wrote and spoke his prophecies. What 1 Samuel said would have been relevant to their immediate situation. Regarding 1 Samuel, the period described in 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 24 (the era of the Kings of Judah) is the most likely historical setting and first audience of 1 Samuel's words.

## 2) SECOND PRINCIPLE: The Old Testament story

It is important to remember where 1 Samuel fits in the larger Old Testament story (what has gone before and what is going to happen after). 1 Samuel will continually refer to events and pictures that have already taken place in Israel's story with God. For example, 1 Samuel 1-7 will sound a lot like the period of the Judges when: *“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judg. 21:25). It is important to remember the story of the Benjaminites in Judges 19-21, since Saul is a Benjaminite (1 Sam. 9:1). Samuel is the first prophet who is like Moses (Deut. 18:15) and points forward to the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha in 1 & 2 Kings. Israel's rebellious heart in 1 Sam. 8:7-8 echoes what Moses and Joshua warned of in Deut. 31:27 and Joshua 24:19ff. It will also be the pattern we observe in 1 & 2 Kings. God's use of Israel's enemies to accomplish His purposes in 1 & 2 Samuel will also be the pattern we see in 1 & 2 Kings. The story of the monarchy that starts in 1 Samuel continues in 1 & 2 Kings.

## 3) THIRD PRINCIPLE: Multiple-Fulfilments (the three eras of Jesus' ministry)

When you go to the New Testament, every Old Testament book can be applied in three chronological spheres that relate to Jesus' ministry. There is: 1) the inauguration of Jesus' ministry (**the Gospels**); 2) the continuation of Jesus' ministry (**the Last Days and the Church as the body of Christ**) and 3) the Consummation of Jesus' ministry (**The Return of Jesus**). The picture below illustrates this...



To demonstrate this, let us look 1 Samuel 2-4 regarding the priesthood of Eli's house. **At the inauguration of Jesus' ministry**, He becomes God's faithful High Priest who is perfect in obedience and honours His Father. He makes the perfect sacrifice for sin. Yet, unlike all other priests, Jesus' priesthood is eternal and our access to God's presence is secured forever (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 8-10). Jesus' people will never suffer what Israel did in 1 Samuel 4 when the Ark went into exile. God is always with us in Christ (Matt. 28:20; Eph. 2:22).

**At the continuation of Jesus' ministry**, we are brought into His priestly house and made priests ourselves in service of God. We are a: *“royal priesthood... that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”* (1 Pet. 2:9). Through His sacrificial death, Jesus has made us: *“a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”* (Rev. 2:6). Our entire lives should therefore be used as sacrifice of worship: *“present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”* (Rom. 12:1).

**At the consummation (the return)**, we see: *“no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb”* (Rev. 21:22). We will eternally (as God's priests) worship and serve our God within the glory of His presence. God will be honoured by the nations (His people) eternally: *“They will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations”* (Rev. 21:26). Yet, the warning to Eli's house remains. The judgment of Eli's house and Israel in 1 Sam. 4 becomes a small picture of what God will do to all who did not honour Jesus, but rejected Him. They will suffer eternal exile (Rev. 21:8, 27).

Yet, to see this, you need to apply the second principle to your Bible reading...

#### 4) FOURTH PRINCIPLE: Signposts

There are at least four ways in which you can make legitimate connections between the Old Testament and Jesus. These are the four signposts you should be looking for...

- a) **Fulfilment language:** like Jesus reading Isaiah 61:1-2 and saying, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”* (Lk. 4:21). Jesus is saying that He is the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy about the Herald proclaiming Good News. The rest of Luke and Isaiah 61 will flesh that out for you. But when you read Isaiah 61, you are not reading it properly if you do not relate it (in some way) to Jesus.
  
- b) **Typology:** An event, ritual or person is a copy/shadow of the reality that is Jesus. For example, the earthly Ark was a *“type”* of the real Heavenly Throne room where Jesus will make atonement on the Cross: *“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’”* (Hebrews 8:5ff)
  
- c) **Contrast or comparison (linked with typology):** Whereas a person (who should be something) failed in the Old Testament, Jesus fulfills what that person should have been. For example, the contrasts made between Adam and Jesus are numerous: *“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”.* (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

d) **Echoes:** Often the authors of the Bible (inspired by the Holy Spirit) connect various events together through themes that get echoed in the various stories. For example, Adam and Eve got “exiled” or banished from the Garden of Eden due to sin (Gen. 3:24), being refused entry by the cherubim. The Tabernacle/Temple is filled with echoes of the Garden of Eden (pomegranates, palm trees, cherubim). Like Eden, access to God’s holy presence is barred.

