

Hope for the Helpless



**Studies from 1 Samuel 4-10**

## Study 1 - God & Superstition

### 1 Samuel 4:1-22

Do you have any 'superstitions' that you observe or you have learnt?

*[Create a poster with various superstitious beliefs and practices that the group can come up with]*

What do we mean when we call someone a 'philistine'?

*The Philistines were a militarily advanced society that had invaded from the island of Crete and planted colonies in Canaan in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century BC. They are the main adversary of the Israelites in 1 Samuel.*

*Read verses 1-11.*

1. What was the elders response to the defeat? Why did they think this response would work? (vv3-4)
2. What should we as readers expect the result to be, given that we know the background story in chapters 2-3?
3. Why were the Philistines afraid (v6-8)? Did they know the Exodus story correctly?

*Read verses 12-22.*

4. What was Eli's response to news of the defeat?
5. What is the significance of the naming of Phineas's son 'Ichabod'?

*Reflection*

6. What were the Israelites relying on for victory? Was this something that God had given them reason to rely on?
7. Do we ever use our faith in God as a form of superstition?
8. What would make our homes and church places that are truly fit for God to dwell in?

*Ask God to help us have a true understanding of how he wants to bless us.*

## Study 2 - God is Not Dead

### 1 Samuel 5:1-6:16

In 1966, Time Magazine ran a very famous cover with the simple phrase 'Is God Dead?'. Why do many people believe that God has no place in the modern world?

*Read the passage.*

1. What did the Philistines do with the ark?
2. What contrast is made between the power of the Lord and that of the god Dagon? What does this say about the Biblical attitude to idols? (look at Isaiah 44:9-20 for more reflection)
3. What strategies did the Philistines try in order to deal with the problem of the ark? [*to help the group understand the point of the two cows and the cart, perhaps have them act out the actions in verses 7-10*].
4. Are any Israelites involved in recovering the ark? What does this suggest about the point of this passage?

*Reflection*

5. Does God need our help?
6. What can help us if we feel that God is 'dead' in our lives? Where else might this feeling be found in the Bible (hint – see John 19:38-42)?
7. What is the source of Christian hope?

*Pray particularly for those people you know who are feeling deserted by God at the moment.*

## **Study 3 – God the Helper**

### **1 Samuel 7:2-17**

*[This is meant to be a more reflective and prayerful study, to encourage a spirit of thanksgiving among the group]*

Ask everyone in the group to share something that God has done to help them at some point in their life.

*Read the passage.*

1. What did the Israelites do to show their commitment to the Lord? (vv4-9)
2. How was this different to their actions in chapter 4 (see Study 1)?
3. What was the result in their fight against the Philistines?
4. Identify other things that Scripture speaks about that God has done for his people, both in the Old & New Testament. [Brainstorm]

*Reflection*

'Ebenezer' means 'stone of help' (v12). As a group activity, get a number of stones and have each person write on one a blessing that God has given them. Pile the stones in a heap and spend some time as a group giving thanks to God. Each person takes the stone home with them to use as a reminder during the week.

## Study 4 – God the King

### 1 Samuel 8:1-22

*Read the passage together.*

1. How would Samuel have felt, seeing his sons turn out like Eli's sons had? What might be a solution to this problem of hereditary leadership?
2. Why do the Israelites want a king (v4)?
3. What does the Lord think of this request (v6-9)? Why is it seen as such a rejection of the Lord?
4. What problems does Samuel warn the people of, that a king will bring (vv10-18)? Can you think of any contemporary parallels with these problems?
5. What do you think you would decide if you were one of the elders of Israel – to have a king and take the consequences or trust in the Lord and face the fear of the Philistines? [take a vote among the group]

*Reflection*

6. Why do we tend to want someone to do things on our behalf, like a king or priest?
7. What does it mean in our own lives for God to be our king?

*Pray for areas in the lives of group members where we struggle to acknowledge God as king.*

## **Study 5 – A New Hope?**

### **1 Samuel 9:1-26**

What criteria do you generally use to judge someone on a first impression?

*Read verses 1-9.*

1. Why do you think that the Lord relented and allowed the people to have a king (see 8:21-22)?
2. What were Saul's apparent qualifications to be king (9:1-2)?
3. Do you think that the fact that Saul is unable to track his father's donkeys is meant to imply anything about his suitability to be king?

*Read verses 10-26.*

4. Samuel is told by the Lord in v17 that Saul has been chosen to govern his people. Given that the term 'govern' can have the meaning of harsh control, why might the Lord have chosen Saul?
5. How do you feel about Saul after reading and discussing this passage?

Reflection

6. What criteria do you use to judge people in the long term?
7. What are the attributes of a true and good king? (see Isaiah 53:1-7).

*Pray for discernment and wisdom about choices that you are facing at the moment.*

## Study 6 – A Failed Hope?

### 1 Samuel 9:27-10:16

Have you ever been anointed with oil? What significance does this act have?

*Read the passage.*

1. What signs does Samuel give Saul to confirm his election as king (vv1-7)?  
What do the signs mean?
2. Why is it so important that Saul receive the Spirit of the Lord (v6)?
3. What will be the ongoing relationship between Samuel the prophet and Saul the king (v8)?
4. The saying in vv11-12 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' is a cryptic one.  
Can the group provide possible meanings for it?
5. Why did Saul hide his big news from his uncle (v16)?

*Reflection*

6. 'Christ' and 'Messiah' mean 'The Anointed One'. Why was Jesus given this title?
7. How can we be more open to the Spirit of God, allowing him to change us into a different person?

*If people in the group would like prayer for healing or blessing, pray and anoint them with oil (if they are comfortable with that).*

## Study 8 – Renewed Hope?

### 1 Samuel 10:17-27

How are political leaders chosen in Australia, and what does this say about our values as a society?

*Read the passage together.*

1. Why does Samuel reiterate the Lord's displeasure at the people's desire for a king (vv17-19), even though he has chosen Saul himself?
2. How is Saul appointed (vv20-22), and why would this method have been used?
3. Why might he have hidden (vv20-22)?
4. Why is Saul's height significant (v24)?
5. What kind of things might have been written in the scroll that Samuel compiled outlining the duties of kingship (v25)? (look at Deuteronomy 17:14-20)
6. Do you think, based on the previous two studies, that Saul will live up to his kingly duties?

*Reflection*

7. Do we expect our own leaders to live up to their election promises? Why not?
8. How can we encourage accountability in our leaders?

*Pray for those who have responsibility in our nation, state, and city, that God would help them to live up to their responsibilities.*