

1 SAMUEL

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GOD WILL HAVE HIS KING



9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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 matthiasmedia

God Will Have His King
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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

A FAMINE OF THE WORD

[1 SAMUEL 1:1-4:1a]

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE IN TROUBLE. As the book of 1 Samuel opens, God has kept his promise to settle his people in a land of their own. But ever since they moved into the land, the Israelites have been making a mess of things. In the book of Joshua, Israel entered the land and drove out (most of) the inhabitants, but the rot of immorality and idolatry soon set in again. Attacked from without (by the surrounding nations) and within (by indwelling sin), Israel quickly fell into anarchy. Periodically, God raised up 'judges' to save them, and that worked well for as long as each judge lived, but as soon as the judge died the cycle of immorality and rebellion began again. The book of Judges closes with one of God's priests prostituting out and then butchering his mistress, and with a civil war. Israel is in trouble.

The root of that trouble is the problem of leadership. Judges closes with these words:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judg 21:25)

If only Israel could have a king, like all the other nations, everything would be fine—right?

Well, yes. And no. And it's that 'yes and no' that 1 Samuel is all about. First Samuel is the story of the Israelites as they look for, find, and live with their new king. But it is also the story of God's insistence that whomever Israel picks as its *human* king, Israel must still recognize that God is their *ultimate* king. *How is Israel going to have a human king and still serve God as its king?* That is the question of 1 Samuel.

The book falls into three sections,

dealing with one main character in each: Samuel (chapters 1-7), Saul (8-15), and David (16-31). It may seem strange that a book about kings spends its first

seven chapters talking about a prophet, Samuel. But that is important because, as we're about to find out, "The word of the LORD was rare in those days..."

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-11, 20-28.

1. Who is Hannah? What is her situation?

2. What does she ask God for?

3. How does God answer her prayer, and how does Hannah respond?

Hophni and Phineas

According to Leviticus 7, priests were allowed to take the breast and right leg of a sacrifice as 'pay'. But Hophni and Phinehas were taking far more. Worse, they were taking meat before the fat was cut off, which was meant to be burned separately in honour of the Lord (Lev 7:31).

Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25.

At the time of 1 Samuel, the tabernacle was located at Shiloh in Israel's centre, and was manned by the priests Eli, Hophni and Phinehas (Eli's sons).

4. How are **Hophni and Phinehas** described?

5. What is the root cause of their behaviour?

6. How does their father, Eli, respond to them?

Read 1 Samuel 2:27-36.

7. What does God think of Eli's response to his sons? (See also 3:13.)

8. What does God promise to do as a result?

9. How would you describe the contrast between Hannah and Eli, Hophni and Phineas?

ELI'S SONS, HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS, were "worthless men" (2:12). And Eli was little better: gluttonous and corrupt, he was brave enough to scold his sons for their behaviour, but not brave enough to do anything about it. He honoured his sons above the Lord, and

fattened his own belly without regard for God's commands. So God declares he will bring an end to Eli and his family, and that instead he will raise up a faithful priest who will do the job properly. Who will it be? Enter the little boy who never should have been born...

Samuel

In Hebrew, the name 'Samuel' is a pun. Hannah asked God for a son and 'Samuel' sounds like the Hebrew for 'God listens'.

Read 1 Samuel 2:18-21, 26; 3:1-4:1a.

10. How is **Samuel** described? How does Samuel compare to Eli's sons?

11. What situation is Israel in under the leadership of Eli (3:1)?

12. What message does God give Samuel?

13. As the passage ends, what situation is Israel in under the leadership of Samuel (3:19-4:1a)?

14. Why do you think the “word of the LORD” was so rare under the leadership of Eli and his sons? (See also Amos 8:11-12.)

15. What hints are there that Samuel will not be the final leader of Israel? (See 2:10, 35.)

ISRAEL WAS IN TROUBLE BECAUSE “the word of the LORD was rare in those days” (3:1). God and Israel were no longer on speaking terms, and the reason is that the Israelites were no longer listening to God. Their most direct point of contact with God, the tabernacle, was being run by worthless men, too interested in listening to the sizzle of their BBQ and the titters of their secretaries to listen to the maker of heaven and earth. And so he stopped speaking. There began a famine of the word of God.

But God would still listen to anyone who would speak to him. Hannah asked God to listen to her, and he did, and Samuel (‘God listens’) was the result. And once the lines of communication were open, there was no stopping them. God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel spoke to Israel. And the message he spoke was: “The LORD will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed” (2:10). The famine of the word of God was over, and a feast was coming—a feast fit for a king.

» Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- Read Hebrews 1:1-3. How do these verses show us the clearest way in which God speaks to us today? How does this shape the way we should think about God revealing himself to us?