Joshua enters the Promised Land on the east side (crossing the Jordan) and is met by an angelic figure with a drawn sword (Joshua 5:13-15). This event echoes what we have seen in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:24. This echo also informs us how we should view the Promised Land (The restoration of Eden).

We see Israel being exiled from the Promised Land in Kings and Chronicles, banished from the Land (another echo). Matthew’s Gospel intentionally starts with mentioning the Exile (Matt. 1:1-17) and why the boy must be called “Jesus/Joshua” (Matt. 1:20-21). These echoes link Matthew’s Gospel to a theme that started way back in Genesis 3. Jesus’ arrival marks the beginning of the conclusion of that theme.

Ultimately, the journey of seeing how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament and the Old Testament points to Jesus is a lifelong endeavour of continually reading, studying and meditating on the Scriptures. We never graduate from the school of knowing Jesus in the Bible; rather it is a journey that begins in this life and continues in eternity. In this sense, you can read 1 Samuel your whole life and find “new threads” that tie to Jesus, His people and His Return.

**SERMON NOTES ON 1 SAMUEL 2:12-3:21**

# The Fall of Eli and the Rise of Samuel



1 Samuel 2:12-3:21

## The Fall of Eli and the Rise of Samuel

### STUDY 2

*"I love the name of honour,  
more than I fear death"*  
(Julius Caesar)

1. Is there anything wrong with thinking this way from a Christian perspective? Why or why not?

### Investigate

#### Read 1 Samuel 2:12-36...

1. What were Eli's sons doing? (2:12-16, 22)
2. What is God concerned with (2:17; cf. Lev. 7:31-34)? What is Eli concerned with (2:22-25)?
3. How is Samuel and His family different from Eli and his family (1 Sam. 2:18-21; 2:26)?
4. What is God's charge against Eli (1 Sam. 2:27-30)?
5. What is the punishment for Eli's sin (1 Sam. 2:31-36)?
6. How does 1 Sam 2:30 help us understand what is happening in the stories of Eli's family and Samuel's family? How does it relate to Hannah's prayer?

#### Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21...

7. What is happening in 3:1-10? Why is this special according to 3:1?
8. What is the message given in 3:11-14?
9. In contrast to Eli, how is Samuel described in 3:19-21?



## Thinking & Living

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In this text we see clearly that Eli is not a priest who honoured the LORD (1 Sam 2:29). But we are promised a priest who will do exactly what is on the LORD's heart and mind (1 Sam. 2:35). In the New Testament we see that God fulfils this promise through Jesus – the perfect priest. He perfectly honours the LORD, unlike Eli, and He enables us to be in a right relationship with God the Father so that we too can honour Him as we should.

### Read Hebrews 4:14-16...

1. How is Jesus different from Eli's family according to Heb. 4:15?
2. What does it mean for us that Jesus is our high priest (4:16)? Why is this a big deal?
3. How do we honour the LORD with Jesus as our high priest? (cf. Heb. 10:22-25)
4. What is the danger in teaching this story without the good news of Jesus in mind?
5. What are some areas where you personally find it difficult to honour the LORD above yourself?
6. What are some areas that you as a group can practice honouring the LORD together?
7. How would you explain the lesson of this week's study to a 10-year-old?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

1. Praise the LORD for our perfect High Priest Jesus. Isn't wonderful that we have Jesus and not Eli as our priest! Isn't it wonderful that we have someone interceding for us who perfectly honours the LORD and enables us to honour Him in relationship with Him?
2. Pray for one another to be able to put the LORD's honour above your own in the various areas you struggle in.
3. Pray for our Church to seek to honour the LORD above the desire for worldly popularity, wealth, and comfort.
4. Pray for wisdom as we sometimes need to confront one another regarding how we fail to honour the Lord in our lives.
5. Pray that we would be humble in how we serve others in our community as a Church. Pray that we do not do it for our own honour's sake, but for the sake of our High Priest.



# God in Exile



1 SAMUEL 4:1-7:2

# God in Exile

**STUDY 3**

1. *“Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?”*  
(1 Sam. 6:20). How would you answer this question?

## Investigate

To appreciate this narrative, remember the following: 1) God does not automatically side with anyone (only those who are for Him: cf. Deut. 28; Joshua 5:13-15). 2) The theme of exile (which started in Gen. 3:23-24). 3) The Exodus narrative in Ex. 5-15 (God’s hand against Egypt). 4) Hannah’s Prayer (the great reversals in 1 Sam. 2:1-11). 5) God’s verdict on Eli’s house (*“Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained”*; 1 Sam. 2:30).

**Keep your Bible open at 1 Samuel 4-7:2...**

1. Keeping 1 Sam. 6:20 in mind, let’s see who can stand in God’s presence?

	<b>Israel with the house of Eli (1 Sam. 4:1-22)</b>	<b>The Philistines (1 Sam. 5:1-6:12)</b>	<b>Israel without the house of Eli (1 Sam. 6:13-7:2)</b>
Can they stand in God’s presence? (Yes or No)			
How do we know that they can/ can’t?			
Why is that the case?			

2. What does Israel lack in this narrative? (What role did Moses-Aaron; Joshua-Eleazar fulfil? How did Eli’s house fail in this?)
3. Who might fulfil the role that Israel is lacking? (cf. 1 Sam. 3:19-4:1)



## Thinking & Living

In our narrative, God goes into exile (the Ark leaving Israel) and uses Israel's enemies as the instrument of His judgment (the Philistines). Sadly, this becomes a mini-picture of Israel's future. God will again go into exile (Ezk. 10:1ff) and use Israel's enemies' as the instrument of His judgment (Hab. 1:6; cf. Ezk. 21:1ff). Although we have glimmers of great priests and prophets, the majority will continue in the line of Eli's house. So...

1. Christians claim that they can stand in God's presence. In fact, God indwells His people (cf. Eph. 2:19-22) and we have confidence to approach God (Heb. 4:16; 10:22). Why?
2. Contrast what Israel had in 1 Samuel vs. what we have in Jesus...

Eli's house	Jesus
1 Sam. 2:17, 29	Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15
1 Sam. 3:1	Heb. 1:1-3
1 Sam. 4:11, 18	Heb. 7:23-25

3. Knowing what you know now, how will you answer the introduction question?
4. How can you stand in God's presence and live? How will you be confident that you won't suffer exile from God's presence? (cf. Heb. 10:19, 39)
5. How would you explain this truth to a...
  - a) Non-Christian
  - b) Child

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

1. Praise God for Jesus, our High Priest and Prophet, the perfect mediator. Praise God that through Him we can enjoy God's presence now and forever.
2. Pray for our church family. Specifically, that we would recognize and appropriately respond to the gift of God's presence. Consider praying through some of the following passages...
  - a) Ephesians 4:1-4 - On Unity
  - b) Ephesians 4:22-24 - A new way to live
  - c) Ephesians 4:32-5:2 - A new way to love
  - d) Hebrews 10:19-25 - On Gathering
3. Pray for someone you know who has not yet trusted in Jesus. Realize, that like Israel and the Philistines in this passage, they cannot stand in God's presence. The standard is God's holiness, not their own standard. Pray that they might not walk in the way of the house of Eli, but trust in and follow Jesus.
4. Pray for our church plants: 1) Ubabalo neThemba Church and 2) Muizenberg. Pray that they would be beacons of God's presence in their areas, calling others to come to God in Christ. Pray for their growth.
5. Pray for our witness as a church family. Pray that we would be the prophetic witness in our valley of God's presence. Pray that more people would come to know, trust, and follow Jesus through our various ministries.



**SERMON NOTES ON 1 SAMUEL 7:3-17**

# A New Moses



1 Samuel 7:3-17

## A New Moses

**STUDY 4**

1. James and Peter describe trials/suffering as good because they “test” the genuineness of our “faith” and solidifies our faith (1 Pet. 1:7; James 1:2-4). Discuss why that is the case...

### Investigate

**Read 1 Samuel 7:3-17...**

1. What trial was Israel facing? (v. 7)
2. How have they responded? What do we see of their “faith” (vs. 3-4, 7-8)?
3. After the death of Eli (1 Sam. 4:18), Samuel began to fulfil the role of Judge (1 Sam. 7:15). Yet, Samuel is not like any other judge. In Ps. 99:6 and Jer. 15:1, he is placed alongside Moses... Why? Compare...

<b>Samuel</b>	<b>Moses</b>
1 Sam. 3:20-21	Deut. 18:15, 18
1 Sam. 7:3	Deut. 29:16-18
1 Sam. 7:6	Numbers 11:1-3
1 Sam. 7:15	Ex. 18:13

4. Israel has a new prophet like “Moses”. The covenant is restored. What does Yahweh do in response? (vs. 10-15)



# Thinking & Living

Both Moses and Samuel (and the pattern of Israel under them) are ultimately shadows pointing to the reality of Jesus and His people...

1. How is Jesus greater than Moses and Samuel?

Matthew 5:17	John 1:1, 17-18; 5:39-40
<i>"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."</i>	<i>"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."</i>  <i>"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."</i>

2. Like Israel responded to Moses/Samuel, how are we supposed to respond to Jesus?

Matthew 7:24; 28:20...	John 1:12; 6:28-29; 14:15
<i>"Therefore everyone <b>who hears</b> these words of mine and <b>puts them into practice</b> is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."</i>  <i>"... teaching them <b>to obey</b> everything I have commanded you"</i>	<i>"Yet to all who did <b>receive him</b>, to those who <b>believed</b> in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"</i>  <i>"Then they asked him (Jesus), <b>'What must we do to do the works God requires?'</b>"</i> <i>Jesus answered, <b>'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'</b>"</i>  <i>"If you love me, keep my commands."</i>

3. We might not have Philistines on our doorstep, but we do face "trials of many kinds" (James 1:2). How are we supposed to respond to them? How do we show our "faith"?

4. God singlehandedly defeated the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:10) and restored to Israel the land (1 Sam. 7:14). Considering what you know of the Gospel, discuss what Jesus single-handedly defeated on our behalf...
5. How does this encourage you to have hope in your present circumstances?
6. How would you use 1 Samuel 7 to encourage your children/ grandchildren / children at church to have hope as they experience all sorts of trials growing up?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

1. Praise God that you have Jesus, the ultimately prophet, priest, and Judge of His people.
2. Praise God that He is powerful to save His people. Praise God for delivering us (His people) from sin and death, giving us a new hope.
3. Share with one another various "trials" you are facing. Pray for one another to remain steadfast in our trust/faith in Jesus through these "trials".
4. Pray for Ubabalo neThemba Church and the Muizenberg church plant. Each church family will have their own particular "trials". Pray that they would continue to trust in and follow Jesus through these trials.
5. Pray for the children of our church family. As they navigate schooling, that they would remain resolute in their trust in Jesus.
6. Pray for our missions partners (see website). Pray that they would continue to be a witness to Jesus as our prophet, priest, and judge. Pray for those they are discipling; that they would continue in their walk with Jesus.



## SERMON NOTES ON 1 SAMUEL 8:1-22

# A King like the Nations



1 Samuel 8:1-22

## A King like the Nations

### STUDY 5

1. What is idolatry? Can you think of anything in your life that you might tend towards idolizing?

### Investigate

#### Read 1 Samuel 8...

1. What event in vs. 1-3 caused Israel to make their request? Where have we seen this before (cf. 1 Sam. 2:12-17)?
2. In response to the situation, what do Israel's elders ask for (v. 4)? Is this a good thing, or a bad thing? (cf. Gen. 17:6; Deut. 17:14-20)
3. Look at vs. 6-9. What are the people really doing in asking for this? Why is this not surprising (v. 8)?
4. If their request is granted, what kind of king will they have (vs. 10-18)?
5. Consider 1 Sam. 7:10, what is ironic about their request in 8:20?
6. Compare what the people are doing (v. 19) to what Samuel is doing (vs. 7, 9, 21-22). What is the difference?

#### Read James 4:1-10...

1. What is the root of the problems listed in James 4:1-3? How does this link to 1 Sam 8? Based on vs. 4-5, what do you think these 'desires' (v. 1) are after?
2. Consider vs. 4-6... What will happen if we persist in our worldly desires?
3. If we are aware of our sinful desires (idolatry), then how should we respond? (vs. 6-10)



## Thinking & Living

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God wanted Israel to be set-apart (holy/different) from the world (Ex. 19:5-6). Yet, Israel wanted to be *“like all the nations”* (1 Sam. 8:5). Instead of trusting and following God, they were rejecting Him (1 Sam. 8:7). James reiterates that we cannot be double minded in our devotion to God. We need to realise that: *“friendship with the world is enmity with God”* (James 4:4) ...

1. Israel wanted a king like the nations. What are some of the things you want that is influenced by the world’s standards?
2. Israel forgot God’s deliverance. Instead, they wanted a king to take the place of God and deliver them. What are some of things you have sought to put in the place of God, looking for a) Satisfaction, b) Security, or c) Hope?
3. What happens when we pursue the things we want according to the world’s standards?
4. Both 1 Samuel and James 4 highlight various consequences of rejecting God’s rule for something you want/desire. Can you think of a time when you experienced the consequences of loving and living for something more than for God? Share with your group.
5. If Christ is our King, what should we do with our idols? How does the Gospel help us dethrone our sinful desires and put God in their place? Discuss...

**FAMILY BONUS QUESTION:** It is hard to stand out for Jesus at school and it is tempting to start wanting what everyone else might have, even when you know those things are contrary to Jesus’ will. How can you help your children put God first in their lives?

## Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

1. Pray that God the Spirit identifies areas in your own life where you don’t put Him first. Pray that He will help you turn back to Him through His Spirit.
2. Pray for your group, for the individual struggles each member goes through of putting God first and forsaking our idols.
3. Pray for St Peters as a whole, that as a body we submit to God’s rule and never forget how He has provided for us and looked after us.
4. Pray for our missions partners. Pray for wisdom as they disciple people in various contexts to trust in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not in the various idols of their culture.
5. Pray for each other and for our country as we all submit to sinful human rulers who are under God’s control. Pray that we remember how God rules – through human agency – and that we trust His purposes will prevail as we submit to Him.



## Saul made King



1 Samuel 9:1-11:15

## Saul made King

### STUDY 6

1. Are the events in our lives coincidental (random) or providential (they have a divine purpose)? Discuss...

### Investigate

#### Read 1 Samuel 9:1-10:1...

1. What “events” are happening in Saul’s life (9:1-14)?
2. The events look ordinary, but what do we discover in 1 Sam. 9:15-17? Why did all these events happen? (10:1)

#### Read 1 Samuel 10:2-27...

1. What “events” happened in Saul’s life to confirm his kingship?
2. What do we discover about Israel’s desire for a king (1 Sam. 10:18-19)? Yet, what is God’s plan through this desire (1 Sam. 9:15-16)? Has something like this happened before? (cf. Gen. 50:20)
3. How does Saul and Israel respond to all of this? (1 Sam. 10:16, 20-22, 26-27)

#### Read 1 Samuel 11:1-15...

1. What “event” is happening to Israel (vs. 1-3)?
2. How does Saul respond (vs. 4-11)? (Contrast with 10:20-22)
3. How does our narrative arch end (vs. 12-15)? (Contrast with 10:26-27)
4. How has God used Israel’s enemies to accomplish His purposes? (Clue: Eli’s house in 1 Sam. 4 and Samuel in 1 Sam. 7).



## Thinking & Living

1. Does God only work this way with “special” people like Saul or Samuel? What do we discover in Proverbs?

Proverbs 16:9	Proverbs 20:24
<i>“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.”</i>	<i>“A person’s steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way?”</i>

### Read Romans 8:28-30... God’s plan for you

Keep in mind that the cross & resurrection of Jesus is the lens through which we need to interpret these verses (Romans 8:17). Jesus’ journey is ours as well...

1. What does God “work” according to His purpose? (v. 28)
2. What is God working towards? (v. 29)
3. In what tense is v. 30? How sure can we be that God’s purpose will succeed?
4. Saul’s journey started with donkeys going missing. His kingship was solidified by the Ammonites attacking. God will use Israel’s evil desire (a king like the nations) to accomplish His purposes (establish a King). List some of the ordinary and difficult things you are currently going through...
  - a) How should you view these things? Coincidental or providential? (cf. Rom. 11:36)
  - b) What do you know God is busy doing through these things?
  - c) Knowing this, how would you respond to these things?
5. Share with one another a story where you have experienced God’s providence in the ordinary or difficult things of life.

## Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Praise God! He who controls and rules over all things loves you and cares for you: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows”* (Matt. 10:29-31)
2. Praise God that our ordinary lives are part of His extraordinary purposes!
3. Praise God for the Cross & Resurrection of Jesus, where we see how God can turn evil upside-down to accomplish His purposes. This is the lens through which we can understand our own lives.
4. Pray for one another: that we would trust His goodness and love in the ordinary times and in the very difficult times.
5. Pray for events you know of (personally, in our church community, valley, country and globally). Pray in accordance with Romans 8:28-30 and Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt. 26:39)



# The Sovereignty of God and Agency

When you start the journey of reading your Bible from Genesis, you will discover a unique interplay between God's plans and purposes and people's actions, decisions, and circumstances. This observation has led to many discussions about God's sovereignty. How are we supposed to understand these phenomena and is it relevant for us?

## Examples of God's sovereignty through agency (human or circumstantial)

When people think about *"God's sovereignty"*, we might think of God being directly involved in everything (with no intermediary). Yet, from the beginning of the Bible we see that **God rules through agency**. God created humanity as His agents of rule (Gen. 1:26-27). God would use the events surrounding Joseph's enslavement and imprisonment as the agent to get Joseph in the position to rescue His people from starvation (cf. Gen. 50:20). God would use Samson's desire for Philistine woman as the means to judge the Philistines (cf. Judg. 14:3-4). Often God would use the seemingly ordinary things of life as the agent to accomplish His will.

In 1 Samuel 9:1-10:1, we see some very ordinary things happening. Some donkeys got lost and Saul needs to look for them (9:3). Saul can't find them, finally gives up, but is urged by his servant to go look for a "seer" (9:4-6). They also have just enough money to pay for the prophet's fee (9:7-8). As Ralph-Davis puts it: *"It is all so natural and ordinary"* (2003:75). Yet, in 9:15-17 we are told that these ordinary events are governed by Divine purpose. All these events are orchestrated by Yahweh to bring Saul to Samuel.

In a similar way, God would often use Israel's enemies as the instruments/agents of His sovereign decree. The Philistines were used to depose Eli's house (1 Sam. 4:18), but also to raise Samuel as Judge (1 Sam. 7:7ff). The Ammonites were used to raise Saul as King (1 Sam. 11:1ff), and the Philistines to depose Saul (1 Sam. 31:1ff). Ultimately, God would use the nations of Assyria and Babylon to judge His people and send them into exile (cf. Is. 8:5-8; Hab. 1:6). God would use Persia to bring Israel back from exile (2 Chron. 36:22-23).

One of the greatest examples of God using human agency to accomplish His purposes is the Cross of Jesus. Although it was the Jewish leaders, Herod and Pontius Pilate who conspired against Jesus; unknown to them, they were the agents for accomplishing God's will: *"for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place"* (Acts 4:27-28; cf. 2:23). Pilates' authority to judge Jesus was only given by God to accomplish His will (cf. Jn. 19:10-11).

In Acts 1:8, Jesus commissioned His people to be witnesses in: *"Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"*. The first part of the mission was going well (Jerusalem), but the mission to Judea, Samaria and the end of the earth only started after Saul and the Jewish leaders began persecuting the church in Jerusalem, causing them to scatter (Acts 8:1). Ironically, Saul sought to eradicate the church by persecuting it, yet he became the catalyst for its spread and growth.

These are just a few examples from the Old and New Testament of God sovereignly working through agency. Yet, God's sovereignty through agency is not limited to "special" people in the Bible or great events. It includes...

## Our personal stories

The book of Proverbs makes it clear that our personal lives are also governed by God in this way: *"A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps"* (Prov. 16:9). God directs our way through various means, even though we cannot always understand or perceive it: *"a man's steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can man understand his way?"* (Prov. 20:24; cf. Eccl. 3:9-15).

Commenting on 1 Samuel 9-10, Ralph Davis puts it this way: *"Yahweh's strange and baffling providence is not the exclusive privilege of some kingdom elite; it extends to each of his people no matter how apparently common. However, unlike 1 Samuel 9, He may not let you in on the secret. You may see traces of what he has been doing much later as you look back, but in the present, you may be just as much in the dark as Saul was. If so, you must simply go on looking for the lost asses – or whatever task God has given you to do"* (2003:76).

Even so, there are two extraordinary things you can know God is busy doing through our ordinary lives right now. Firstly, you can be sure that God is busy: *"according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth"* (Eph. 1:9-10). God is busy uniting all things in Christ and our being here in the Fish Hoek valley is part of that plan. God has orchestrated our lives through various agencies (good and bad) to bring us to this valley to fulfill His purpose in Christ.

Secondly, you can be sure that God is busy working everything in your ordinary life to make you like Christ (a brother/sister and fellow heir): *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"* (Rom. 8:28-29). God the Holy Spirit is working through every aspect of your life to make you like Christ. Everything is used as a chisel to shape and mold you into the image of Jesus. Everything is God's agent to change you to be like Jesus.

## To reflect on

Some of us might believe that God is far removed from the ordinary things of life. God is not involved in the day-to-day minutia. Everything in this world has natural cause-and-effect relationships that do not have any divine purpose. He is up there in heaven, and we are down here on earth. The two realms never meet unless God “dips in” from time to time. We alone shape our own destiny. This view is known as Deism and hopefully you can see that it is incompatible with how God revealed Himself in the Bible.

When we put on the lens given by Scripture (as God revealed Himself), then we start seeing that God is far more imminent than we imagined. In fact, He is involved in everything. Yet, He rules through the ordinary. He accomplishes His purposes through various human and circumstantial agencies. He continually turns evil upside-down to accomplish His good purposes (like He did with Joseph, Israel, David, and Jesus). And so, every detail of life (the good that happens and the evil that gets turned upside-down) is used by God to accomplish His purposes. This includes your personal life.

So, consider your life story in all its details (where it began to where you are now in this Valley at St. Peters). Put on the lens of Scripture as you look at it and ask yourself: how has God possibly used my life (and everything surrounding my life) to accomplish His purposes? Some of it might be clear, some of it might be shrouded in mist (like Job’s situation and the Preacher in Ecclesiastes). Yet, you do have the revealed will of God in Jesus. You have the Scriptures. You can know that whatever happened, is happening and will happen, God’s purposes will stand. He will work through them.

You can rest in these truths. You can find meaning/significance in these truths. Your life might seem ordinary to you or tragic, yet God’s revealed promises and purposes show you that your life has extraordinary significance. God’s Word shows you that whatever comes your way will be redeemed/turned for good; for you and those around you, since God is also using you as an agent for His will. And so, you can pray, with greater depth, understanding and confidence: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9-10).

## An Example who did this: Augustine and the Fall of Rome

Many might know Augustine, because of the debate about God’s sovereignty vs. human responsibility. Some might know his conversion story recorded in Confessions. Yet, what is often neglected is the historical era in which he lived. The majority of Augustine’s ministry as the bishop of Hippo took place after the Fall of Rome in 410 A.D. He lived during the collapse of the western Roman Empire and the chaos that ensued in the region. In fact, his era is not so dissimilar to ours. Not too long ago the world witnessed the collapse of the European empires and the many wars that ensued in the 20th Century.

When Augustine received news of the fall of Rome, many people were in a state of panic. Many tried to understand why this happened and how to respond. Putting on the biblical lens that *“God’s sovereignly works through agency”*, Augustine dedicated 15 years to reflect and write on the events of his age. The final book would be known as *“The City of God”*. Augustine also wrote the first autobiography, where he applied this principle to his own life. This book will be known as *“Confessions”*.

Although Augustine concludes that much of the Roman Empire was unjust and wicked (and so its fall was deserved), he also knows that God has used the Empire as an agent to accomplish His purposes: *“These things being so, we do not attribute the power of giving kingdoms and empires to any save to the true God, who gives happiness in the kingdom of heaven to the pious alone, but gives kingly power on earth both to the pious and the impious, as it may please Him, whose good pleasure is always just... Manifestly these things are ruled and governed by the one God according as He pleases; and if His motives are hid, are they therefore unjust?”* (City of God, V:21). You can just consider the Cross of Christ and the spread of the Gospel as examples of how God used the Empire to accomplish His purposes.

In the same way, Augustine recognized that God used many things in his life to bring him to the point of believing and following Jesus. His education (Confessions 3:4); his encounter with a teacher of cult that caused him to be disillusioned with the cult (Confessions 5:6-7:12); his receiving a post in rhetoric at Milan where he met Bishop Ambrose (Confessions 5:13); listening to Bishop Ambrose’s sermons (Confessions 5:13:23-24). As Augustine put it: *“I was drawing nearer little by little, and unconsciously”*. All these things moved Augustine to start reading the Pauline epistles, which made him see Christ as Redeemer (Confessions 7:21:27). A conversation with a man named Simplicianus moved Augustine to want to become a Christian, although he still hesitated (Confessions 8:5). Reading the Life of Antony (a popular book written by Athanasius) and hearing children playing a game *“Take up and read”* moved Augustine to pick up Romans and read it. On that day Augustine was converted (Confession 8:12). Augustine recognized that God was sovereignly working out His purposes through all these seemingly ordinary things.

Knowing and reflecting on these things filled Augustine with a tremendous sense of hope. It galvanized his heart to continue serving Jesus, being busy with what God has given him to do each day (not being crushed by the news). It helped him see that his life has meaning and significance. It filled him with love and praise to God.

The same is true for us (our own personal stories) and our age (the world we live in). Why not do what Augustine did and reflect on your life and world in the light of God’s Word?

# Anticipate Reversal

## STUDY 7

1. How does it make you feel that the wicked and manipulative often manage to navigate their way to the top of the ladder? What difficulties does this present to faith in a good God?

## Investigate

### Read 1 Samuel 22:6-23...

1. How does Doeg ingratiate himself into King Saul's court? (vs. 9, 18-19)
2. How did David feel about what happened to the priest Ahimelech and his family? (v. 22)

### Read Psalm 52...

3. How does vs. 1-4 describe Doeg (his position and character)?
4. However, what does David promise is Doeg's destiny? (vs. 5-7)
5. In contrast, how does David see himself? What will be David's ultimate destiny? (vs. 8-9)
6. What aspects of God's character gives David the assurance that his current misfortune and Doeg's current elevation are temporary? (vs. 8-9)



## Thinking & Living

1. In many respects Psalm 52 is a Psalm of anticipation. In what ways is it helpful for us to have Psalms like this in the Bible? (consider your discussion with the introduction question)
2. Reflect on the way that Jesus has brought about God's rescue plan. What aspects of wickedness are already defeated? Which aspects do we still anticipate will be defeated?
3. Can you recognise any situations in your own life, past or present, where you found the wicked wrongly glorified? How might Psalm 52 and Jesus' promised return help us to navigate these moments in our lives?
4. What active steps does David take while he anticipates the reversal of fortunes that God has promised to bring in this world? (Psalm 52:8-9). How can we take some of these steps while we wait for God's perfect justice?
5. **FOR PARENTS:** Suppose your child comes home from school having been missed out on an award because another child lied about what they had done. How could you use Psalm 52 to teach your child how God calls us to live in this world? How will you encourage your child if they never see justice in this situation?

## Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Thank God that those who achieve status and power through wickedness and deceit will inevitably be 'uprooted' and 'brought down' (Psalm 52:5).
2. Praise God that His love is 'unfailing' and that His name is 'good' (Psalm 52:9).
3. Bring before God any personal situations where you are frustrated at those He has allowed to rise to positions of privilege. Pray that justice will be done. Pray that He will give you patience and humility as you anticipate this.
4. Ask God that He will bless our plans of establishing an iThemba Primary School at Masiphumelele. Pray that neither government bureaucracy nor corruption would prevent or slow this project.
5. Pray for our country. A) Christians in our country would be *"like an olive tree"*, trusting in God's unfailing love. B) For God's justice: *"Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and pluck you from your tent; He will uproot you from the land of the living"* (Ps. 52:5)



## Psalm 57

# Confidently seeking refuge in God

### STUDY 8

1. What "storms" have you experienced so far this year? How have you responded them?

## Investigate

The context of Psalm 57 is: *"When he had fled from Saul into the cave"*. A description of the situation is given in 1 Samuel 24:1-2. Saul has mustered 3000 troops and surrounded David's location, wanting to kill him.

### Read Psalm 57...

1. Look at vs. 1-4... Sketch and discuss what you see and feel

V. 1	Vs. 2-3	V. 4
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2. Look at vs. 6-10... Sketch and discuss what you see and feel

V. 6	Vs. 7-10
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3. What is David's desire through all of this? Discuss vs. 5, 11...



## Thinking & Living

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### Read 1 Peter 2:21-25... Jesus our example

1. How does Jesus' example mirror Psalm 57?

### Read 1 Peter 5:6-11... Our own struggles

2. How are we called to mirror Psalm 57?
3. Considering "the storms of life" you are experiencing...
  - a) How should you respond now?
  - b) What should you expect?
  - c) What do you desire and how have these passages affirmed/corrected those desires?

## Points to Pray

(now and during the week)...

1. Praise God that we can find shelter in the shadow of His wings and that He will turn evil against itself. He will accomplish His good purpose for us.
2. Praise God for the examples of David and Jesus. We know the end of the story and we can expect the same end for ourselves (if we trust Him).
3. Pray for one another: that we would remain steadfast in our trust and devotion to God our Father in Jesus throughout the storms of life.
4. Pray for one another: for God's deliverance in your present situation. Take the opportunity to share with someone your struggle and to pray together for God's upside-down deliverance in it.
5. Pray for your personal situation, our church family, our Valley and our country: "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (Psalm 57:5, 11)

